

Pilgrimage to shrines and holy places



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Forewords

Pilgrimage is a holy journey in which an individual undertakes to visit a given place motivated by a spiritual encounter or an experience by somebody else. To some people however, people pilgrimage means visiting a place with a history of exceptional divine experience happened. Examples of such great experiences include a great spiritual revelation, hubs of holy personalities among others. People from different regions visit places considered to have this unique spiritual significance (Eade & Michael p. 34). The practice of pilgrimage has a long history and people from different backgrounds, religions and traditions practice it. One can understand Pilgrimage as universal because it transcends many boundaries, and people are always seeking answers to questions deeply rooted in their hearts.

Irrespective of the fact that different people have varied and interesting reasons they embark on pilgrimages and that most of the reasons are private and deeply rooted in their heart conscious, the motivation for pilgrimage is the internal needs, based on some spiritual expectations. Ideally, pilgrimage helps people get something that they cannot achieve themselves. During pilgrimage, participants engage in soul-searching in attempt to connect with the spiritual world; they endeavor to find revelations to the deep understandings of the spiritual. Among the ancient and famous pilgrimage is the Contemporary Roman Catholic Pilgrimage to Medjugorje in the former Yugoslavian territories (Orec, Para 2). This paper therefore, presents a deep insight into Contemporary Roman Catholic Pilgrimage to Medjugorje in the former Yugoslavian territories. Furthermore, it looks at the

various experiences of this pilgrimage as well as finds out the spiritual and social significance the participants attach to it.

Solitary pilgrims as a community

At times of pilgrimage, people anticipate deep personal experiences. However, support from the community is vital (Orec, Para 7). According to the latter, when many people or a community support each other in the instances of pilgrimage, they provide moral support and elements of spiritual understanding. Pilgrims usually comes together and makes a community. They believe that through this community they experience a harmonized spiritual world, through this community the spirits of different pilgrims speaks to each other; all the pilgrims experience a divine transformation through Spiritual revelations (Dean, Para 2). The latter reveals that when people visit a certain site of pilgrimage, they usually have some expectations and there is an expected behavior or appearance in these places. Similarly, the sites, expect pilgrims to behave and act in a certain way. For example when the Muslim pilgrims visit Mecca they have a common dressing code which signifies that all pilgrims are equal before God (Eade & Sallnow, Page 29). Furthermore, Pilgrims focuses on given core sites where they visit and spend time of meditation and try to get the deep spiritual meanings.

Common pilgrimage experiences

In most pilgrimage sites, pilgrims usually encounter a series of ceremonial activities which includes native dances, church services and prayers or devotional walks. The walking and doing rituals in a uniform rhythmic mode make the pilgrims feel that they are walking in God's presence. Sometimes, the pilgrim's gets emotional and nervous and develop a sense of personal

blame. During the pilgrimage people come face-to-face with the hidden life realities; they become more connected with the inner person (Turner & Turner, p. 124).

The catholic pilgrimage

Catholic faithfuls form a large group of the Christian community that has a great attachment to pilgrimage sites. The catholic pilgrim's site includes; catholic shrines, places of Marian apparitions, Fatima, and Medjugorje (Dean, Para 10). According to Dean, Catholic faithful tour these places to deepen their understanding on the core places of devotion. The Catholic pilgrims usually tour places which various bible holy personalities once toured. Some of the sites allow pilgrims to walk with Jesus on his way to Calvary. Some catholic pilgrims tour places where Peter and Paul were when they delivered the information about the resurrection gift to Jesus Christ. They visit these places so they can have the same experience with these biblical personalities (Dean, Para 8). According to Orec (Para 2), the Catholic spiritual journey tries to follow Jesus himself in discipleship, which involves simulation, understanding, and service. The Catholic faithful tries to undergo and experience transformation just like the many disciples of Jesus did. Furthermore, they engage in pilgrimage so they can experience some reflection and deep understanding with their God while still trying to get some revelations about their spiritual life.

The importance of the ritual in catholic pilgrimage

Some rituals practiced in the Catholic pilgrimage sites to help the pilgrims enhance their spiritual understanding. These rituals include blessings from the sacred water, processions, the holy Eucharist feast, and blessing of the

sick. These rituals use signs and a harmonized hymn which evokes the emotions that motivates the dairy life of the pilgrims. These rituals are expressive and they make the faithful experience some mystic powers and communicate with their souls (Dean, Para 7).

Marian Apparitions

Ideally, an apparition is a mystic revelation that is visible through the eyes. For along time, Christians claims the Virgin Mary has manifested to them in the time of needs. The devotion to Mary has become an important part of the catholic faithful. The claim of the Mary appearances to Christians has become widespread. During the Marian apparitions' people undergo some mystic experiences that they have never experienced before (Eade & Michael, p. 154). To the latter, earliest apparitions of Mary are healing and restoration of health. By this time, the medical knowledge was low and people traveled to shrines to seek cures to the diseases they could understand. Another imagination about Mary in the world is that of an intercessor between mankind and God. According to Dean (Para 5), the Catholics have a strong believe the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus intercedes between people and her son, Jesus. Some believes she has the ability to influence Gods decisions. Moreover, the claim of mystic healing in the shrines is still common among Christians.

Catholic Pilgrimage to Medjugorje

The first apparitions

In June 1981 six children from medjugorje, a village in Bosnia, reported that they had seen a vision of the Virgin Mary. They said the vision was in form of effulgence of light. In the first day of the vision, the six children saw a

woman with a child and because of fear, the children ran away. The following morning, the same woman appeared at the same spot alone and the children went to her and they had a conversation. The woman had blue eyes and dressed in a gray dress and a white veil (Eade & Sallnow, p. 27). The latter reports that these apparitions appeared to the six children several times. In effect, various doctors and psychologist questioned and tested them to ascertain whether they were normal. The entire test revealed that all the young people were not lying and were children of average intelligence from normal background. The doctors proved the young girls and boys had no psychological disorder. Because of the controversies that resulted from these apparitions, bishop Zanic was sympathetic to the experience the young visionaries underwent from some church leaders. He issued statements that suggested the young visionaries were not lying nor were they influenced by anybody. Instead, Zanic contented that they were expressing their personal in-depth experience. However, he said that everything was not clear by then (Eade & Michael, p 32). For reasons not clear shortly after his statement, the bishop changed his stance and became a critic of the medjugorje apparitions. From the first apparitions the young persons continued to experience the apparitions. According to Dean (para 7), four of them still experience dairy visions even in present days.

How the apparitions occur.

The apparition come spontaneously, as the children wait while reciteing rosary. Before the last part of rosary the childrent enter the sacristy where they pray loudly with the faithful. The visinaries then kneel down in unison and look upwards together in the same side, with an anticipaing expression.

Their mouths act as if they are speaking but they don't utter any sound (Heidi & Pile p. 48). Their glances converge to a certain point which shows the point of the apparitions which seems so close to them. Usually, the apparitions last for between one and two minutes. After the apparitions experience, the visionaries' reports the message the Virgin Mary wanted delivered to the pilgrims. Consequently, they remain functional during the experience of the apparitions, they lose in touch with the normal world and their physical body functioning remains unaltered. The visionaries pray with Madonna without losing equilibrium they then return to the normal world without any psychological trauma (Heidi, & Pile, p. 46). The most interesting part of the Mejugorje apparitions however, is that for the six years the young visionaries remain normal and healthy without any neurotic problems. They were subjects of various interrogations and medical testing from both the government and the Catholic Church tested the credibility of their apparitions (Orec Fra, para 8).

Today many pilgrims from all over the world visit Medjugorje to have the spiritual experience. Both Christians and non-Christians visit this place, approximately 15 million pilgrims visit Medjugorje to connect with the spiritual world. While here, many people express their confessions, this occurs in this place more so, than any other place in the world. Also, many prayer groups have formed in different parts of the world for Medjugorje. The message from the visionaries has generated big followers all over the world. During the war, more than 200, 000 pilgrims visited Medjugorje annually, today over a million pilgrims visit each year (Sells, p. 122).

Attacks and criticism

Although the visionaries at medjugorje have received the strong support they have also received critics from the public even some Catholics question the authenticity of these apparitions. The catholic traditions claim that apparitions are manipulations from the Franciscan order. They claim the medjugorje apparition undermines the importance of Fatima. Medjugorje apparitions are open while Fatima rejected communism in the society (Orec Fra, Para 8).

Message from medjugorje

In medjugorje Mary appears in troubled times where she pleads to the people to change their sinful ways of life and make the life better. The messages she send are deep secrets that explain current events in the world today. Sometimes they are threatening; a message which tells people to repent or they may face some unforeseen catastrophes. She antecedes between men and Christ to avert some catastrophic happening within the people (Janz, p. 45). The major messages from Medjugorje are –

Prayer

The Virgin Mary recommends that all the people to pray, she tells people to pray with love and should concentrate in their prayers. She points out that prayers heals people soul, prayer helps to heal sins. She sends the message that without prayer human being cannot experience God's presence (Orec Fra par 11). The lady says that everybody should pray because through their prayer one redees their soul and defeats Satan. She encourages the faithful to allow the player rule the world because the power of Satan will destroy

Satan's evil, therefore Christians should not fear Satan because prayer enables them to conquer him (Orec Fra par 12).

Fasting

The lady asks Christians to fast twice a week so they can receive spiritual healing and freedom. She says that through fasting the prayers can avert the happening of war she says that fasting is a sacrifice of human to God and people should purify themselves during fasting.

Reading the bible

The lady message tells people that they have forgotten the bible and they should pray everyday. She says that every family should pray and read the bible each day.

Confessions

The Virgin Mary tells people to confess their sins so they can go straight to the lord. She encourages the west make monthly confessions because confessions provide remedies to the church. Moreover, confessions fill the pilgrim's with joy when they hear them (Dean, par 7).

Eucharist

The Virgin Mary sends the message to the church to attend the Sunday masses and people should celebrate Eucharist because it is the gift from the lord. She says that she takes the mass as the most important moment of holy life of a person. The Virgin Mary is crying because people don't take Jesus Christ with the seriousness he deserves. She says the Eucharist is a sign that Jesus has resurrected and is in our life (Orec Fra par 11).

Vatican reaction reactions to the medjugorje apparitions

In the 1985 arch bishop Alberto Bovone who was the secretary of the Doctrine of the Faith wrote a message to the Italian Bishop Conferences asking them to discourage the pilgrims touring medjugorje. However, the Vatican was not able to affirm whether Catholic faithful should attend the pilgrims in medjugorje. The church was unable to give guidelines to its faithful on the authenticity of the medjugorje apparitions. Consequently, the issue is growing in complications and controversy hence raising the fear the Medjugorje teaching may contradict the church teachings. There are doubts concerning the Medjugorje apparitions whether they are divine or based on personal visions. Although Vatican has not given its stand on this issue, the pilgrims stream dairy to Medjugorje to experience the apparitions.

Conclusion

Pilgrimage is an important part in human life because it provides the connection between man and some divine powers. Since time immemorial the Catholic faithful have been visiting various shrines, which they believe connected them with Jesus and his disciples. They believe that visiting these places provides a spiritual connection with their creator. The medjugorje apparition has attracted many pilgrims from different parts of the world. The pilgrim touring medjugorje expects to receive some spiritual teaching of the Virgin Mary. Although the Catholic Church has not universally accepted the medjugorje pilgrimage it continues to be an important site to the catholic faithful.

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