

Pilgrimage as a Challenge to Reformed Liturgical Praxis

Jacobus Nicolas de Klerk

The growing interest globally in pilgrimages such as *El Camino* de Santiago de Compostela which also reflects amongst South African Christian pilgrims from the Dutch Reformed Church, is the focus of research in this dissertation. The exploration aimed to facilitate an understanding of meaning pilgrims from the Dutch Reformed Church appropriate for themselves from this ritual-liturgical activity. The outcome indicates transformation in worshipping and the expression of faith in synergy with the global context of the Reformed tradition of which the impact could be compared to that of the Reformation itself.

Qualitative empirical data indicates a shift in the ritual-liturgical expression of faith in the Reformed tradition in South Africa, which could be described as a self-designed expression of faith with an emphasis on the dominant role of personal transformation and growth. The Reformed tradition will do well to take note of these spiritual cultural changes in behavior. This outcome poses a challenge to current Reformed liturgical practices in South Africa.

Chapter 1 explains the practical situation and challenges presented by the increasing popularity of pilgrimage to the Reformed tradition in South Africa. Reasons why the pilgrimage concept was chosen as the topic of research and why it is important for the future of the Reformed tradition are elaborated on.

Chapter 2 situates the study on pilgrimage in the academic field of Practical Theology, Liturgical Studies and Ritual Studies. The domain of Practical Theology is described as a continuous process of redefining, explaining Practical Theology as a context-orientated approach. The redefinition of Practical Theology is further explained with the development of hermeneutics, the 'living human web', public theology, the relevance of a proposed leadership model, the dynamics of change, the application within Liturgical Studies and the relationship between worship and culture.

This chapter contains a description of the four tasks of Practical Theology. The logical sequence in structure provides clarity in a situation with a lot of information, different interpretations and motivations with four questions namely: 'What is going on? Why is this going on? What ought to be going on?'

* J.N. DE KLERK: *Pilgrimage as a Challenge to Reformed Liturgical Praxis*. Date of defense: June 23, 2016, University of Pretoria, South-Africa. Supervisor: prof C. Wepener. E-mail: nico.dk@mweb.co.za.

How might we respond? With these questions current trends are studied, with the input from multi-disciplinary perspectives, which are then brought into the field of theology and ethics to discern the most appropriate way to respond. Liturgical Studies is further elaborated on in terms of the shift towards multi-disciplinary research, individualism, globalization and technology. The rituals and symbols in liturgy as well as their appropriation, their functions or dimensions may differ over time, particularly because under the influence of individualism. The necessity of a multi-disciplinary approach within Practical Theology is elaborated on, as social sciences and other relevant disciplines have a lot to contribute to the context of worshipping and the expression of faith. This explanation puts the context of this research in perspective as references are made to various other disciplines like anthropology, sociology, philosophy, neuroscience and other relevant disciplines to this study.

Chapter 3 explains ethnography as research methodology and participant observation as method with the limited use of Social Scientific Biblical Interpretation for the purpose of knowledge of the social context in Biblical times. Ethnography with participant observation enables a researcher to reflect the reality of what is going on. Participant observation enables an understanding of behavior while acknowledging reciprocity and respect in the relationship. It can be described as a process of gathering data, recognizing patterns and learning about the meaning pilgrims appropriate in actions and symbols.

Chapter 4 introduces three relevant concepts from a multi-disciplinary perspective namely liminality from anthropology, heterotopia from philosophy and liturgical-inculturation from theology. Liminality is explained within its dual context of liminality for groups and *liminoid*, as the individual choice for liminality. Other sub-concepts such as *communitas*, *societas* and flow, all associated with the process of liminality, is a pro-active way of structuring transformation.

Heterotopia opens up endless possibilities of understanding and interpretation of one single gesture, a ritual or a symbol, dependent on the interpretation or meaning of the individual. Heterotopia could be aligned with the message of hope from Scripture, the renewal of thoughts and a paradigm of transformation. A simplified way of looking at heterotopia is to describe it as an effort to get into the spiritual mind-set of the Christian pilgrim from the Reformed tradition and to learn about the way in which they appropriate meaning. Emerging spiritual phenomena, new understandings, perceptions and behavior become integrated into acts of worship and therefore liturgy and this process are captured with the term 'liturgical-inculturation', explained in this chapter. This study emphasized that for modern Christians relevance of faith and therefore individualized faith design has become important.

Chapter 5 reflects on the history and meaning of pilgrimage through the ages, in order to contribute to the future road of Reformed Churches. Current

changes in the expression of faith can indeed only be meaningful by discerning differences from past expressions of faith. This chapter tracks pilgrimage from its starting point, according to Scripture, although pre-Old Testament forms of pilgrimage may also have occurred. The pilgrimage track is followed in the Old Testament, the New Testament, the early Church, the Middle Ages, the Reformation period and afterwards up to recent developments.

As for the Reformation, Luther and Calvin had not much positive to say about pilgrimage and staunchly rejected the practice. This is how the relationship between the Reformed tradition and pilgrimage until recently has been described. Yet, the history and meaning attached to pilgrimage exceed the time of the Reformation. It is clearly demonstrated that the Reformers were not against the ritual of pilgrimage as such, but against its abuse by the Roman Catholic church in their time.

Pilgrimage as a ritual has a general meaning of a human being on a journey in a spiritual context, not from this world. This metaphor can be used in multiple contexts, such as peace and reconciliation. It is clear that pilgrimage has had different contextual meanings through the ages. The physical effect of pilgrimage and similar rituals also draws attention from the field of neuroscience and a new dynamic academic field called ‘neuro-theology’.

The outcome of this research clearly indicates how pilgrimage is used as a spiritual tool in current times by incorporating the more personal needs with the spiritual (this is reflected on in chapters seven and eight). The dominant meaning, according to the outcome of this research, may be understood in the cultural context of our day with the emphasis on individuality, freedom of speech and human rights. Pilgrimage today is different in many aspects from its history in how and why it is done and Churches of the Reformed tradition should be well informed about the implication of this.

Chapter 6 describes the development and context of the different traditions (i.e. East-Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Protestant Ecumenical and Charismatic Churches), with emphasis on the presence of five basic elements of liturgy to be found in *Luke 24*, the Emmaus narrative. This chapter then elaborates on the role of imagination, space and time, bodily participation in worship, the relation with trauma and the mystical side of the Emmaus narrative.

Worshipping God should be the ultimate objective for any Christian pilgrim of the Reformed tradition. Yet, in the cultural context of today, this incorporates the broader social existence of the pilgrim with personal needs regarding emotional, physical or psychological transformation or various practical life processes. This could, in fact, be a positive development in the expression of faith as faith infiltrates life in its fullness and the Church may become part of worshippers lives in all aspects.

A theology of pilgrimage is essential for current times where the experience of Christians, in general, is that faith falls short in many circumstances. A theology of pilgrimage is further demanded by the complexities of contextualization and

the open space in which pilgrims from the Reformed tradition appropriate the practice and meaning. The challenge is to present a theology of pilgrimage in a simple way with five concepts that link with the five basic elements of liturgy in *Luke 24*, thus providing solid ground for the theological foundation. These five concepts are:

- 1) Small things. It was a small thing when a Person joined the Emmaus disciples on the road, a small thing to invite the Stranger to their house and both situations could have been regarded as coincidence but it turned out to be the biggest thing that could have happened. This implies a sensitivity to those things happening 'by coincidence'. An alertness for the small things, the random stranger, the unexpected and curiosity when things start going wrong with attentiveness to see God in all of this. The link with liturgy is that small things reflect on Divine *koinonia*, of His presence with the human being in every step of life with no such thing as any form of coincidence nor something went wrong but to focus energy on recognizing His Hand.
- 2) Wisdom. The Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* becomes relevant with the current trend of personal development to be integrated with spiritual development. Pilgrimage as a metaphor for life asks for the intent to constantly seek wisdom in the Word of God, to understand the most obvious as if for the first time, to actively seek His presence with silence and simplicity, to make oneself accessible to wisdom and live life with delight. The link with liturgy is: reading of Scripture is the undisputable source of wisdom.
- 3) Stretch. As a pilgrim, challenges will be experienced, via a stranger or a friend, hospitality, experiencing the mystical, healing in one way or another, to cross thresholds, to get out of comfort zones but at the same time the paradox of positive anticipation. The link with liturgy is: prayer as an element of liturgy is the one element that stretches the Christian to cross thresholds in faith, sometimes with no rational explanation, just faith.
- 4) Self-empowering. This is more than sensitivity for the self, emotional boundaries and far away from self-centeredness or narcissism, as self-empowering means to take care of the self as if appointed by God to look after His possession, to seek intimacy with the Divine, live in anticipation for eyes to be opened at any moment. Pilgrims learn this the hard way as they can't deny the voice of the body and pace which may imply noetic knowledge. The link with liturgy is: the purpose of the sacraments, the breaking of bread in *Luke 24*, has the intention of building up faith and reassurance of Christians.
- 5) Visibility. Acts are measurable as witnesses especially in situations of uncertainty. Visibility means the end of personal comfort zones with no acceptable excuses and instead, one may become 'different' and attract attention or even resistance. The link with liturgy is: witnessing as the case with the Emmaus disciples cause behavior out of the normal, like travelling back to Jerusalem after dark and this links with the praise and worship element of liturgy.

A theology of pilgrimage will do well in a simplified form with just five words, easy to remember, easy to communicate, but each could be the stimulus to endless thoughts, debates, conversations, spiritual and personal growth. A theology of pilgrimage should rather be a pocket guide with an open-end as an effort to mimic the experience of the Emmaus disciples in the presence of Christ, meaning detachment from physical circumstances, thought paradigms, transcending context, time and culture as a spiritual state of being.

Chapter 7 accounts for the empirical research process, identification of co-researchers, unstructured interviews, transcription, identification of concepts, coding or code analysis of concepts, concepts to categories and finally the data analysis process in the formation of a grounded theory.

For this research on pilgrimage and the challenge to the Reformed ritual-liturgical praxis, the openness required from the researcher may even go to the lengths of discovering in the data analysis that there is no messages or challenge at all. Christians could be just exploring options available without appropriating meaning for themselves in any different way than in everyday life or that pilgrimage is just another spiritual tool available. The challenge for the researcher is to have this kind of openness and tamed intuition, conscious about one's own subjectivity, towards the outcome of a scientific general analytic strategy.

A grounded theory emerged from the data analysis process, based on a literature study, the empirical research and application of triangulation. Triangulation is important and throughout the research, triangulation is used to verify progress and direction of the research of which account is given in chapter seven. The outcomes of empirical research are processed in Chapter eight in a liturgical theory for praxis for the Reformed tradition.

Chapter 8 reflects the outcome of empirical research as stated in a grounded theory with a liturgical theory for praxis for the Reformed tradition, based on the meaning Christian pilgrims of the Reformed tradition appropriated in doing *El Camino* de Santiago de Compostela. It determines what can be learned for the future of the Reformed tradition based on the current expression of faith with rituals such as pilgrimage and labyrinth, keeping the shift in liturgical practices in mind towards an individualized faith experience, alternatively stated as self-designed faith.

The focus of Liturgical Studies used to be on classical theological concepts, not always taking the cultural-anthropological context into consideration. This implies tension at times with new concepts emerging, boundaries to be redefined, a shift in authority and this asks for an open mind and new methods of research. In this regard research is cautioned to apply 'tamed intuition'.

Chapter 8 concludes with the research outcomes processed into a liturgical theory for praxis for the Reformed tradition as a suggested indication of future direction for development.

Personal growth and development as top priority for the *Camino* may be challenging for the assumption that the *Camino* is all about spirituality as it reflects on development of personal identity, emotional boundaries, self-value, development of Emotional Intelligence's dimensions and practical wisdom in general and this could be seen as an opportunity for a liturgical theory for praxis. Reformed Christians want to experience God's presence and this somehow is not happening currently with too much clutter as one possibility that may lead to the experience of an absent God. This was one of the reasons why the Reformation took place. Liturgical theory for praxis has to address the need for personal development, as well as experiences of His presence in the development of a new value system.

Spiritual growth. Spirituality is present in all facets of pilgrimage. Re-interpretation of any experience to seek for Divine presence has become a lifestyle for pilgrim co-researchers as a spiritual discipline. Reformed Christians have a need for spiritual experiences. Liturgical theory for praxis could focus on various ways of exploring meta-communication for processing spiritual experiences, consciously away from the rational. The personal narrative of the pilgrim is of the essence in the meaning pilgrims appropriate for themselves on a pilgrimage. The Reformed tradition could pay attention to the 5-phase model of pre-understanding, the experience of being brought up short, communication about the new and unknown or contradictions which may eventually lead to new knowledge and understanding and obviously a new way of thinking.

Spiritual communication. Communication is a key area for spiritual development with the understanding that communication elevates knowledge, implying focused transparent communication will take spiritual communication to a meta level. Liturgical theory for praxis could explore possible contributions from other disciplines, such as noetic, the numinous, kinesiology, neuroscience or the creative usage of social media, to ensure verbalizing and externalizing of information to become available to the Body of Christ. Intentional communication with graphic symbols could be another valuable source. Group interaction on topics of mutual interest where people meet online could be another. The Reformed tradition will do well to process available knowledge with an openness to learn and understand, with creativity to open new channels for transparent communication which could be as simple as doing a ritual together, with permission to observe and reflect on each other, opening up endless opportunity for 'spiritual communication' in the most natural way. In telling and re-telling of stories spiritual identity develops. The value, use and potential, of social media has to find a place in spiritual communication amongst spiritual attendance, priestly listening and development of listening skills, exploring the potential of Christian pilgrims to verbalize their spiritual experiences, thus making the value of pilgrimage more accessible to others.

Body participation. Co-researchers report a sensitivity for their bodies unknown in the Reformed tradition with spiritual insights and awareness's flowing out of the experience, providing an analogy in more than one way. Commitment, perseverance, focus and pace are prominent which get transformed into an individual determined spiritual application. Liturgical theory for praxis may include the latest scientific knowledge and research on bodily communication, interpreting physical and neuro-scientific effects, for with ritual action the body obtained a voice and the body's memory is much stronger than that of the mind. The 'how to' culture could also be utilized for instance: "How to unlock the pre-knowledge in your body". Bodily participation as in walking on a pilgrimage is a natural act and won't stretch any members of the Reformed tradition, therefore it is the most natural way of exploring spiritual life.

Decisions concerning pilgrimage. Decisions play a big role through the whole process of pilgrimage as resistance from family and others, fear of rejection and courage to implement decisions, could set challenges for self-identity. It is as if there is a meta-knowledge of thresholds to be crossed with no return. Therefore decision-making emerges from the empirical data as a significant step into the unknown. Liturgical theory for praxis may benefit by including Emotional Intelligence as an example, which is linked to integrity. This could be a useful tool as it creates awareness in terms of decisions and integrity. The value and necessity of independent decisions have great value for spiritual growth, as it triggers many other related issues such as self-value, confidence, et cetera, which also link decisions to personal development.

What Christians do, say they do and actually do. This is all about congruence and synergy as there should be alignment in what Christians do, say they do and actually do, for this seems to be not the case. The challenge for liturgists is to create the context or space for synergy. Liturgical theory for praxis could address the personal identity with the realization of own identity detached from materialism, role and status in ordinary life. Stripped of status, money and possessions, the pilgrim has only the self to present to others and this leads to an awareness of personal identity.

Silence has a powerful effect on pilgrims. Silence usually leads to profound insights in the present or past or brings clarity to difficult situations or decisions. Liturgical theory for praxis could be aimed at a process of awareness, consciousness, commitment and creative planning for silence to happen as life does not make this happen. Silence is something to be learned with self-discipline.

Simplicity. The principle of simplicity during pilgrimage has a similar high-impact as silence, changing lives and lifestyles in more than one way as it seems to infiltrate the thought paradigm of pilgrims. In modern society, the human

being has created too many choices because of wealth and life's complexities, to which pilgrimage creates a context of detachment and freedom. The Reformers had to deal with a similar situation during the Reformation when they had to clear faith experience from all the unnecessary and declared that the focus must be on the Word of God alone. The value of simplicity exists in the context and meaning created by participants. Liturgical theory for praxis should keep the inculturation of simplicity true to its intention, with other words, it should be simple. A proven strategy is to experience, then reflect, then integrate the new knowledge. The labyrinth, as a mini-pilgrimage according to the researcher, is an excellent spiritual tool for silence and simplicity as it creates a context for it. The benefit is a limited time investment without the logistics of a pilgrimage.

Spiritual friendship. Worshippers need mystery and mystery is to be found in the presence of God and the presence of others at specific times. Spiritual friendship can be seen as the fun part of God's presence, where God makes the pilgrim laugh and/or cry, always with the element of surprise, the unexpected, the unexplainable, usually described by co-researchers with a smile and: "...it must have been from God". In worship people need to experience the mystery of *koinonia* with God and that reflects in the relationship with others. Liturgical theory for praxis will do good if it is aimed at sensitizing worshippers for the unexpected, being alert to the smallest of things around with the realization that the Reformed tradition does not believe in coincidences.

Symbols. The Reformed tradition has many symbols in liturgy but symbols were not allowed in a personal capacity as that would replace the centrality of God. This is related to the practical situation of the Reformers five hundred years ago, however, many new ways and forms of ritual and symbol have appeared in the Reformed tradition during recent times. The same applies in the broader South African context but almost invisible and without much debate as for example, the crosses on nearby hills in nearly every town and city became part of the South African landscape during recent years. The symbol in ritual has the ability to unlock or create a mutual space for worshippers accommodating different perceptions and meaning. Liturgical theory for praxis could use pilgrimage as a symbol or metaphor for life with endless possibilities to unleash the inherent power, meaning and potential to strengthen personal faith. Pilgrimage facilitates full bodily participation without any resistance as it fits the culture and it opens up space for either personal or spiritual needs to be addressed or both at the same time.