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IS THE CAMINO JUST? CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM THE SURVEY CONDUCTED AMONG POLISH PILGRIMS

CZY CAMINO JEST SPRAWIEDLIWE? WSKAZÓWKI Z BADANIA POLSKICH PIELGRZYMÓW

Abstract

Familiarising the reader with the range of factors connecting Polish pilgrims with others on the Way of Saint James (Spanish: Camino de Santiago) will be grounded on the teaching of Saint Thomas Aquinas on the virtue of justice which will put in order encounters of the Slavic pilgrim with others on the way. The analysis will also be based on the author's own empirical research on the experience of Polish pilgrims on the Way of Saint James, namely, in-depth interviews conducted in the summer of 2019 in Santiago de Compostela (n=50).

The virtue of justice will be shown as the empowering of the pilgrim's will, thanks to which he can be guided by right principles in his actions and his behavior is good, as well as he is able to give everyone what is rightly due to him under the law. The entire argument will be confronted with manifestations of injustice leading to conflict, discomfort and judgment resulting from significant discrepancies in experiencing the Camino pilgrimage.



Streszczenie

Przybliżenie zakresu czynników łączących polskich pielgrzymów z innymi osobami na Drodze świętego Jakuba (hiszp. Camino de Santiago) zostanie osadzone na nauce świętego Tomasza z Akwinu o cnocie sprawiedliwości, wprowadzającej porządek w spotkania słowiańskiego pielgrzyma z towarzyszami wędrówki na szlaku. Analiza będzie również oparta na własnych badaniach empirycznych nad doświadczeniem Polaków pielgrzymujących do sanktuarium świętego Jakuba, wywiadach pogłębionych, przeprowadzonych latem 2019 roku w Santiago de Compostela (n=50).

Cnota sprawiedliwości zostanie ukazana jako usprawienie woli pielgrzyma, dzięki czemu może on kierować się słusznymi zasadami w swoich działaniach, a jego postępowanie jest dobre, jak również jest zdolny do oddawania każdemu tego, co mu się zgodnie z prawem należy. Całość wywodu zostanie skonfrontowana z przejawami niesprawiedliwości, prowadzącymi do konfliktów, dyskomfortu i osądu z powodu różnic w doświadczeniu pielgrzymowania na Camino.

Keywords: pilgrimage, cardinal virtues, justice, St. Thomas Aquinas, qualitative research, Camino de Santiago

Słowa kluczowe: pielgrzymowanie, cnoty kardynalne, sprawiedliwość, św. Tomasz z Akwinu, badanie jakościowe, Camino de Santiago

Introduction

Pilgrimage is one of the oldest and most fundamental forms of human mobility and over the centuries has had a multifaceted impact on the history of societies, cultural development or economic processes.¹

It is most common to define a pilgrimage as making a religiously motivated journey. In material aspect it means going to a certain holy place, while much more important is its spiritual meaning focused on the pursuit of certain spiritual goals and inner understanding.²

A pilgrim is commonly defined as one who leaves his or her place and embarks on a difficult journey into the unknown, a stranger who comes from afar to encounter the sacred.³ The journey may be a compulsory act mandated by religious rules or a voluntary journey undertaken by those who seek transcendence to visit a sacred place or a place where a spiritual leader lived and, in the process, also experience

¹ N. Collins-Kreiner, *Researching Pilgrimage. Continuity and Transformations*, "Annals of Tourism Research" 2010, vol. 37, no. 2, pp. 440–456.

² R. Barber, *Pilgrimages*, London, The Boydell Press, 1993, p. 1.

³ V. Turner, E. Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1978.

adventure.⁴ For many, the motivation for pilgrimage is to seek the reward of a transcendent experience away from ordinary life, gained through a physical and spiritual approach to pilgrimage, a search for identity.⁵

Pilgrimage holds a special place in Polish history. Apart from building up a religious identity of individuals, over the centuries it has also been very important for formation of the national identity, in which pilgrimages to places of Marian devotion, such as Jasna Góra in particular, visited by millions of pilgrims since 1711, played the most significant role. These pilgrimages were aimed not only at strengthening the Catholic faith, but also at strengthening social, national and patriotic ties, especially in the difficult times of partitions and communism.⁶ It should also be mentioned that Poland is currently experiencing dynamic growth in popularity of designated Camino routes.⁷

Literature review

Among the most recent studies on the Camino de Santiago within various scientific disciplines, there have been comparisons between the motivations of Christian and atheist pilgrims,⁸ the motivations of pilgrims in terms of spiritual experience,⁹ the distinctive characteristics of Polish pilgrims on the Camino,¹⁰ the motivations and satisfaction levels of pilgrims in the context of the commercialisation of the Camino¹¹ and the motivation and satisfaction levels of Camino pilgrims compared to El Rocio pilgrims¹² and many others.

⁴ D. Liutikas, *In Search of Miracles: Pilgrimage to the Miraculous Places*, "Tourism Review" 2015, vol. 70, no. 3, pp. 197–213; P.J. Margry (Ed.), *Shrines and Pilgrimage in the Modern World. New Itineraries into the Sacred*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2008; C. Fernandes et al., *A New Research Approach for Religious Tourism: the Case Study of the Portuguese Route to Santiago*, "International Journal of Tourism Policy" 2012, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 83–94.

⁵ D. Liutikas, op. cit., pp. 197–213; P.J. Margry, op. cit.

⁶ C. Ryszka, *Idzie wierna Warszawa*, Częstochowa, Paulinianum, 2010.

⁷ F. Mróz, *How Has Camino Developed? Geographical and Historical Factors Conditioning the Creation and Development of the Way of St. James in Poland*, [in:] E. Alarcón, P. Roszak (Eds.), *The Way of St. James: Renewing Insights*, Navarra, Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, 2017, pp. 59–80.

⁸ M. Farias et al., *Atheists on the Santiago Way: Examining Motivations to Go on Pilgrimage*, "Sociology of Religion" 2019, vol. 80, no. 1, pp. 28–44.

⁹ S. Amaro, A. Antunes, C. Henriques, *A Closer Look at Santiago de Compostela's Pilgrims Through the Lens of Motivations*, "Tourism Management" 2018, no. 64, pp. 271–280.

¹⁰ P. Drzewiecki, Ł. Śledziecki, P. Chmielowski, *Kim jest polski pielgrzym Dróg Św. Jakuba? Badanie polskich pielgrzymów na Camino de Santiago*, [w:] P. Roszak, W. Rozynkowski (Eds.), *Camino Polaco. Teologia–sztuka–historia–teraźniejszość*, vol. 3, Toruń, Wydawnictwo UMK, 2019, pp. 203–214.

¹¹ C. Fernandes et al., op. cit., pp. 83–94.

¹² G.M.V. de la Torre, L.M.P. Naranjo, R.C. Carranza, *Analysis of the Pilgrim Profile in Spain: Two Case Studies*, "International Journal of Applied Science and Technology" 2012, vol. 2, no. 4, pp. 23–29.

The aim of the work undertaken is to give an idea of the range of factors connecting Polish pilgrims with other people on the Way of Saint James –all set in the theory of virtues according to the teachings of Saint Thomas Aquinas, with reference to the virtue of justice putting in order matters concerning the pilgrims' attitudes to the people they meet on the way. The virtue of justice will be shown as the empowering of the pilgrim's will so that they can be guided by just principles in their actions¹³ and their conduct may be good, enabling the pilgrim to give to everyone what is rightfully due to them. In categorising the virtue of justice, Aquinas takes as his point of departure the fact of man's life in society,¹⁴ which is the area of juridical-moral relations, and distinguishes three types of such relations: society–man, man–society and man–man, to which he accordingly attributes the categories of justice: juridical, distributive and exchangeable.¹⁵

The virtue of justice (*iustitia*) empowers the will so that man can be guided in his actions by just principles. It should be noted that justice is also accompanied by many subsidiary virtues both towards God: piety¹⁶ (also as a gift of the Holy Spirit); and towards parents and homeland: honour and respect; and towards people: integrity and authenticity of being. Aquinas also points out that: “mercy without justice is the mother of disorder, while justice without mercy is cruelty”.¹⁷

Method

In order to properly diagnose the essence of the phenomenon, it was decided to choose a qualitative study using the methodology of individual in-depth interviews with pilgrims according to Steinar Kvale's guidelines.¹⁸ Based on the developed interview scenario, in-depth interviews (n=50) were conducted with Polish pilgrims during a two-month research internship as part of the Erasmus+ scholarship at the Centro Europeo de Peregrinacion Juan Pablo II, Santiago de Compostela, Spain (24.07.2019–23.09.2019). The opportunity to conduct the interviews in the place

¹³ M. Mróz, *Człowiek w dynamizmie cnoty: aktualność aretologii św. Tomasza z Akwinu w świetle pytania o podstawy moralności chrześcijańskiej*, Toruń, Wyższe Seminarium Duchowne, 2001, p. 617.

¹⁴ S. Lis, *Kategorie sprawiedliwości według świętego Tomasza z Akwinu*, “Resovia Sacra. Studia Teologiczno-Filozoficzne Diecezji Rzeszowskiej” 1996, no. 3, p. 221.

¹⁵ T. Ślipko, *The Contemporary Concept of Social Justice and the Traditional Distribution of Justice*, “Studia Philosophiae Christianae” 1966, no. 2, pp. 60–61.

¹⁶ P. Roszak, T. Gutowski, *Pobożność jako cnota relacyjna wg św. Tomasza z Akwinu*, “Studia Gdańskie” 2021, no. 48, pp. 93–103.

¹⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Super Evangelium Matthaei lectura*, [in:] Sancti Thomae de Aquino, *Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P.M.*, vol. 30, Rome 1969.

¹⁸ S. Kvale, *Prowadzenie wywiadów*, Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2010.

where the pilgrims completed their journey enabled the authors to obtain recent information about their current experiences. As a follow-up, the interview transcriptions were coded according to a classification taken from *the Summa of Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas* by category, then anonymised and analysed using MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2020.

Survey results¹⁹

Within the framework of religiosity and *devotion (devotio)*²⁰ three main areas in the accounts of pilgrims have been identified as manifestations of the virtue of righteousness towards God, namely: liturgy, freedom of expression and the presence of symbols, which will be described in detail. Priests walking the Camino route usually carry with them some travel liturgical sets to celebrate the Mass. They wear sports clothes so other pilgrims are not always aware that they are dealing with clergymen. One priest, however, recalled how he tried to bless other pilgrims along the way. The other time some fellow pilgrims who found out he was a priest asked him to give them a blessing. Those who declare themselves as believers are not embarrassed to confess their faith in public. They also often emphasise a different, more direct and sincere nature of their relationship with other pilgrims on the Camino due to the fact that they do not treat the pilgrimage just like any other lay trip. Additionally, the rite of blessing pilgrims makes them feel the sense of community with others and be generous with mutual care and help. It can therefore be said that the religious character of the Camino also manifests itself in the practice of love towards fellow human being in accordance with the virtue of justice in everyday situations.

For many respondents of various age, both individual prayer and rosary prayer groups played an important role during the journey. For a twenty-year-old pilgrim who was walking the Camino route for the first time from his hometown in Poland, praying the rosary (he prayed all parts every day) was a source of comfort and strengthened him in the difficulties and adversities of the journey. Similarly, a pilgrim at retirement age recalled a situation when people from other countries seeing a rosary in his hand, took their own rosaries out of their pockets encouraged by his example.

Some of the pilgrims consulted the Scriptures during the journey. A group of four students who declared themselves to be believers mentioned that they met many

¹⁹ B. Seryczyńska, *Terapeutyczny wymiar pielgrzymowania w kontekście Camino de Santiago*, Doctoral dissertation, Toruń, from the author, 2023.

²⁰ P. Roszak, T. Gutowski, *Pobożność jako cnota relacyjna...*, op. cit., p. 97.

people, both believers and non-believers, during the Camino. They stated that the conversation with them often turned to the topic of God and faith. They highlighted this experience as the difference between the Camino and hiking the tourist trail where conversations tend to be of a different nature.

Pilgrims also mentioned penance and fasting among their religious practices. One of them recounted his experience when, during the pilgrimage, he was given a difficult intention to pray for which he perceived as hopeless in human eyes. After a few days, he decided to undertake a fast every Friday on bread and water for this intention. Another pilgrim explicitly declared that he had walked the entire way with a penitential purpose, through which he felt a spiritual refinement. He tried to accept every hardship or inconvenience he encountered on the way in the spirit of penance and that helped him to persevere in the face of the most difficult experience which for him was spending a night in multi-bedded rooms with an unbearable humidity. On the other hand, a pilgrim who declared himself a non-believer during the interview stated that he also understood the pilgrimage as a penitential act in the sense of rehabilitation and finding harmony, order and meaning.

Many pilgrims emphasised the uniqueness of having the shrine of Saint James the Apostle as their destination. They also felt the presence and support of Saint James along the way and pointed out the difference between the route leading to the Apostle's tomb in Santiago and the onward journey to Finisterre or Muxia because of the destination. One pilgrim even compared reaching the tomb of Saint James to touching God, while another claimed that embracing the statue seemed to him a kind of superstition and that only praying at the tomb had value.

Attitudes such as integrity, honour and respect towards homeland and family, gratitude, truthfulness and authenticity, kindness, generosity, leniency and gentleness – a justifiable departure from the letter of law – were singled out among the manifestations of the virtue of justice in the pilgrims' relationships with others. These attitudes were often striking in the context of some vital issues that they tried to be particularly mindful of while walking the Camino. They often mentioned prayer and attendance at Mass first, followed immediately by meeting basic needs: food and rest.

One person recalled a situation in which, after Mass, she and a group of pilgrims with whom she had travelled was invited to a meal by an Italian woman who left the church with them, although she did not know that they had run out of food that day. The person who recounted this emphasised that the joy of this meeting at the table was greater than the relief deriving from satisfying the hunger. Later, in one of the villages, there were dry baguettes on display in a basket with a sign saying "to take". In this way they were provided with bread they so desperately needed, which also made it possible for them to move on. Thanks to the simplicity of such

gestures, pilgrims have the opportunity to return to the original meaning of simple food, which, especially in consumer cultures, is to some extent lost.

One person recalled staying overnight in a monastery, where the monks offered her everything she asked for. She also received from them as much food as she could carry. The monks saw in the pilgrim a sign of God's grace sent to them, so they responded to God's call by showing hospitality. On the other hand, young pilgrims recalled that they had met a man along the way who was being exploited at work – he earned two francs an hour (in Poland 5 PLN). This man gave them everything he had with him, all his food, then travelled by train 30 kilometers further to where he lived, from where he brought them necessities and more food. The pilgrims who told this story prayed for all the people they met along the way, whose intentions they carried on their pilgrimage to Saint James to Santiago. The man they met shared with them what he had in material terms, but he also shared his life with them. In turn, they were able to thank him by carrying his intentions and praying for him.

Someone else, when recounting how, during the Camino, pilgrims share food with each other, stressed that this had a deep human as well as spiritual dimension. Another pilgrim recollected a situation when he had nothing to eat and was invited by fellow pilgrims to share a table; they said he did not have to contribute to the food, and he described their invitation as a positive approach full of love for one's neighbour, and emphasized the unique closeness that was then created between almost strangers.

Summary and further discussion

The issues of the value and experience of the presence of God in relation to the formation of conscience are dealt with by many scholars from different scientific fields, also referring to the teaching of the Church and her pastors.²¹ With regards to the followings, it seems timely to carry out the study of the contemporary experience of Polish pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago in their search for the meaning of their own lives through the harmonious development of their capabilities and potential for the development of virtues and - among them, the aforementioned virtue of justice.

The study confirms the theory that for many pilgrims the Camino is an experience of profound inner transformation and the development of moral virtues in the light of

²¹ D. Krok, *System wartości a poznawcze i społeczne wymiary religijności*, "Roczniki Psychologiczne" 2010, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 161–182; M. Murzyn, J. Nogiec, *Deklarowane wartości w opinii przedstawicieli wybranych pokoleń*, "The Central European Review of Economics and Management" 2015, vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 373–380; J. Śliwak, B. Zarzycka, R. Rak, *Kryzys w wartościowaniu a religijność*, „Czasopismo Psychologiczne–Psychological Journal” 2011, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 75–86.

Thomistic approach. The list of virtues according to Aquinas' categorisation is long, but four of them give the right attitude of desire,²² which is why they were called cardinal virtues: prudence (*prudentia*), justice (*iustitia*), fortitude (*fortitudo*) and temperance (*temperantia*). Prudence corresponding to the rational part of the soul, fortitude corresponding to the driven part (force of anger),²³ temperance corresponding to desire (desire for pleasure) and justice bringing order and harmony to the will.²⁴ According to Aquinas, moral virtues are obtained through moral action, so that the attainment of a state of virtue depends on human effort. In the list of moral virtues proposed by Aquinas there are close references to Greek philosophy, especially Aristotelian philosophy, but Saint Thomas in his doctrine of human virtues maintains the harmony between natural and supernatural morality and the compatibility of the Gospel with philosophical truth.²⁵ The human virtues are thus presented by Aquinas in the perspective of humanity, according to the formula that grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it.²⁶ The study carried out makes it possible to show the potential of the virtue of justice as one of the cardinal virtues, in the sense of being effective in good action, as those that lead pilgrims to Santiago in relation to the categories of truth, goodness and beauty.²⁷ However, this is not a discussion of an abstract moral order that manages an order of human acts and actions, but the reality of personal and relational experience deriving from the statements of Polish pilgrims going to Santiago in which the relevance of Saint Thomas Aquinas' teaching on human virtues can be seen.

It seems that in the future, it would also be appropriate to indicate a wider context of the possibility of showing value preferences among pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago, as well as those involved in spreading the cult of Saint James the Apostle within the confraternities and Jacobite associations in Poland. Therefore, it could be interesting to indicate how religiosity influences the pilgrims' sensitivity of conscience in comparison with those involved in spreading the cult of Saint James the Apostle within the confraternities and Jacobite associations in Poland, as well as to make a comparative study of the attitudes of Polish pilgrims on the Camino with organised pilgrimages to Jasna Góra. An indication of how pilgrimage helps to cope

²² STh I-II, q. 61, a. 1c, quoted after M. Mróz, *Człowiek...*, op. cit., p. 591.

²³ B. Seryczyńska, T. Duda, *How Is Fortitude among Pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago Expressed and Formed? Clues from a Study of Polish Pilgrims*, "Pastoral Psychology" 2021, no 70, pp. 541–556.

²⁴ STh I-II, q. 61, a. 2c, quoted in M. Mróz, *Człowiek...*, op. cit., p. 592.

²⁵ M. Mróz, *Człowiek...*, op. cit., p. 577.

²⁶ STh I, q. 62, a.

²⁷ M. Mróz, *Człowiek...* op. cit., p. 13.

with the difficulties of the recent experience of the Covid-19 pandemic²⁸ or the war in Ukraine²⁹ could also provide interesting data.

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²⁸ B. Seryczynska et al., *Religious Capital as a Central Factor in Coping with the Covid-19. Clues from an International Survey*, "European Journal of Science and Theology" 2021, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 43–56.

²⁹ L. Oviedo et al., *Coping and Resilience Strategies among Ukraine War Refugees*, "International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health" 2022, vol. 19, no. 20, 13094.

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