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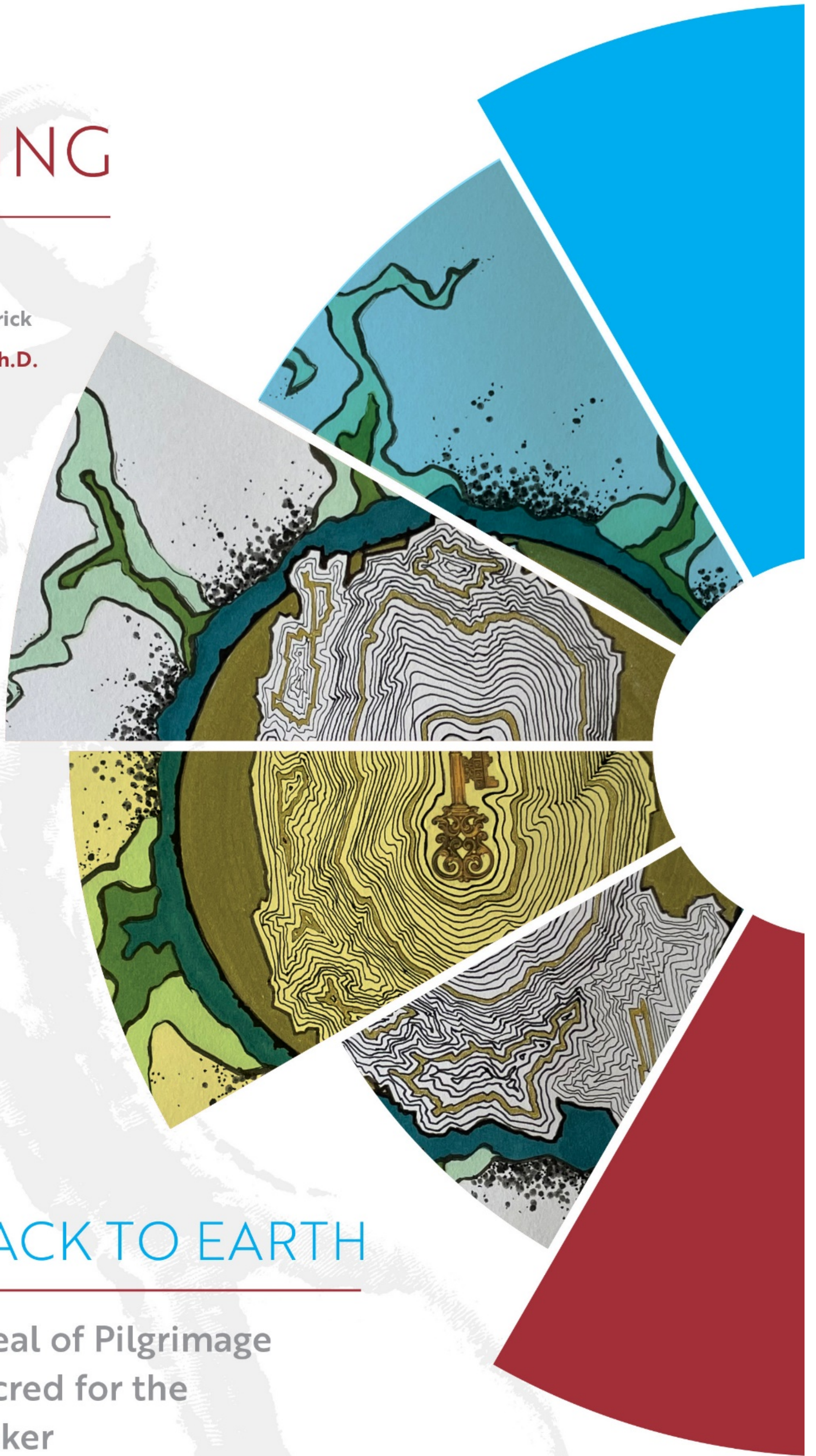

WALKING BACK TO EARTH

The Enduring Appeal of Pilgrimage as Portal to the Sacred for the Contemporary Seeker

Walking Back to Earth:
The Enduring Appeal of Ancient Pilgrimage as Portal to the Sacred for the Contemporary Seeker

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A thesis in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Ph.D.

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Submitted to Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick

October 2021

DECLARATION

I hereby wish to declare that this work which I now submit for assessment for the award of Ph.D. is my own work and I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original and to the best of my knowledge does not breach any copyright law and that all work of others cited by me has been acknowledged in the text.

Judith King

13th October, 2021

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Although this work bears my name I am indebted to a significant number of people whose involvement has been instrumental to its conclusion.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis offers a perspective on pilgrimage, from the vantage point of the pilgrim's reflection on their embodied experience and an analysis of that experience from theological and psychological hermeneutics, in particular. In the experience of performing the pilgrimage, in the givenness of its intense physical requirements, the pilgrim is drawn into a deeply holistic sense of their own embodiment-in-the-world. This experience of embodiment, the thesis argues, is both inherently satisfying and satiates a deep incarnational longing in the pilgrim. The particularity, vulnerability and delight and earthiness of being human is made whole and holy in the teaching of Incarnation and when the pilgrim drops into their own earthy embodiment at the behest of their pilgrimage journey, I argue that many re-connect with this fundamental truth of being human.

Pilgrims re-discover that there is something holy and wholesome about their very being and in turn they see their fellow pilgrims with the reverence that living such truth begets. Along ancient pathways and encircling ancient stones and prayer-beds, pilgrims walk, eat, fast, rest, pray, reflect, and exchange life-stories. They do so in places and patterns that were held sacred by their foremothers and forefathers and, in that movement, they both honour a religious tradition and make it new.

It is a sacred witness in a time of contesting truths and a veritable eschewal of the sacred, in much of the signature cultural discourse and the social and political decision-making of our times. Contemporary pilgrimage, in an era of postmodernity, reveals a hunger for congregating differently -as pilgrim church- if you will, and hence the thesis argues the pilgrim journey is being re-found in our time as an essentially religious quest.

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CHAPTER 1: PILGRIM TO PILGRIM SCHOLAR

1.0 Introduction

This thesis offers a perspective on pilgrimage, from the vantage point of the pilgrim's reflection on their embodied experience and based on a dialogical exchange between my analysis of that experience and theological and psychological hermeneutics, in particular. In a synthesis of that dialogue, I argue that in the experience of performing the pilgrimage[1], in the givenness of its intense physical requirements, the pilgrim is drawn into a deeply holistic sense of their own embodiment-in-the-world[2]. I further contend that this experience of embodiment[3] is both inherently satisfying and satiates a deep incarnational longing in the pilgrim. I suggest strongly then that the pilgrim's journey has much to communicate, that their quest is not only, an evolution of that of the medieval pilgrims or those of late antiquity, but that a deliberation upon their experience may contribute also to an evolution in our theology of incarnation.

In being born as body, as a particular human being, of a particular woman, into a particular family, in a particular place and time in history, Word of God enters the uniqueness and finiteness, vulnerability, despair and delight of earthy embodiment. This is the definitive article of faith of the Christian religious tradition. *The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*. (Jn 1:14) The particularity of every human being, born and becoming in their own time and place, is made universally whole and holy in this remarkable unfolding in the birth, life and death of Jesus of Nazareth, who, through resurrection became, the Christ.

When the pilgrim drops into their own earthy embodiment at the behest of their pilgrimage journey, I argue that many re-connect with this fundamental truth of

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[1] The use of the word 'performing' here is reflective of Merleau-Ponty's idea of performativity, as articulated in the *Phenomenology of Perception* rather than in the more vernacular sense of the word as 'merely acting' with its associated sense with the 'inauthentic'. See https://hedgehogreview.com/issues/distinctions-that-define-and-divide/articles/performative for article on the corruption of the word performative. (September 2021)
[2] Also after Merleau Ponty's 'Beings-in-the-world' elucidation;
[3] Embodiment is a central concept in the work to follow and its origins as such and the meaning I intend will be illustrated in detail in the literature review.

being human. They re-discover that there is something holy and wholesome about their very being. In turn they see their fellow pilgrims with the reverence that living such truth begets. Along ancient pathways and encircling ancient stones and prayer-beds, pilgrims walk, eat, fast, rest, pray, reflect, and exchange life-stories. They do so in places and patterns that were held sacred by their foremothers and forefathers and, in that movement, I illustrate how they both honour a religious tradition and make it new. It is a sacred witness in a time of contesting truths and a veritable eschewal of the sacred, in much of the signature cultural discourse and the social and political decision-making of our times. Finally, I suggest, that contemporary pilgrimage also reveals a hunger for congregating differently -as church, if you will-and the hunger for such an experience is one that requires attention. In summary then, I argue that in the era of postmodernity (mindful that even this signifier of the current era is a contested one, and a point I will return to later), in a Western Hemisphere cultural context, which Boeve describes as 'pluralized, individualised and detraditionalised' (2014), the pilgrim journey is being re-found as an essentially religious quest.

1.1 Background to the Research

I offer these contentions and arguments on the basis of pilgrimage research carried out between the Summer of 2018 and the early Winter of 2020, on two pilgrimages, the Camino de Santiago de Compostela, Northern Spain and Lough Derg, Northwest Ireland. Both sites are arguably among the most iconic pilgrimages in Christianity's multiplicity of pilgrimage places, on account of either their prominence in history or the present or both. I will offer an historical overview and contemporary account of both places in Chapter 2. A number of people who had completed either pilgrimage in 2018 or 2019 were interviewed about their experience. (Pertinent details about this group of research participants, including a sub-group who have experienced both pilgrimages, will be offered in Chapter 4 where I outline my research methodology and in Chapter 5 when we will hear from these pilgrims directly.) Interest in understanding better not only the enduring but also the increased appeal of pilgrimage in the contemporary era, was first enkindled by personal experience. Given the centrality of *the phenomenology of experience* as a core thread of my approach

to the research (and to be outlined more fully in the review of literature in Chapter 3), I believe it is fitting to give some sense of the context of that personal experience here.

1.1.1 Pertinent Personal Experience: Pilgrimage

In the summer of 2016, I realised a long-burgeoning dream and walked the *Camino Francés,* the 'French Route' of the Camino de Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage. In the activity of it, the experience was totally absorbing, physically and sensorially. In thought, reverie and spirit, it was multifaceted and deeply meaningful. In the daily round of the month-long duration, the social contact and encounter with other pilgrims and local villagers and farmers, was expanding, humbling and life-affirming. Arriving at the pilgrimage's destination, the Cathedral in Santiago de Compostela, was joyous, and yet, I can see now, a mere mirage of conclusion. Rather than the end, it was, in Eliot's '*Little Gidding'* terms[4], merely the beginning of an intense desire to understand what I had just experienced. I wished to invite others to tell me the story of their pilgrimage – were they too totally absorbed in it? Did they find it meaningful in myriad ways? Were they impacted similarly by those they met on the road? Were there any moments of joy or other intense feelings? I committed therefore to listen and wonder, to deliberate and learn and in time to come to know and articulate. In particular, I wondered if the experience of contemporary pilgrims had any broader significance or meaning for the individual person and for a theological reading of personhood in the 21st Century. This study of pilgrimage, in which my own pilgrim journeys act as a kind of fractal[5], is the outcome of that process of deliberation.

Eighteen months after my Camino journey, I registered on a programme of study following a few signature conversations with my eventual Supervisor, Professor Eamonn Conway. These preliminary conversations confirmed the nexus of my interest: What are people seeking in these times when they go on pilgrimage and

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[4] Eliot's said poem is replete with phrases and sentiments which seem to me to condense aspects of the pilgrimage experience in quite powerful ways (Faber & Faber, 2001/1941)

[5] In the sense of fractals as patterns formed from chaotic equations/random and contain self-similar patterns of complexity increasing with magnification.

why is it important that the experience be physically demanding? Through these conversations, the idea of including a second pilgrimage, to St Patrick's Purgatory on the inland island of Lough Derg, was agreed. It too is physically demanding, was as local to my geographical and religious origins as Santiago de Compostela was exotic, and it shared a similar virtually uninterrupted history of over one thousand years of pilgrim footfall. Hence, I travelled to the Island that summer of 2018, and although located my home county, for the first time I made the Lough Derg pilgrimage. The contrasts and the similarities were instructive. My curiosity was also aroused by the requirement in both pilgrimages to spending considerable time outdoors, albeit for quite differing durations. A working title (which has itself endured), soon emerged and its key terms assisted me to frame some boundaries on the research:

> *Walking Back to Earth: The enduring appeal of ancient pilgrimage as portal to the Sacred for the Contemporary Seeker.*

The first clarity such a title offered was that the research would look at the *process* of pilgrimage; it would be curious about the body *in* the pilgrimage process, hence the pertinence of '*walking'* in the present participle; my own experience and listening to that of others suggested that there was something in pilgrimage about a desire to reconnect with something felt lost or obscured, hence the use of the word *'back'*; and furthermore, I wondered, if one of those things might be connectedness to *earth* and more unmediated contact with the natural world; mention of the phrase '*enduring appeal of ancient'* would require both historical context and evidence of contemporary resurgence or, at the very least, sustained interest; '*portal to the Sacred'* would be declarative of my theological intent and my intuition that perhaps contemporary pilgrimage continues to be an essentially religious quest; and finally, including the term '*contemporary Seeker*' offered me a pathway to pursue that theological quest, acknowledge the socio-cultural-religious context, in which I am located, and yet not become too stymied by the way some discourse on context seems to separate the spiritual from the religious into somewhat of a diametrical opposition.

1.1.2 Pertinent Personal Experience: Professional and Personal Life

In my professional life as Psychotherapist, Psychotherapy tutor and Group Facilitator, I draw on the psychological for its knowledge, insight and potential healing techniques when working with others. I do so that we might all understand better and learn from our personal, familial and collective predicaments. Living in a Northern European economic, social and cultural milieu, I also experience at first-hand, not only personally, but with clients, students and others, the paucity of what Taylor calls, the flattening ceiling on the transcendent, which is indicative of the dominant narrative of that culture (2010). Raised in a traditional, Catholic family of the Ireland of the 1960s and 1970s, by contrast, I virtually 'marinated' in religious doctrine and was left without any doubts and few enough questions about my place in the machinations of the local and national power triangle of church, school and state. The benefits of such an upbringing for me, personally, were many - a sacred and spacious container for my natural awe and wonder, and a world view of high and dramatic proportions (in contrast to Taylor's description of the flattened roof on the transcendent of secularity), a moral code of love, kindness and goodness and a strong sense of neighbourliness and accountability to the other. In addition, frequent presence at sacramental rituals taught me reverence and the beauty of sung and spoken praise to God and simultaneously, sated, for that time at least, what I now understand as my innate thirst for the Sacred.

The shadow of it all, beginning with the tight, social control mentioned above, and held by the powerful in that triad, (particularly in the school-church dyad), also included an often oppressive obstruction of the natural questioning, for example, of the adolescent; a punitive response to behaviour, even naïve outbursts of *joie de vivre*; a largely negative and suspicious view of all things related to the body, particularly sexuality; a systemic favouritism for the wealthy and powerful with its corollary discrimination towards those less so; a sometimes (and certainly not always), hollow and inauthentic preaching on the God of Love. Much of this was unacknowledged and unseen by me until I was graced with a transformative, education experience in my late twenties in the Mount Oliver Institute in Dundalk. There, I encountered the 'opened window' of Vatican II and post-Vatican II theology, in particular liberation and feminist theologies, and in

tandem with a psychologically and systemically astute pedagogy, I learned to think more critically and independently. An unquenchable fire was kindled. All three facets of these life experiences, my formative years, my 'Damascus' in Dundalk and the continuing and daily shaping of my professional, personal and faith life from my engagement with my social context, permit a glimpse into some of the more visible geological layers of my subjectivity, which contribute significantly to how I perceive this study of contemporary pilgrimage. They form the elements of what is termed 'the brought researcher', and about which I will say more in Chapter 4 when I describe my research methodology in detail.

1.1.3. Pertinent Personal Experience: Pivotal experience in-the-body

A final area of life experience, relevant first to my going on pilgrimage and germane also to the choice of research question and methodology, was the life-altering impact of becoming injured in an accident in the year 2000. A random event on a city-centre street was a nerve-rackingly close brush with (relatively early) mortality, and the aftermath offered many steep and abiding lessons along what I might call, 'the vulnerability-resilience spectrum'[6], a characteristic of much human experience in-the-body. Simple questions about very tangible, taken-for-granted aspects of being alive and getting better, as well as more ultimate and existential ones, flooded my consciousness, as I tried to absorb the impact of the accident and recover physically and psychologically. Will I remember how to walk? What is a human being? Since you might be withdrawn in an instant, what is the nature and purpose of our finite, intelligent, bodily journey into and through life? How *do* damaged bodies heal? What (Who?) was that something - "a presence-like thing" - that seemed to permeate my being and my interactions with others for weeks and months afterwards? Where was God? Where was God in this? Who is God? Why this? Why anything at all? Structurally, if not in the details, it seemed to me, that pilgrimage asks of its participants a similarly wide spectrum of questions. Practical ones such as: *Will I able for it? Do I have the right gear?* Through psychological musings like, *Will this change me? Who else will be there? Will I get on with them?* And, onto more ultimate questions

[6] Or as Barthes put it more poetically, 'Either woe or well-being…' (1978). I will also return to thoughts of a such spectrum when I come to a more detailed elaboration of embodiment and discussion on my findings.

such as: *Why am I here? What does life mean? What am I doing with my life? What of God? What about my return? Will anything change? Have I changed?*

Two years after this accident, I stood in the archaeological grounds of the Sanctuary of Asclepius at Epidaurus in Greece and marvelled at the wisdom of the generations of antiquity, particularly their seemingly more integrated approach to recovery from affliction, disease and illness than what seems available to us now (notwithstanding extraordinary medical advances)[7]. The use, for example, of a diet of particular foods, skin applications of salts, plants and herbs, special baths and a dedicated dream room, all offered sequentially on one residential visit to a single patient, was in stark contrast to my own previous couple of years of recovery with alternate visits to the physiotherapist, the psychotherapist, the nutritionist, the shock and trauma clinician and the check-ups with the orthopaedic surgeon, each working in closely guarded silos of knowledge and expertise.

The significance of these personal and professional experiences for research into 'the body-on-pilgrimage', relates both to what I have already learned and what I wished to learn through the research. The human body is multifaceted and complex, and an exploration of it, from any vantage point, deserves multiple lenses of attention. So pivotal is the body to human experience and knowledge that every age (often in vastly contrasting ways among varying cultures simultaneously), can be said to have had its philosophy, theology and sociology (and, more recently psychology), as well as an array of ethical and cultural practices concerning the body and bodies in relationship to one another. Understandably, these were more implicit in pre-literate societies but archaeological and hieroglyphic evidence bears testimony to their existence nonetheless. Research on the body-on-pilgrimage in the contemporary era then would require that I too would observe and perceive through a number of lenses. Psychology and theology have been valuable companions to me both personally and professionally through all of these same life experiences, and therefore were fitting primary resources to draw upon for this study of pilgrimage, and so are my

[7] https://visitworldheritage.com/en/eu/epidaurus-revisited-and-the-history-of-health-by-vasileios-lambrinoudakis/53759886-df5b-4ee3-8d87-ac2d16ed49bc

'parent disciplines', if you will. A third area of literature and at first new to me, is that of Pilgrimage Studies, an area of burgeoning academic interest, of global and multi-faith dimensions, as I will outline in Chapter 3. Other disciplines which have much to contribute to the subject are anthropology, sociology and human geography. My methodological option then was for a cross-discipline exploration, what is known as, multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary research[8]. I hoped to create a constructive dialogue, and perhaps on occasion, critically-constructive, among and between such signature disciplines, so as to contribute what I hope will be an insightful interpretation of the possible theological significance of the search and experience of the contemporary pilgrim. An immediate risk of an interdisciplinary approach is to find oneself attempting what has been called a 'giant discourse', whereby the option to be inclusive, not alone yields little additional value, but rather becomes 'an impoverished and thin conception' of (in my case), the embodied pilgrimage experience (Boeve et al, 2014, p.183). A useful instrument in guarding against such risk is the precision and clarity of the research questions.

1.2 The Research Questions

Having established the nexus of my interest, a working title and a methodological preference, my next task was to become more precise about my research questions. A number of early iterations, soon discovered to be too broad and unwieldy, were eventually whittled down to two:

> *How do pilgrims embody and interpret their pilgrimage experience?*
> *How do theology and psychology, in particular, interpret that experience?*

In my review of literature (Chapter 3), I will address the resurgence of interest in pilgrimage-making and the consequent upsurge in the study and research of it, as mentioned above. In that breadth of research there are studies and analyses

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[8] Interdisciplinarity has been described as, 'a form of inquiry that integrates knowledge and modes of thinking from two or more disciplines…or fields of study…to produce a cognitive or practical advancement that would have been unlikely through a single discipline.[8] (Mansilla, 2011)

that pay varying levels of attention to the physical and physiological challenges of pilgrimage. However, I was curious to discover how instrumental is the experience-in-the-body-on-pilgrimage to the overall import and meaning of the pilgrimage. Pilgrimage, certainly, may be physically challenging and physiologically satisfying with a discernible number of health benefits when completed, but does that effect a change in how a pilgrim carries themselves in the world, in how embodied they are or become as a result of their pilgrimage? And if so, I yearned to know, what might be the meaning and import of that. So, in summary, I wanted to research how pilgrims *embodied* their pilgrimage experience.

1.3 A Working Description of Embodiment

Given that *embody* and *embodiment* are such key concepts for my study, requires that I clarify their meaning and provenance for what follows. Dictionary explanations of embodiment use varying phraseology for essentially the same summary – embodiment is a tangible expression of an abstraction. Recurring examples also include additions such as, 'an embodiment of beauty/virtue/ goodness/ integrity. Given my theological quest, I was curious that most dictionaries name 'incarnation' as the first synonym of choice. Such definitions would seem to equate embodiment with something like, '…the epitome of'. In fairness one offered an additional meaning of, 'formation into an aggregate body or whole'.[9] In adopting *embodiment* as a key concept in this research, I intend a somewhat more layered and substantial meaning than any of these. I will dedicate a section to naming and elaborating upon those layers in the literature review, mindful that 'the human body' is a vexed and even contentious arena of human experience and academic reflection (Sigurdson, 2016, pp.15-19). It is also my hope that as I elaborate it may become clear that embodiment, although now a word and concept in daily parlance, it is not such a common state of being.

Psychological literature for many decades has been significantly expanded by texts wholly or partially dedicated to embodiment and many of them are supported by research developments in neuroscience in more recent years.

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[9] Century Dictionary and Cyclopaedia

Theological literature has, it could be argued, always included reference to incarnation (embodiment's most repeated synonym), and in more recent decades an additional discipline within theology has been called 'body theology' (Althaus-Reid & Isherwood, 2008; Johnson, 2015 & 2001; West, 2003). Much recent theological discussion on the body has largely been dedicated to a critique of bioethics or to matters relating to sexual morality. By way of introducing the thesis, I want to offer a working description of embodiment so as to clarify my use of the term. It is tentative and makes no claims of definitive comprehensiveness.

> *Embodiment is a state of being in which a person is simultaneously present to the wholeness of their personal beingness, in moment-to-moment relatedness to the larger context in which they find themselves. The nature of consciousness of this level of embodied presence-in-place may vary, (including capacity or willingness to articulate such), but nonetheless, this kinaesthetic, tactile experience continually arises and informs living, moving and being, each passing moment.*

I observe that the pilgrimages in both places included in this research require the pilgrim to be physically *in* their bodies with a degree of what I would call, 'conscious availability'. By conscious availability, I mean, a novel (for some), level of attentiveness and attunement to the task, to others and to the ground beneath their feet. When I ask how do pilgrims *embody* their pilgrimage, I am keen to discover more about their experience of, what I am calling this "requirement". I want to learn how they have perceived this journey into and through the pilgrimage process, what philosopher Merleau-Ponty would have called a, 'first-order experience' (Sigurdson, 2016, p.314) Moving from that perception and reflection of the pilgrim on pilgrimage, the research proceeds to the task of interpretation, through what Merleau-Ponty calls *second-order experience*, the sciences, in this case, particularly the psychological sciences. Finally, in such a schema of 'orders of human experience', theology, given the particular nature of its ultimate enquiry (again to be returned to later), is more

what I might call a third-order experience.[10] When and where illuminative, insights of import from other disciplines are also included in the research interpretive process.

1.4 A Fundamental Hermeneutic

The leader of the *World Community of Christian meditation*, Laurence Freeman opens many of his talks asking his hearers what they think is the original language of Christianity.

> 'If Sanskrit is considered the language of Hinduism', he begins, 'Judaism, Hebrew; Arabic, Islam; then what is the language of Christianity? 'It is', he concludes, 'the language of the body'.

What he is pointing to is the absolute centrality of the Incarnation to the theology and lived experience of Christianity. Although it is demonstrably, a 'non-negotiable article of the Christian faith', Godzieba et al suggest that it is not altogether clear, 'how precisely it formatively influences Catholic theology and practice today' (2006). They further suggest that our unprecedented context (albeit pre-global pandemic of 2019) and one they describe as, 'post-Holocaust, post-colonial, post 9/11 and seemingly full of terror-without-end (ibid, p.778), demands that we analyse our presuppositions and methodologies more closely. A further demand for theology, they believe, arises from the dominant and powerful narratives of consumerism in contemporary culture in the West (and, arguably large parts of Austral-Asia too), a culture that,

> …often commodifies religious experience, fetishizes idealized attractive body-images, and yet suppresses the substantiality of real bodies as they experience their pleasures and pains, ecstasies and tragedies, lives and deaths. Can belief…in the irreducible *particularity* of the Incarnation, be the ground of a theological method that is accountable both to revelation and to the long Christian tradition of practices and reflections, while also speaking to our contemporaries? If we answer yes, …then

[10] I signal here my intention to engage in theological reflection which includes this idea of stages. An order of experience model like those of Merleau-Ponty's and Schillebeeckx, for example, would follow like something like – one's actual lived experience (in this case of pilgrimage); secondly, reflection upon that experience and thirdly, theological reflection on that experience. Two additional schema, with similar stages-style approach include *praxis* and Voegelin's Experience and Truth. I will return to some of these in the review of literature.

> what does theology look like when *Incarnation* is seen as its *fundamental hermeneutical strategy* (ibid, p.778)?

In a later section of the same article, Godzieba says if we were to 'activate the incarnational imagination' and rise to this challenge of 'employing incarnation as a fundamental hermeneutical strategy', then,

> embodiment-and the materiality, particularity, and "presence" that accompany it-would be seen not simply as one theological locus among others, but as the necessary precondition for all the *loci,* and for the act of faith itself. We indeed have a revelational warrant for claiming the body and its intentionality as the revelatory space *par excellence.* Embodiment thus becomes a fundamental theological principle, and theological anthropology becomes fundamental theology (ibid, 791).

Taking on this challenge of embodiment as a fundamental theological principle, and answering a definitive 'Yes' to the question above about whether such a method can be 'accountable both to revelation and the Christian tradition and practices and speak to our contemporaries', I argue that contemporary pilgrims have something pertinent and particular to offer us, making their experience on contemporary pilgrimage one such 'revelatory space'.

1.5 Outline of the Thesis

In addition to the signals already pointed towards above, let me introduce briefly the sequence and content of the chapters to follow. This Introductory Chapter opened with a brief synopsis of the main arguments of the thesis. It then described the background, parameters, and purpose of this research study as well as introducing pertinent personal and professional experience of the brought researcher. A clarification and then working definition of one of the study's key terms - embodiment - was then offered. In Chapter 2 a brief historical overview of Christian pilgrimage segues into an introduction to the two pilgrimages sites which are at the centre of this study, the pilgrimages on Lough Derg and along the Camino de Santiago. It tells of the engendering stories, the significant historical details, as well as offering an outline of the rubrical tradition into which the contemporary pilgrim is drawn. Similarities and differences between the two sites are noted including those of rubrical content and pilgrimage duration.

Chapter 3 opens with a preamble on the contemporary context since that is the era of concern. It then offers a detailed literature review of two core concepts central to my research questions - experience as a source for primary data and the complexities of interpretation. Having attended to these fundamental bases of the research study, the review develops the conversation among the conversation partners mentioned above, over three sections. In *Section One*, the newer discipline of pilgrimage studies is introduced and themes relevant to the parameters of this study are discussed and elaborated upon, with particular emphasis on the pilgrim body, given the research questions.

Section Two of Chapter 3 explores the formative impact of contemporary and historical, philosophical and theological perspectives on the human body. It pays particular attention to the shift in the twentieth century towards a phenomenological view on and of the body and the consequences of that turn for both philosophy and theology. This section also outlines elements of contemporary theological anthropology concerning body and embodiment and pays attention to the challenges from feminist theology. *Section Three* of the chapter turns to the third conversation partner and explores pertinent developments in psychology of the body. Given the interdisciplinary breadth of the review, the chapter strives to maintain a close connection between the material cited and reviewed and its pertinence for the experience of embodiment on pilgrimage.

In Chapter 4, all aspects of the research design and methodology are discussed, the participants in the study are given a brief introduction and a detailed summary is offered of the analysis and interpretation process, including how data saturation and data validation are attended to. In Chapter 5, the findings which emerged from this research method are presented in five arch-themes. Each theme and its sub-themes are introduced, developed and triangulated with other literature where appropriate. The chapter is threaded through with the voice and experience of the pilgrims who shared their stories.

Chapter 6 develops the interpretation process still further and discusses a number of the research findings in more detail continuing the inter-disciplinary

conversation between pilgrimage studies, theological anthropology and psychology of the body. The chapter takes the three sub-clauses of the thesis title as a way of clustering a number of discussion points about walking back to earth; the enduring appeal of ancient pilgrimage and contemporary pilgrimage as portal to the Sacred. The hermeneutical discussion concludes with an exploration of two theological points which emerged strongly from the discussion, firstly, the relationship between incarnation and transcendence and secondly, the nature of the salvific in that relationship as indicated by pilgrimage experience. The final section of Chapter 6 completes the thesis by offering a summary of its main conclusions. It also acknowledges the limitations of the research study, mindful that both the conclusions and limitations open possibilities for further study and exploration. The closing section also includes one final story of an encounter with a pilgrim other.

1.6 Delimitations

In addition to the academic interconnections and distinctions noted above, and some of the assumptions I have made in the outset, I wish to signal a couple of important delimitations in relation to core concepts to be explored and to the choice of pilgrimage sites. Let me begin with the latter. In shining a spotlight on the experience of contemporary pilgrims on ancient pilgrimages in particular, I will locate the study in its historical context, but given that both sites have had over one thousand years of such history, I cannot do so exhaustively. Nor will the boundaries of the research question allow for an in-depth comparative study of both sites. Such a comparative study would be particularly informative, I believe, in relation to the dominant spiritualities operative in the pilgrimage process and in the practices and faith disposition of pilgrims. Spirituality and faith practices will certainly be included in this research but not, it must be stressed, in service of an in-depth comparative study between both sites.

Secondly, to the point of core concepts. Most theological and indeed much psychological research, ostensibly focused of the human body and embodiment, would demand attention to and critical analysis of the discussion regarding contemporary and growing discourses about gender and sexuality. However, the scope of this study does not require nor permit such. Neither gender nor

sexuality are absent from the research but their pertinence did not emerge as a significant area of discussion or contention from the primary research on the experience of pilgrims. By contrast, the more repeated reference was to experiences of 'a particular kind of equality' and, what might be best summarised as, 'a kind of resting in a shared oneness with fellow pilgrims', temporary, certainly, but welcome respite from the more acrimonious equality debate that often pertains. This finding of a strong sense of shared pilgrim identity has been noted by many other pilgrimage scholars also and will be given attention later in the study (Harman, 2014, Gossen, 2012, Greenia 2019, 2018). However, there is a modest exception to this delimitation regarding in-depth exploration of issues relating to gender and sexuality. Given the correlation of pilgrim experience with theological hermeneutic on the body in particular required that I pay attention (necessarily limited also), to the problems and possibilities in relation to the theology of female embodiment in review of pertinent literature.

1.7 Conclusion

Pilgrimage continues to have an enduring appeal in all religious traditions and indeed has experienced a surge of interest in the twenty-first century. These are contemporary seekers, some of whom have less certainty about the nature of their involvement with traditional religious practice, doctrine and world-view in this time of secularity and detraditionalization, but are eager to show up for and participate in these pilgrimage practices. There is a particularly strong interest in pilgrimages which are more physically demanding. It was this nexus in particular at the juncture of pilgrim place, pilgrim body and pilgrimage practice that I was most curious about and which set me on a pathway from being pilgrim to becoming pilgrim scholar and one day to return again back to pilgrim and 'know it for the first time'.

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time. [11]

[11] Eliot, T.S. also 'Little Gidding' Verse V from The Four Quartets, Faber & Faber, 2001/1941

CHAPTER 2: THE-LIVED-WORLD-OF-PILGRIMAGE: AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW AND A CONTEMPORARY OUTLINE OF THE PILGRIMAGE PROCESS ON BOTH SITES

2.0 The Places of Pilgrimage: An Introduction

In the Introductory Chapter, I noted how my personal experience of completing one of the Camino Routes to Santiago de Compostela was a significant motivation for undertaking this research study. I also noted my particular interest in understanding better the pivotal role performed in and by our body in the pilgrimage experience and this interest drew my attention to a second pilgrimage, much closer to home, St. Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg. It too requires significant physical stamina to complete. When I offer a definition and description of pilgrimage later in Chapter Three, both rooted in my research findings, readers will note the pivotal role of place and location in the lived world of pilgrimage. Hence, a primary task of this account of my research process and its findings is to introduce these two places of pilgrimage as such familiarisation will be critical to understanding all that follows.

Firstly, I contextualise the pilgrimages of both these sites with a brief historical note on Christian Pilgrimage generally. Then, I describe each site in turn, beginning also with an historical overview. As mentioned in the Introductory Chapter, among my delimitations, I acknowledged the impossibility of including more detailed historical accounts. Given Lough Derg's almost fifteen hundred years of history and the Camino's over one thousand years, I can only offer what I might call a potted history of each of these ancient pilgrimages, noting a few salient points. Following these few points, I describe the contemporary experience for the pilgrim at these sites and the rubric into which they are invited to participate. There are important statistics and facts relating to the overall pilgrimage in the years 2018 and 2019 from each site, which I will outline later in Chapter 3 on Research Methodology. These are important by way of data for further contextualisation of the research process. Let me begin however, with a few important points regarding the history of Christian Pilgrimage generally.

2.1 An Historical Sketch of Christian Pilgrimage

Whilst a scholarly debate continues as to whether pilgrimage is an appropriate term to describe aspects of the religious landscape of aboriginal and tribal peoples (Turner, 1973, Turners, 1978, Pechilis, 1992, McIntosh, 2020), it is clear that the practice of deeming places as particularly significant and returning to them in patterned, ritual journeys, would certainly seem to be both an ancient human practice and one enduringly cherished among all the major religions of today. Jerusalem, for example for Jews (Rachel's Tomb, the Western Wall); and for Christians (the Garden of Gethsemane and the contemporary site of the ancient Golgotha); Mecca for the Hajj of Islam; the River Ganges for the Kumbh Mela of Hindus; the Bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya, Bihar, in India for Buddhists, to name just some of the premier places of pilgrimage of the five major world religions. The religious tradition whose pilgrimage practice is at the heart of this thesis is, Christianity. It is possible perhaps to say that there have been four discernible periods of Christian Pilgrimage - early Christian, early Irish and European monasticism, medieval pilgrimage and contemporary pilgrimage. Before and between all of these periods, the practice of pilgrimage did not cease, however, the characteristic that marks these periods out for special attention, is the measurable increase in the numbers of pilgrims who participated during these times.

Many scholars note that pilgrimage-making is an ancient biblical tradition. 'When Yahweh called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees to found a great nation (Genesis 12:1-3), whose people would be as countless as grains of sand or the stars in the sky (Genesis, 22:17), this first of Jewish patriarchs was being summoned to pilgrimage' says Greenia (2018, see also Taylor & Hickey, 2015). In early Christianity, however, the practice was at first discouraged on at least a couple of counts. Perhaps at the most fundamental level, as Irish historian Peter Harbison puts it, 'the empty tomb had none to show for the momentous event of the Resurrection' (1995). Mc Gowan and Bradshaw note how Paul's teachings, particularly in Acts 17:24, also had significant impact, given that Paul underlines that the God of their new understanding, through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, 'the God who made heaven and earth and everything in it, was no longer

to be found in temples made of human hands' (2018, p. 39). They also note how St. Jerome, who had settled in the Holy Land, discouraged others, for example, Paulinus of Nola, from believing that he too might need to travel there, so as to be closer to Christ, 'I do not presume to limit God's omnipotence to a narrow strip of earth' he wrote, adding 'access to the courts of heaven is as easy from Britain as Jerusalem' (ibid p. 41). Harbison notes however that once the cult of the martyrs took hold, associations between revered persons and particular places became restored, and reverence for relics and visits to their repositories began to take root as a significant practice among the early Christians, whose first identifier, was interestingly, 'the People of the Way'. Harbison also cites Helena's (Mother of Constantine), finding of the true cross in a cave beneath the Mount of Golgotha in 326, as another significant impetus for the emergence of early Christian Pilgrimage (1995, p.24). Mc Gowan and Bradshaw note also Helena's journey as significant in this early period and they cite a number of documented visits to the Holy Land of other women of means (2018 p.41), up to and including the main subject of their work of new translation, that of Egeria, and her extraordinarily well-preserved and detailed record of an early and extensive pilgrimage journey to Jerusalem. They acknowledge the argument among some scholars about describing these early journeys as pilgrimage, preferring to consider them as, 'journeys of curiosity in search of theological insight' (ibid p. 43), but, in tandem with Harbison, McGowan and Bradshaw say that there seems to be widespread agreement among most, that pilgrimage to the Holy Land developed out of the early practice of visiting the tombs of the departed, especially those of the martyrs (ibid p.44). As Christianity spread and the number of revered persons and their special places grew too, pilgrimage became, soon enough a significant devotional practice until, many hundred years later, it came to be described as 'a phenomenon of such magnitude' in European medieval societies' (Salonia, 2018 p. 3.). The Turners, reflecting on this growth in Europe in particular say 'the Spanish traditions, indeed in England and Italy as well, express the folk belief that if Europe could not go to the Holy places, then the Holy places, or material tokens of them, could come to Europe' (1978 p. 170).

In his work referenced above, Salonia challenges a revisionist view in some literature regarding medieval pilgrimage, particularly in relation to considering these journeys, during which Pilgrims longed to see and touch the land interring

or upholding the remains of their revered saints, as something macabre and ghoulish. Instead, he argues that the practice is rooted rather in reverence for the human body. 'In the mindset of Christian pilgrims in both Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages', he suggests 'a crucial consequence of this principle (i.e. the dignity of the human body), was the body's capacity to channel spiritual energy (e.g., performing miracles), even after death, once the soul had departed (ibid p. 5). Rather than a useless attempt to exorcise the terror of death, he suggests, (like Bunynam, whom he cites), that medieval pilgrims were instead, ritualising their ability to 'stare unafraid at the weak, vulnerable human body, even when lifeless', and so 'celebrate the sacredness and physicality of the human body of this holy man or woman, who in life was instrument, through which a transcendent power could reveal itself' (ibid p. 10). Thus Salonia strongly suggests that 'reverence and physical journeys towards relics and saints were less theologically controversial than reverence and pilgrimages towards holy sites because of the new place assigned to the human body within Christian cosmology' (ibid p.5). This is a most interesting suggestion from Salonia, given aspects of my own thesis regarding the significance of the contemporary body on pilgrimage.

A second interesting perspective on aspects of Medieval pilgrimage and of resonance to my own thesis, was cited by Bernadette Flanagan when she noted a common function of pilgrimage was what she called 'embodied spiritual therapy'. She refers to accounts of bereaved women (referencing Ann Craig Leigh's 2009 study), being directed by their priests to literally 'walk off their grief':

> In those days, the body and soul were tacitly assumed to be intimately linked in one's spiritual life. For these women who could not shake the disorientation and depression of miscarriage, infant death, and widowhood, their priests encouraged them to begin by placing one foot in front of the other. Their immediate goal was not a lofty spiritual lesson, but simply the surrender to the present moment as a way of moving beyond emotional paralysis (2019, pp. 194-195).

A second major trajectory of Christian pilgrimage was that of journeys to Rome, once the eternal city had become more firmly established as the powerful epicentre of this growing, world religion. The *Via Francigena*, Canterbury to Rome pilgrimage, is recorded as an established pilgrim route as early as 990 AD and pilgrimages along the route flourished even more, following the martyrdom of

Thomas Becket in 1170, and of course its pilgrims, in composite and colourful form, were the subject of Chaucer's classic tales. However, many hundred years before this Irish women and men, recently converted to this new Christian faith, brought to Ireland by St. Patrick, soon developed a homespun form of pilgrimage, *peregrinatio.* In its purest and original form, this involved setting off, out to sea, in a coracle, prepared to preach the Good News of Christianity, wherever one might land. *Peregrino pro Christo*, became the honorary name of many early Irish saints, St. Colmcille, St Columbanus and St. Gall among the more well-known, and often credited with bringing Christianity to much of mainland Europe. Harbison notes that the sixth and seventh centuries saw the heights of this peregrination. The demise of it, he informs us, was on account of 'a special canon of the *Chalonsur-Saone* Council of 813 AD', which contained a strong admonishment. It seems the Irish 'peregrini' were wandering throughout Europe 'claiming to be Bishops and ordaining priests and deacons without the say-so of local magistrates' (1995 p. 35). This lively Irish dimension to the briefest of overviews of the history of Christian pilgrimage, signals the influence of the Irish on the global emergence of a deeply respected practice of pilgrimage in early Christianity generally and it is specifically relevant to the first of our two pilgrimage sites, that of Lough Derg.

2.2 St Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg, County Donegal, Ireland

2.2.1 Background and Brief historical overview

Emerging Irish scholar, Fiona Rose Mcnally, in her most informative and well researched dissertation on the *Evolution of Pilgrimage Practice in Early Modern Ireland*, remarks that a definitive history of Lough Derg has yet to be written, but she welcomes and references a number of helpful historical accounts, giving particular credit to the work of Alice Curtayne of 1976. Mcnally's scholarship and others (Turners 1978, J.E. 1984, , Harbison 1995, Purcell et al 2019/1988, Conway 2016, Taylor 2016 and 2019, Nugent 2020), have been instrumental by way of instruction for me on the history and background to the pilgrimage site.

St. Patrick's Purgatory is a pilgrimage centre located on one among an archipelago of forty-six islands, named *Station Island*. The island is on an inland

lake called Lough Derg, in County Donegal. Derg, may have come from ‘dearg’, meaning ‘red’ in Irish, (and in folklore is associated with the red of the spilled blood of snakes and other monsters, and even, in one instance, the devil’s mother, all slain by St. Patrick). (See J.E. 1984, pp.11-12.) However, a member of the British Army’s ordnance surveying crew of 1833, John O’ Donavan (ibid p. 24), and also cited by the Turners (1978 p.108), believes rather that the more likely translation of the placename is ‘the Lake of the Cave’, coming from the old Irish word, ‘deirc’ for cave or pit (Conway, 2016, p. 23). A second island, *Saints Island*, was the primary site of historical note and the location of the original cave, which, O’Donovan believes, was always there (J.E. 1884 p. 24). Hence Turner ascribes the term ‘archaic’ to the Lough Derg pilgrimage as he and Conway both acknowledge that it ‘bears evident traces of earlier religions’ (1978 p. 104 and Conway, 2016. P. 20-21). Tradition has it that St. Patrick founded a monastery there in the 5th Century and later appointed local man, St. Davog (or Dabheoc) as the first abbot. A legend which gained much momentum, particularly widely from the twelfth century onwards, when the Augustinian Canons took over the running of the monastic settlement, narrated that St. Patrick had entered the cave on *Saints Island* during Lent and was granted an extended vision of purgatory with many suffering souls in unspeakable torment. The first evidence of wide circulation of this legend was from the Irish Knight, *Owein*, whose pilgrimage journey was recounted by the Cistercian monk, Henry of Saltrey in 1184 (ibid p.26). After Owein’s pilgrimage, which included his twenty-four hours in the purgatorial cave, he spread news of this vision-filled wonder across Europe, fomenting much interest and curiosity, particularly among noble and more wealthy Catholics, many of whom soon began long and arduous journeys to this pilgrimage site ‘on the edge of the world’ (Taylor 2016), and, seeking there, similar experiences of the netherworld. Such medieval fame had a double-edged influence on the historical fortunes of St. Patrick’s Purgatory for in 1497, Pope Alexander VI decreed the closure of the pilgrimage and the destruction of the cave, after a disappointed and obviously influential Dutch monk, who had failed to have any purgatorial visions on his pilgrimage to Lough Derg, and was even more scandalised by the fees he was asked for by local bishops (J.E. 1984, p. 34), reported the Island as a mere money-making racket

(Conway, 2016 p.30). At a recent virtual Conference on *The Wisdom of Trauma,*[12] holotropic therapist Stanislav Grof (and of later reference in Chapter Three, page), described in detail the types of visions an Amerindian Shamanic Healer would regularly have in shamanic visioning ceremonies. His details bear uncanny resemblance to those described by some of those deemed 'spiritually fit enough' (ibid, p.27) to do the twenty-four hours in the purgatorial cave of Lough Derg. The human capacity to enter such altered states of consciousness, including willingness to surrender egoic control to their unnerving power (hence not everyone can), and Carl Jung's description of the collective unconscious, all go some way towards explaining such extraordinary resemblances across time and such diverse cultures. There is some debate among scholars of historical accounts as to whether or not the stories of purgatorial visions, coming from various Lough Derg cave experiences, were in part, the raw material for Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Some dismiss it outright and others go to some lengths to detail the Italian-Irish connections of the time and therefore the plausibility of its influence on Dante (J.E. 1984, pp.16-17). The papal closure of Lough Derg turned out to be no more than a momentary setback, one of several, as we shall note, for the resilient monastic and pilgrimage centre (ibid p. 30). A local group of Franciscans took over the re-establishment and leadership of the monastic site and pilgrimage until 1780, when the Diocese of Clogher took over the administration, a situation which pertains to the present.

[12] See SAND (Science & Non-Duality) *The Wisdom of Trauma* Conference, 2021 hosted by founders Zaya & Maurizio Benazzo at https://wisdomoftrauma.com. The Conference opened with the premiere screening of their documentary film featuring the pioneering work of Trauma Therapist, Gabor Maté, also entitled, *The Wisdom of Trauma.*

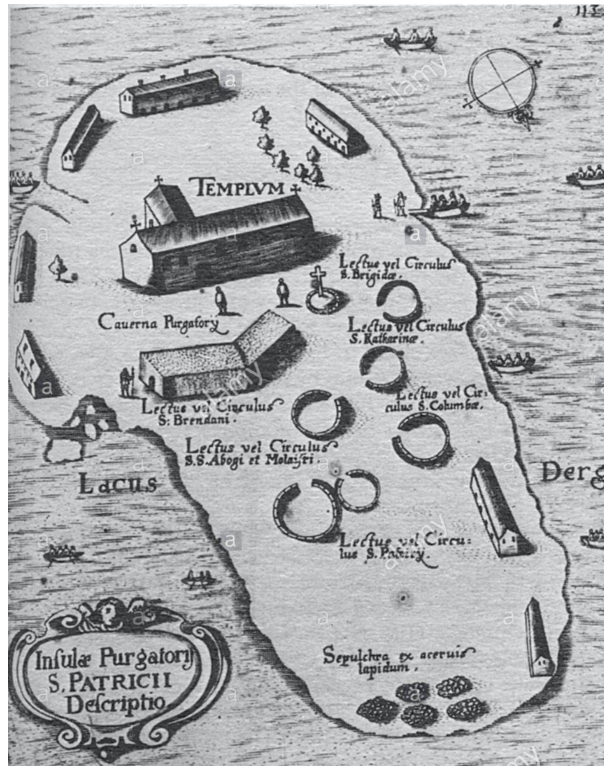

Illustration 1: 1651 Map of Lough Derg

Lough Derg's history, given its ecclesial and European significance, continued to bear the significant brunt of the shifting vagaries of its socio-political-cultural context. Plundering by marauding foreigners (9th & 10th Centuries), the complete destruction of the Island by royal decree (1632), after the Reformation and the era of the penal laws (17th & 18th Centuries), the Famine[13] (1845-1847|), "the Troubles" (1969-1994) to name but some (Conway, 2016, pp.26-35). As recently as 1970, the Turners observed that 'nationalism is a potent force' on the island (1978 p. 124). However, when I conducted my research, perhaps again because the surrounding political situation has been relatively peaceful more recently, this did not emerge as 'a force', nor a theme of note. Perhaps the closest comment was, 'there's something quintessentially Irish about it'. (I am mindful, of course, of the possibility of personal bias in this regard.) What has had more enduring and extant influence is the nature of the penitential practices of the pilgrimage, which have been deeply established and at their core much unchanged, since the early medieval period. There are some variations, the medieval version of the

[13] Records indicate that 30,000 pilgrims did the Lough Derg pilgrimage in 1846 when the 'Great Famine' was at its height. (Fact offered as part of an oral history narration, Lough Derg Pilgrim Walk, October 3rd, 2021 by then Prior, Fr. La Flynn).

pilgrimage, for example, lasting for fifteen days in comparison with the contemporary three days. Such penitential practices are recognised as intrinsic and unique to the Celtic variations of early monastic Christianity (Maddrell & Scriven, 2016). Harbison, for example, recounts how the Annals of Tighernach record the death of the Abbot of Louth in 757 after a year on pilgrimage in Clonmacnoise having lived on water only from St Finghin's well (1993 p.53). This form of ascetism was soon to have wider and eventually even a measure of global influence. Alongside the physical austerities, significant attention was given also to sin, and to the baring of the details of one's personal sins which were then prescribed precise penances as though akin to medicinal remedies (Conway, 2016 p. 25). Hence individual confession was part of the pilgrimage rubric from early on, a gift the Irish are deemed to have given the global Church, and now celebrated as the Sacrament of Reconciliation (ibid p. 25 and citing Hugh Connolly's 1995 study of *Irish Penitentials* and their significance for the Sacrament of Penance today).

2.2.2 The Contemporary Pilgrimage

This bedrock of history, figuratively and literally, remains foundational to the contemporary experience. When *Saints Island* was the busy monastic centre, *Station Island* was to become the more contemplative and hermitage locus for the early monastic life practices. A number of beehive huts were built on it. These were ubiquitously scattered all along the western Irish coast at the time. (They were located wherever those *peregrini pro Christo* arrived in their coracles!) The circular remnants of four of these huts, and two more which were added subsequently, each dedicated today to a Saint (five of them Irish and a sixth to St Catherine), form an important element of the topography for the contemporary pilgrimage process. Soon after the cave on *Saints Island* was eventually filled in, the whole pilgrimage experience transferred to *Station Island*. A second cave was also part of the pilgrimage process on Station Island for some time, but it too was later filled in and the current St. Mary's Chapel was built over it. Hence, when contemporary pilgrims make their journey to do the Lough Derg pilgrimage, they first make their way to a small jetty, at land's end, fifteen kilometres or so from the nearest village of Pettigo, perched on the border between Donegal and Fermanagh, and therefore on the border between the

Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. From this jetty, pilgrims are sailed across to the island by local boatmen, members of the seasonal staff of the pilgrimage. Although only a kilometre or so from the shore, the short water-trip nonetheless facilitates a visceral sense of stepping off and out into a different dimension. These deeply tactile, bodily aspects of the pilgrimage are continued when immediately upon arrival pilgrims are invited to go barefoot, their second penitential act, just as soon as they have deposited their overnight bag in the dormitories.

Pilgrims will have made their first act of pilgrimage in earnest the night before by fasting from midnight and abstaining from food, soft drinks and alcohol for the duration, save for the once-a-day, 'Lough Derg meal' - dry toast and/or oat biscuits and black tea or coffee. Pilgrims may drink as much water as personally required and a boiling urn of water is always available in the Break Room where pilgrims can make 'Lough Derg soup', hot water with salt and pepper, and they can also shelter awhile there when the elements are harsh. A second fast is also required - from one night of sleep. In its stead, the pilgrims participate in a twenty-four hour vigil, the night section of which is conducted in the Island's basilica. For the duration of "the stations", the doors are ceremoniously closed and locked to effect a contemporary resonance with the cave-phenomenon of the pilgrimage's origins.

These "stations" are the cornerstone of the pilgrimage rubric, a long series of prayers, ritual gestures and movements, which take about one and a half hours in the round, and pilgrims are asked to complete nine of them. They are mostly conducted in the outdoors, at the full mercy of the elements, and at the pilgrims own pace and preference, except for the four rounds held during the night vigil in the basilica, which are performed in the collective . The devotional ritual in the round involves kneeling, arising, standing, contemplative circular walking, upright prostration, sitting, touching, kissing, blessing oneself with lake water and baptismal water and, finally, the silent or certainly hushed repetition of the long litany of prayers. The exception to this private praying of the stations occurs as mentioned during the vigil when the prayers are enunciated aloud and collectively, which goes some way to assist pilgrims to ward off sleepiness. Pilgrims participate in the Eucharist each day and twice on the middle day and

are invited to the Sacrament of Reconciliation on the final morning, shortly before their return boat journey to the mainland, where they continue their food and alcohol fast until that night at midnight. As a totality, the pilgrimage process requires significant physical stamina and although contemporary pilgrims do not have to seek permission to do it, nor be deemed 'spiritually fit' for it, as has happened in previous eras, nonetheless, it is still considered one of the most difficult pilgrimages in Christendom[14].

The Diocese of Clogher and the men and women on the core staff over the last number of decades have worked assiduously to maintain a fine balance of fidelity to, what former Bishop Joseph Duffy calls, the 'rubrical tradition' and yet also offer 'a more balanced view of the Catholic Church's teaching' (one might add more radically true to origins) on sin, sorrow and penance (Purcell et all, 2018/1988). Conway's account (2016) offers both historical context and a much less puritanically penitential but robust, contemporary theology. Canadian scholar, J.E. (1984), concluded his reflections on his out-of-season pilgrim walk to Lough Derg with some insights from his interview with the then Bishop, Bishop Joseph Duffy. Duffy acknowledges that the penitential element of the pilgrimage certainly might encourage some to, 'bypass the normal channels of nature and reality as we know them, and to ...oversimplify and look for a miracle'. Yet, Lough Derg's enduring power, Duffy seems to suggest, comes from more simple things. 'Firstly', he says it provides Irish people with 'a direct link to their past, much of which has put us to the test'. Secondly, he continues 'the symbolism means something, it carries a lesson. Without being pious about it, I do think that's the deepest measure of the place. We die, and we are reborn. It's a very simple message. All Lough Derg does, is drive it home' (J.E. 1984, p.36).

In Chapter 5, I will return to how aspects of the rubric influences of the Island's pilgrimage have impacted some of my research findings. However, in the interim, I wish to note that a fully detailed sequence of the Stations rubric is respectfully and perceptively recounted in Purcell et al (2018/1988) and aesthetically and visually captured by Irish human geographer, Richard Scriven.[15]

[14] https://www.theguardian.com/world/shortcuts/2014/aug/15/-sp-toughest-pilgrimage-st-patrick-purgatory
[15] To gain a most helpful sense of what is required of the contemporary Lough Derg pilgrim, see Scriven's account at http://liminalentwinings.com/tag/lough-derg/

2.3 The Camino de Santiago de Compostela, Galicia, Northern Spain

2.3.1 Background and Brief Historical Review

For my instruction on the background to and historical detail about the Camino de Santiago I am indebted to a number of scholars, including one, Bernadette Cunningham (2018), who researched the pilgrimage from a strongly Irish angle. (Greenia, 2018, 2017, 2014, 2011, Sanchez y Sanchez & Hesp, 2016, Harman, 2014, Webb, 2002, and Lozano, 1998/1993). Although the pilgrimage is called affectionately, 'the Camino', it is actually a network of many pilgrimage routes with starting points all over Europe, including one from Ireland, at St. James' Gate, Dublin. (See Map below, Illustration No.2.) Final stages of all routes (and in most cases, all mid-stage stretches), and the pilgrimage's destination shrine are located in Spain, predominantly Northern Spain, and in particular its Galician capital, Santiago de Compostela. The translation, 'St. James of the field of the stars', relates to the pilgrimage's engendering story, and is recounted well by Cunningham (2018 p.18). The story begins with a visit to Spain by the beloved apostle, James. He had come on mission and to preach, part of what some recount as the disciples decision to carve up the 'known world' between them and to travel to each end of and to bring the Good News. (In his detail, Turner even adds a year for James missionary visit - AD 40.) A few short years later, after James was martyred, by Herod Agrippa I, back in Jerusalem, in AD 44, his remains were later brought back to Spain in a stone boat. The earliest documented accounts of such a legend reveal that it was in wide circulation by the seventh century. The second Chapter of the story begins, Cunningham continues, in the ninth century, when a hermit named Pelayo, was drawn to a field, guided there by light and celestial music (hence, the field of stars), and there 'found' the buried remains of St James. On that spot, the Cathedral shrine was built. The earliest parchment in the Cathedral archives is dated c.1138-c.1173 (2018 p.18 and see Footnote 6). The Turners have a slightly different version of the story. They add an appearance of Mary to the original section of the legend, and how she had visited James as an encouragement to the disciple in his preaching work in Spain. In this version it was *her* appearance which was light-filled with stars and celestial music (1978 pp.169-170). From the twelfth

century, Cunningham, in her accounts, charts in detail how Santiago de Compostela emerged to rival Rome and Jerusalem as a pilgrimage place of note (2018, p.18) and so journeys to this shrine became a third trajectory in the history of Christian pilgrimage (ibid p.45). Given our geographical position on the edges of Europe, at least some part of the early pilgrimage journeys from Ireland were made by sea.[16]

Illustration 2: Map of the Main European Camino routes

Cunningham divides her study of Irish pilgrim journeys to Santiago de Compostela into three parts – the Anglo-Norman phase; the Gaelic Irish phase and the phase of modern revival (ibid, pp.95-126; pp 127-150 and pp. 151-164, respectively). She cites interesting stories of the first two documented pilgrims, for example, that of prominent Anglo-Norman and Lord and Manor of Clonmel,

[16] A small group of contemporary pilgrims and sea-faring men re-enacted this form of pilgrimage in a boat specifically made by two of the team, to correspond with the materials and design of the medieval period. The journey, beginning in 2014, was made over three years, on account of weather and other such conditions, (also very in keeping with the experiences of medieval pilgrims who might wait in coastal towns for weeks and months for storm winds to settle adequately); all the while their journey was beautifully recorded and edited by film director, Dónal Ó Céilleachair. The documentary style film, *The Camino Voyage*, was released in 2018 has deservedly won numerous awards.

Richard de Burgh. Contemporaneous accounts indicate that it took him eight months, from October 1222 until June 1223, although Cunningham adds, given his status, he may also have been doing business overseas for part of that time. In a second example, she names Dublin Archbishop, Fulk de Sandford, who in 1267 it would seem from the records, joined an English Group of pilgrims (ibid, p. 99). A remarkable medieval link between my two sites of study is made by Cunningham later in her detail-rich history, when she recounts the story of Hungarian pilgrim, George Crissaphan, who first walked from his home in Hungary to Santiago desiring to experience real penance. Not satisfied he had done enough by the time he reached Santiago de Compostela, he continued to Finisterre. Disappointed by the crowds there and hungry for remoteness, he heard about St. Patrick's Purgatory in Lough Derg and set off to walk to Ireland c.1353. Although wanting to maximise his penitential pain, the story recounts often how all his walking caused him great suffering (ibid, p. 108).

Similarly to Lough Derg, the Camino de Santiago de Compostela was (and remains), at all times subject to the winds of change in its socio-political-cultural context. Perhaps, the most challenging of these for the network of routes was the long period following the Reformation. Those who had chosen to or were evangelised to become members of the newly established protestant and reformed churches, were strongly discouraged from pilgrimage-making. It was viewed as yet another example of Roman Catholicism's corrupt and superstitious devotional practices, and one without hope of 'offering a route to salvation'. Martin Luther was reported to have considered the veneration of St. James as particularly idolatrous (Cunningham p. 151). This led to a dramatic decline in numbers of pilgrims after nearly four centuries of steady growth (ibid, p.151). Such beliefs and fears would seem to continue to hold water among some in the Church of England today, although it too has experienced a dramatic resurgence in interest in pilgrimage and 'pilgrim-like' visits to Anglican Cathedrals from among their faithful and their erstwhile members (and as will be noted again in the next Chapter). Christ Church Cathedral, London, in co-operation with the religious broadsheet and online magazine, *Church Times,* hosted a virtual

Festival of Pilgrimage in September 2020 [17] and there were a number of fine presentations. Yet, in some of the post-presentation conversations, a few testy exchanges about what one panellist had called 'pilgrimage kitsch' suggest a carry-over of unease among some, about unsavoury/superstitious aspects, as they would view them, of the pilgrimage phenomenon.

The rather dismissive 'kitsch' of said reference pertains to another long enduring facet of pilgrimage – the ritual, found replicated in pilgrimages all over the world, of imbuing physical objects/images with a kind of energetic connection of one's experience. In some cases particular objects or images have become emblematic of the pilgrimage site. This is certainly true of the scallop shell and the Camino. The translation of scallops in both French (*Coquille Saint Jacques*) and German (*Jakobsmuscheln*) gives a clear indication of an ancient link between the Saint and shell. Native to and abundant on the Galician coastline, it seems they also served a practical purpose – a 'scallop measure' was the portion given to the pilgrims at food stalls set up at Churches and monasteries along the route in medieval times.[18] Pilgrims also wore them on their garments as a further identifier of their status. Their contemporaries continue the tradition and often pin them on their backpack, also making them visible to all. Many pilgrims past and present have brought such objects home to loved ones and the local community in an attempt, as it were, to transfer and spread around the sacred healing and energy of their pilgrimage experience.

Resilient like St Patrick's Purgatory at Lough Derg, and despite the major political and cultural challenges of the late Medieval period, such as the wars of religion and the Enlightenment, the Camino de Santiago, although it dipped in significance throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, continued to serve throughout as a pilgrim path (Gonzalez, 2016 p. 773). Records show that there was continuing contact between the Irish and other Europeans and the Camino throughout the more troublesome centuries. This was particularly

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[17] A section of the Church Times website has a section dedicated to the September 2020 Festival of Pilgrimage and can be found at https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2020/25-september/audio-video/video/video-why-pilgrimage-has-resonance-today. (Viewing the entire list of Festival presentations may incur a subscription process and/or fee).

[18] For pithy, well-produced video on the associations with the Scallop shell, see https://caminoways.com/the-scallop-shell-and-the-camino-de-santiago

evident among Irish clergy and bishops when they had fallen foul of the colonial English authorities in power at the time and they often sought refuge in the city of Santiago de Compostela. An Irish College was established there in 1605. By the nineteenth century however, the numbers of pilgrims overall had reduced to a trickle, although in Holy Years, it sometimes increased again to about five hundred pilgrims or so. A revival of interest in St. James, among Spanish Catholics, was greatly aided by Pope Leo XIII's declaration in 1884, that the bones found in the Cathedral were indeed those of St. James and two of his disciples. For many decades thereafter, Spanish pilgrims made their way to the city to venerate the saint. However, few of these chose the traditional method of walking the routes (See Cunningham, 2018, pp 152-157).

2.3.2 The Contemporary Pilgrimage

The resurgence of interest in contemporary times in the Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, particularly in its traditional format of an extensive walking pilgrimage along one or other of its ancient routes, and often for weeks at a time, has been researched and commented upon by many, as we will note in Chapter 3. A variety of factors are highlighted throughout such literature, as possible contributors to this resurgence, including some of the following:

- The investments of General Franco's government
- Clever, 'tourism-influenced' marketing
- Santiago city becoming a *UNESCO World Heritage* site in 1985 and subsequently in 1993, the Camino Francés becoming established as a *UNESCO World Heritage Patrimony for Humanity*;
- Becoming the first *European Cultural Route* of the European Union in 1987;
- The work of Fr. Elias Valiña of O'Cebriero rehabilitating the route and introducing the emblematic yellow, raised scallop edges with a blue background; (and later the introduction of the yellow arrows) [19]

[19] See https://www.pygmy-elephant.com/blog/the-history-of-the-camino-de-santiago

- The work of Confraternities around Europe, including in Santiago itself (for example, Jose Guerra Campos whose promotional work gets special mention, Cunningham, 2018 p. 159)
- Improved infrastructure (accommodation options, signage, refreshment spots) along the route and in Santiago itself
- Improved pilgrimage administration, especially in Santiago city
- The Camino passport (and ownership of it by all stakeholders on all routes)
- Cheaper air travel; (pre-pandemic!)
- Popular books, films; film stars or TV personalities doing the route
- Documentaries and journalistic coverage, occasionally from high profile journalists.[20]

The complex interaction of all these factors, past and present are evident to a lesser and greater degree and yet as Gonzalez notes, 'the true protagonist of contemporary revival of 'the Way' is, unarguably, the pilgrim' (2016 p. 775).

Cunningham names a couple of influencing factors of uniquely Irish interest, including Walter Starkie's books, particularly, *The Road to Santiago: Pilgrims of St James*, in 1957*;* the journalistic articles of historian Mary Purcell in popular broadsheets (1960s), as well as the earlier historical work of Patrick Mc Bride (1930s), and, finally Aer Lingus (Ireland's then national airline), began offering chartered flights and tours to Santiago from as early as 1954 (2018 pp.159-161).

Veteran Camino Pilgrimage Scholar, George Greenia, would want to include in the earlier list above, the fact that 'quests for deeper meaning have mushroomed into a world phenomenon'. He acknowledges that 'scholars struggle to understand all the energies at play', in the extraordinary surge of interest in Camino de Santiago over the past half century but summarises pithily the plain

[20] Robert MacFarlane's article in the Guardian June 2012 is one of the most incisive commentaries I have read. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/jun/15/rites-of-way-pilgrimage-walks
Arthur Brooks of the Washington Post walked the route and reported on it in an opinion piece. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/i-walked-500-miles-across-spain-heres-what-i-learned/2019/08/16/148cf612-beac-11e9-9b73-fd3c65ef8f9c_story.html

fact that it has ‘become arguably the iconic pilgrimage in Western culture’ (Sanchez y Sanchez & Hesp, 2016 p. x).

While concern for a developed and appropriately authentic theology of pilgrimage has been a work-in-progress for many years on Lough Derg – and continuing[21] - the Camino de Santiago, one could argue, is a more open canvas, spiritually and theologically. Unlike Lough Derg, where the pilgrimage rubric includes a required sequence of specifically Catholic devotional practices, performed in a relatively small physical space, concomitant with a series of physical privations, the predominant rubrical element in the contemporary Camino de Santiago pilgrimage, is willingness to walk long distances (or cycle or horse-ride), across an immense landscape, which may include traversing several countries, depending on the starting point and with a particular destination in mind all the while, the shrine of St. James at the Cathedral in Santiago de Compostela. Some pilgrims continue, in a many centuries tradition also, of walking onwards to Finisterre/Fisterre, which rather appropriately translates as “the end of the world”. The minimum required distance for certification by Camino Pilgrim Office authorities is the completion of 100km, at one attempt. Camino pilgrims may or may not, as they freely choose, partake in other notable ritual and devotional practices. For example, upon arrival into one of the many villages along the pilgrimage routes, many pilgrims (so-called ‘believers and non-believers’ alike), will visit the local Church, some may participate in a celebration of the Eucharist and many light votive candles[22]. I will return to these similarities and differences in ritual-making among contemporary pilgrims, when I elaborate on my findings, in Chapter 5, but for now I simply want to make a few concluding comments regarding how both comparisons and distinctions are made between the

[21] During 2019 Lough Derg bravely immersed itself in yet another phase of future planning. One aspect of their work was to engage in a deep collaborative reflection on the theology of pilgrimage operative on the pilgrimage currently, and a consideration of any possible ways of ensuring, where deemed necessary, that the underpinning theology would be more optimally life-affirming and Gospel-authentic. Eamonn Conway led this process of deep questioning and reflection with three other priest-theologians, all of whom regularly and voluntarily minister on Lough Derg. Regrettably, COVID 19 restrictions have interrupted the momentum and delayed the outcomes of this process.

[22] Walton cites Camino Pilgrim Jessica Reed’s account of ‘doing things she’d never otherwise do’ when she found herself ‘fetching a euro coin and lighting a candle’. A little bewildered by her own action as a non-believer, and as if metaphorically shrugging her shoulders she rhetorically asks: ‘What can I say? Having declared, ‘It is not something I can explain rationally’ (2015 p. 41).

medieval and contemporary Camino de Santiago pilgrimage, raising a variety of questions.

Gardner *et al* in a thoughtful article discuss the various interpretations by both the Catholic Church and the European union concerning the current resurgence of pilgrimage on all the European Camino routes (Sanchez y Sanchez & Hesp, 2016 pp.57-77). They critique what they consider to be 'a re-casting by the Church', of the medieval pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela as a symbol of Europeans coming together in spiritual union, in which Europe's common cultural and religious heritage was forged. They also critique what they perceive as a similar type of 're-casting' by the Council of Europe who look to medieval pilgrims as models of the noblest of contemporary European values of openness, tolerance, solidarity and multiculturalism (ibid pp.58-60). They cite a notable address in 1982, by Pope John Paul II[23], on a visit to Santiago de Compostela who used the opportunity to remind the citizens of Europe that they cannot understand themselves, their continent, their art or their literature or even their European identity, without Christianity. The development of a European consciousness, a single community out of many disparate nations, would have been impossible, he declared, if not for its Christian heritage (ibid p. 65). Gardner *et al* suggest that some of this thinking amounts to a kind of glossy revisionism and ignores the pilgrim path's role in maintaining the Christian/ Muslim conflict in the Iberian peninsula, as well as other more chequered and violent aspects of the Church's history in and across Europe. They also interpret subsequent comment on the pilgrimage by popes and bishops, for example, as a vain appeal for some kind of mythic return to a Europe more united under Christianity (ibid p. 67). They cite for example Pope Benedict's 2005 talk on the feast of St. James in Italy's Valle D'Aosta where he was holidaying at the time (ibid, p. 68). Benedict references 'the countless pilgrims from all over Europe who are making the pilgrimage to the Shrine of St. James in Santiago' and he quotes and reiterates his predecessor JP II's talks on his two visits to Santiago.[24] Reading these pontifical talks in full, it is hard not to agree that they contain a

[23] https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1982/november/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19821109_atto-europeistico.html
[24] https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/4468/pope-calls-on-europe-to-return-to-its-christian-roots;-for-youth-to-become-leaven

longing for a return to some king of ‘glorious history’. Hervieu-Léger (2006) and Davie (2006) both offer further helpful and at times contrasting comment on the place and role of religion in Europe. Yet, it is also possible to argue the evident truth of the view that to understand Europe’s present, we must be cognisant of the multivalent, complex intermingling of its roots in Christianity. Also, by contrast with Gardner *et al*, I found myself appreciating the authenticity of Pope Benedict’s appeal at the end of this 2005 summer address, when he prayed that, “the new generations, drawing their vital lymph from Christ, may know how to be leavening in European society for a renewed humanism, one in which faith and reason cooperate in a fruitful dialogue for the promotion of man and the construction of true peace."

However, I concur wholeheartedly with Gardner *et al* in their conclusions, firstly that the pilgrimage is clearly ‘a global affair’ which is certainly also part of its appeal. Secondly, while they make that same sharp divide of many, between religious devotion and spiritual reflection, they declare that, ‘there is no need to look to the Middle Ages for a legitimacy that never existed, for pilgrims from every corner of the world, every day are making the Camino a strong symbol of unity by their affirming of the values of hospitality, respect, solidarity, tolerance, openness, generosity and peace’ (ibid, p. 71). Such thoughts are mere hints about some of the conflicts that arise in the hermeneutic of contemporary pilgrimage and which are implicitly or explicitly threaded through current literature and thought, a number of which I will return in the subsequent literature review. I will note particularly the theological contribution of Piotr Roszak in relation to the changing theology on place and space. Also, in my presentation and subsequent discussion of my findings in Chapters 5 and 6, I will again return to this challenging area of the theological hermeneutic of contemporary pilgrimage.

Some scholars almost scoff at attempts to make comparisons between the demands the Camino pilgrimage made on medieval pilgrims over and against those on contemporary pilgrims. The arduous, risk-filled nature of the medieval journey is assiduously documented. We know for example that a significant percentage died on route to make the Camino Pilgrimage or on the return journey home. The fact that medieval pilgrims, having rested upon arrival at the much

anticipated destination in Santiago de Compostela, had within a short enough time, to set off again and do the whole trail in reverse to return home, is frequently pointed out as the defining difference, *par excellence*. 'But Is there anything more than vague sentiment to connect the experience of the Irish walker to Santiago with the world of the medieval Irish pilgrim who made the hazardous journey to Galicia 500 years ago?' Cunningham asks in the *Conclusion Section* to her very fine study on medieval Irish pilgrims (2018, pp. 162-163). Her distinguishing identification of the two is immediately remarkable, (but goes without further comment by her, and yet, perhaps enough said) - the contemporary is *a walker*, the medieval aspirant, *a pilgrim*. She continues her reflections by acknowledging that the 'pull of history, (for the contemporary 'walker') is incredibly strong' but goes on to emphasise that the medieval world is one 'far removed' from the contemporary and, 'almost beyond recall'. There is no gainsaying the truth of this. However, some sobering counter points which challenge a perspective that all contemporary Camino pilgrims are stereotypically, comfortable, middle-class hikers, who take no hazardous risks, come from sociologist Lesley Harman's study and the work of anthropologist, Keith Egan. Harman recounts the decisions of two pilgrims, one who had sold their house to fund their pilgrimage, and a second who had cashed in her life savings to fund her completion of it. In 2010, Harman also served in one of the many *hospitalerias* on route and met there a number of young Spanish pilgrims who had lost jobs and homes after the economic crash of 2008 and who kept making and remaking the pilgrimage as the only way of finding shelter and food at rates they could now afford (2014, p. 33). In relation to dying on the Camino, Egan writes movingly of Irish pilgrim, John, who decides to do the Camino one year after his sister Myra had completed the pilgrimage but who had died suddenly during the night of her arrival into Santiago on account of an undiagnosed brain tumour. She had been a hospice nurse and he endeavoured to trace minutely her footsteps along the route where 'he found traces of her life in refuge registers, messages she had left for pilgrims coming after her' (2010 p. 124).

Cunningham's concluding paragraph also includes a strong summary of the noble outcomes that would have accrued for medieval pilgrims on account of their making the Camino pilgrimage and she adds that they would have, 'over time

interpreted these experiences within their context' (2018 p. 163). I was struck by how many of these outcomes, including - a better understanding of their place in the world; being opened to worlds beyond the confines of their own lives – new landscapes, new horizons, new peoples, new possibilities - and all the while coping with the personal challenges of the arduous journey; could also be attributed to, and fairly, I would argue, to the contemporary 'walker'. I would further argue, that many of these "contemporary walkers" of Cunningham's, equally deserve the dignity of the identity of 'pilgrim', as I believe my findings of Chapter 5 will demonstrate.

2.4 Conclusion

I opened this Chapter by emphasising the pivotal role of place in contemporary pilgrimage and the consequent need to introduce both *places* in this study. I first contextualised the more local explorations in an historical overview of Christian pilgrimage generally. I noted that root of ambivalence towards pilgrimage-making, given Christianity's revelation that God is no longer locatable only in the temple nor in any other place for that matter, in light of the Resurrection's abundant and diffuse gift of Christ's Spirit to one and all, wherever they may be. Nonetheless, devotional visits to particular places became, soon enough, an established practice because of the stories of revered people, initially many of them martyrs, that were associated with them. The unfolding story of each place in this study, St. Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg and the Camino de Santiago de Compostela, as narrated here, indicates some of the factors and forces which have interwoven over the centuries, to create the complex matrix that each pilgrimage site is today. I then described briefly how the contemporary pilgrim is invited into and participates in the rubrical tradition of each place and I signalled differences, not only in the devotional content of these traditions, but also differences in the hermeneutical view of what pilgrimage means theologically and spiritually.

Maddrell describes such pilgrimage places as 'spaces for renewal and restoration' (2013 p.2). Eade acknowledges that pilgrimage demonstrates how 'mobile (movement) practices help construct apparently sacredly-charged

places', but he also gives almost equal attention to how power and authority on the part of those with vested interests in such places, are woven into ritual invention and performance (2020 p. 2). Gonzalez describes pilgrimage as a movement and a journey of people and ideas, which keep the sacred value of the space and place alive, and which create spatial relationships (2016, p.772). The enduring power of particular spaces and places for people of every time and indeed over time, is the constant of such diverse commentary. Sacred places remain partially open to empirical, historical and hermeneutical description but also partially, and perhaps necessarily, somewhat elusive in their enduring power to attract the contemporary seeker.

In Chapter 4, I will recount the story of researching some of this 'enduring power of attraction' among the twenty seekers who participated in my study in a detailed description of my research methodology and in Chapter 5 we will hear excerpts from pilgrims' own accounts of their sacred journeys to these historically and contemporaneously important places of pilgrimage.

However, in advance of those tasks, in Chapter 3 next, I will review relevant literature, pertinent to the research questions of pilgrim's embodiment and experience, and to the interpretation of those experiences from the parent disciplines of psychology and theology and the newer discipline of pilgrimage studies.

CHAPTER 3 – MAPPING PILGRIM TERRITORY

3.0 Introduction

How do pilgrims embody and interpret their experience?
How is that experience interpreted by psychology and theology?

The literature search in service of these research questions required significant immersion in both these parent disciplines of theology and psychology as well as in the growing body of work which has been gathering under the umbrella of, 'Pilgrimage Studies'. Pilgrimage scholarship has flourished in recent decades in tandem with the burgeoning interest in making pilgrimage. Some universities, like that of York, England, and William and Mary, Pennsylvania, United States, have opened dedicated hubs of research, sponsorship and scholarship, the Centre for Pilgrimage Studies[25] and the Institute of Pilgrimage studies[26], respectively. Pilgrimage studies have also become increasingly cross-disciplinary, which further attests to the global-wide pervasiveness of the pilgrimage phenomenon, among all cultures and in many places. In the final decade of the twentieth century, Post et al considered then that 'multidisciplinary research on pilgrimage had only {then} got off the ground on a very limited scale' and in fact regarded their own research as, 'an argument for greater academic cross-traffic' (1998 p.24 and p.12 respectively). A few years earlier Preston had declared that it was no longer possible to investigate pilgrimage using only one lens (1992). Earlier again, Morinis, described pilgrimage as, 'a relatively neglected area of investigative scholarship' (1981, p.281). Forty or so years later there is an 'embarrassment of riches', yielding a welcome breadth of insight and a questioning of old assumptions, so much so that contemporary scholars can say,

> ...scholarship has thus taken an important step to understand the multiple meanings of a phenomenon that, with the advent of modernity, has seen the emergence of

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[25] The Centre is described as inter-disciplinary and inter-institutional with a similarly broad multi-national Board of Directors. See https://www.pilgrimagestudies.ac.uk/about

[26] The Institute for Pilgrimage Studies of William and Mary also acts as an inter-disciplinary hub and has a dual focus of facilitating emerging pilgrimage scholars to study abroad, especially in Santiago de Compostela. See https://www.wm.edu/sites/pilgrimage/

> new pilgrimages and pilgrims all around the world…and the shifting nature of discourse on pilgrimage that shows itself at its best when illuminated by a diversity of disciplines and theoretical perspective (Sanchez y Sanchez and Hesp 2016 p. 3).

This study too begins and continues in this inter-disciplinary pattern and seeks to initiate a three-way conversation between and among pilgrimage studies, theology and psychology. In the review of pilgrimage studies literature below, I highlight some of the contemporary themes on pilgrimage, particularly those pertaining to this research.

The intersection between the two other conversation partners - psychology and theology - has been a keen area of scholarly debate for many decades and aspects of that conversation contributed, in part, to the birth of a new discipline as far back as the 19th Century, the Psychology of Religion, with '*The Varieties of Religious Experience*', considered a formative text and its author William James, a founding figure (Leeming et al, 2010). In contrast, the interdisciplinary angle taken by this research is aware of, but not focused on that meta-discussion regarding the origins or purposes of either psychology or religion, nor indeed assessments of their contemporary import. Rather, it is rooted in an academic respect for what both psychology and theology offer to the continuing development of knowledge in the interests of human flourishing, and therefore, I draw on both. Two particular domains from within these parent disciplines, found to be especially conducive to an exploration of the core findings of this research are, *theological anthropology* and *psychology of the body*. Casting more particularly within these domains has also offered a useful boundary from within two otherwise vast, epistemological disciplines.

3.1 Preamble and Preliminary Notes

However, before offering a review and synthesis of my reading in the newer genre of Pilgrimage Studies and these sub-domains of theological anthropology and the psychology of the body, there are three important bases that I must cover and, in some ways, uncover. Firstly, pilgrimages are made in a particular context within which a raft of social, religious, political and cultural influences is always at play. Hence, the first base I will cover is a survey of the contemporary context,

given that this is the era of pilgrimage under review. Two other foundational bases of the research questions of this study, as indicated above are, *experience* of pilgrims and *interpretation* of that experience. The latter requires entering the territory of hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation, and in a first set of preliminary notes, I describe the disciplines and models that I hope will assist my navigation. Experience, and particularly the use of experience as a source of primary data has both possibilities and many challenges, and so my second set of preliminary notes clarify such challenges and how I hope to ameliorate them in service of mining the potential of pilgrim experience as a rich resource of study and learning.

To research contemporary pilgrimage in particular, requires that I address the current context, particularly in relation to intellectual discourse. Yet how does one attenuate the claims and counterclaims of discourse which characterises this period, named by many, but ironically and characteristically, not by all as 'post-modernity'? How does one find a taut thread through the myriad of theories and perspectives bouncing, almost 'boomerang-like', among theorists who boldly name and explain the dimensions of the socio-politico-cultural context of the contemporary era and how that influences the day-to-day reality of those of us who inhabit the times and those who discourse about it? The reality is, that such descriptions and critiques permeate almost all of the literature reviewed here, which therefore requires some attempt, on my part, to outline an understanding of the variety and contrariety therein. I am mindful nonetheless, as history has taught us, that those of us living in an era can often be obtuse about influences and biases that we cannot yet see nor name, but nonetheless shape our perspective on the very context we are attempting to perceive.

3.1.1 Preamble on Context

History is an important place to begin as current context always grows out of all that went before. There are interruptions and unexpected emergences, and this dialectical tension between *the foreseeable* and *the interrupting*, we now know with more certainty, is at the very heart of the nature of the evolution of life (Delio, 2013 & 2013a, Haught, 2010). As Rita Felski advises, it is vital that we do not 'think of context as akin to a box nor of history as a neatly stacked pile of

boxes we call periods' (2011, p.577). 'Instead of absolute temporal difference and distance' (that we might mistakenly believe we have mastered by our discipline of delineating the context), she instead invites us, more truthfully to acknowledge what we have is more like 'a messy hotchpotch and rich confusion, a spillage across period boundaries in which we are thoroughly implicated in the historical phenomena we describe'. Wisely and pertinently she stresses 'pastness is part of who we are' (ibid, p.579 & p.578 respectively).

In the brief review of Christian pilgrimage, as we noted in Chapter 2, there have been four discernible periods, (mindful that they are not boxes!) of Christian Pilgrimage - early Christian, early Irish and European monasticism, medieval pilgrimage and contemporary pilgrimage, each characterised in particular by a measurable increase in the numbers of pilgrims who participated during these times. I now wish to name some of the influences within the contemporary socio-cultural-political post-modern context in which pilgrimage has re-emerged as a significant practice of choice,[27] for remarkable numbers of people. As hinted above such naming and sketching are not simple tasks and the alacrity with which any perceived certainty could be challenged and dismissed, is itself an indicator of one of the dominant characteristics of these times- that pervasive sense of distrust of any theory which purports to explain reality or indeed any aspect of it. In her Introduction to *God, Sexuality and the Self*, theologian Sarah Coakley puts it succinctly when she says:

> …I take postmodernity to mean the (purported) end of a shared 'grand narrative' between different cultural and philosophical contexts …and a rejection of philosophical foundationalism, (the possibility of identifying universal epistemological criteria that could then form the basis for all claims to truth)' (2013,p.13).

Kevin Hart, theologian, poet and philologist agrees that such *anti-foundationalism* is intrinsic to the current time but he goes further and groups it

[27] It is often noted by pilgrim scholars that Islam is perhaps the only religion which specifically requires believers to engage in a particular pilgrimage at least once in a lifetime as part of the fulfilments of their religious duties. Given that almost one quarter of the world's population identify as Muslim, it is perhaps no surprise that in the most recent figures available, 2.5 million completed the Hajj pilgrimage in 2019. It is also worth noting that a peak number of 3.1 million pilgrims engaged in the pilgrimage in 2012, a few months after the events short-named as, "9/11", a further glimpse of how malleable pilgrimage can be to the socio-cultural-political context. See, https://www.statista.com/statistics/617696/saudi-arabia-total-hajj-pilgrims/)

alongside *anti-essentialism* and *anti-realism* to offer a more three-dimensional perspective on the nature of postmodernist discourse, discourse which, he promptly emphasises, cannot be reduced to a single, nor even 'small collection of particular viewpoints' (2004, vi). He uses an illuminative and engaging motif to describe this contemporary conversation between and among diverse, and at times polemical, voices. He opens one of his books and a chapter from another book, both pertaining to postmodernity, with a series of 'call and response' type descriptions that summarise the complex positions from various, what we might call, "camps" in the post-modern milieu. He then poses his alternate opener questions, '*What is postmodernism?*' (in the book of same title) and '*Can one experience God?'* (from the Chapter in 2004/ 2005, and co-authored with Barbara E. Wall). His hypothetical "camp respondents" then answer and yield thoughtful and orientating summaries of their various positions. A superficial web-search of the historical origins of the term 'postmodern' on *Wikipedia,* reveals that its use as a possible name for the period was invoked as early as 1926. However, it was not until the middle of the 20th Century that Arnold Toynbee declared that 'our post-modern age had been inaugurated by World War 1'. The same site offers a most succinct definition when it describes postmodernity as:

> an intellectual stance and mode of discourse defined by an attitude of scepticism towards what it describes as the grand narratives and idealogues of modernism, as well as opposition to epistemic certainty and the stability of meaning. [28]

Given their commitment to foundational narratives, essentialist and universal beliefs about human beings and enduring views of reality and what makes for meaning, it is perhaps no surprise that theologians would come in for special scrutiny and suspicion during such an intellectual shift. They, alongside philosophers who pursue 'a hermeneutic recovery of the divine, after the death of the metaphysical God'[29] continue to explore meta-narratives in response to ultimate questions, such as - *Why is there life? What it might be for? What of the human being? What might be their purpose? What of God? Who is God?* (For example Boeve et al, 2018; Halík and Grün, 2019; Kearney & Treanor, 2015;

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[28] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmodernism which acknowledges the work of A.T. Nuyen, (1992), Jacob Toring (1998) and Gary Aylesworth's 2015 entry on Postmodernism in the online Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy is credited with this particular definition.

[29] This is Jens Zimmerman's summary, for example, of the recent work of philosopher, Richard Kearney.

Kearney, 2016 and 2021). Along a spectrum, bookended, by forensic examination at one end and utter dismissal at the other, the work of such theologians, philosophers and social theorists, past and present, particularly those whose theses have or have had formative religious, social and cultural influence, have been the subject of a whole range of critical analyses. Many of these, in fairness, are constructive and incisive, even as they sought also to deconstruct and unveil. Such analyses are collectively, if not unanimously, described as, 'postmodern' (Turner, 2020, 2016/1984; Kristeva, 2013, 2009,1982; Isherwood, 2000, 2000a; Lacan, 2018, 1971-1972; Derrida, 2016/1967,1st French ed; Foucault,1999,1988,1978).

Hart adds more to his insights when he makes a number of helpful distinctions. He begins with the one between postmodernism and postmodernity. The former he describes as – 'approaches, attitudes and styles in art and culture which questioned or fooled with modernity'. The latter, 'postmodernity', he describes as 'a helpful term' to refer to 'the historical period that emerged after the Second World War' (2004, p.14-15). He guards against the assumption, however, that the 'post' of postmodernism is simply a prefix indicating the epoch succeeding the 'modern' era, for, as he elucidates with remarkable clarity given the many dissonances, the leading cultural and literary theorists of this historical period have widely varying relations to what is called 'modernity', that catch-all term for the historical period preceding and enduring through and beyond the Enlightenment. So much so that he suggests it might be more helpful to say that there are, in fact, a number of 'modernities' which postmodernity mistrusts, questions or rejects, as well as its perceived order, reason, and certainty about enlightenment. Indeed, returning to yet another of his helpful distinctions he distinguishes between 'cultural modernism' and 'theological modernism', which is pertinent to the theology to be reviewed below (2004).

One of the perhaps less contested outcomes of modernity (in the singular, as it were), is the fact that it created the conditions for the growth of the socio-political movement of secularism, both in discourse and in application, as epitomised in various forms of political governance, particularly in Western Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, some states in the

middle East such as Israel, Lebanon (to varying degrees at different times), and for a shorter time, in Iraq and Syria.[30] (There is perhaps less certainty about the extent to which secularity as a form of governance has been operative in some of the countries of the African continent like South Africa, Kenya and Tanzania.) Copson, (who credits Jean Baubérot's thesis), defines secularism as political principles committed to:

> the separation of religious institutions from the institutions of state, and no domination of the political sphere by religious institutions; freedom of thought, conscience and religion for all, with everyone free to change their beliefs, and manifest their beliefs, within the limits of public order and the rights of others; and thirdly, no discrimination against anyone on the grounds of their religion or non-religious worldview, with everyone receiving equal treatment on these grounds (2017, p.2).

The way in which secularity took root and grew across such nation states has been patchy and diverse. However, a common and significant outcome has been the shift in the locus and the status afforded the religious view and its sphere of influence in the political and cultural arena. Cultural commentators and religious leaders have noticed two particular trends in regard to this working out of secularity in practice. For example, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, is appreciative of the positives of secularity as outlined by Copson above, but observes that in practice two very different forms of it have emerged - 'the programmatic and procedural' . 'Procedural secularism' he argues, 'involves the way decisions are made in public matters, in which no one interest group (whether religious, secular, ideological, or professional), is privileged over any other'. He is quick to support this form of secularity and advocates for it as a way of 'brokering harmony' and ensuring more peaceful futures for pluralistic societies. 'Programmatic secularism', by contrast, Williams argues, 'defends an ideological position that the religious voice should never be heard in the public square and that political conversation must be cleansed of any teleological understandings of the human person or society' (2006).

[30] Saha Mahmood has suggested that secular political governments in the Middle East have actually amplified religious tension in the region. (2016)

The more 'purist-minded secularist' like Copson, might say, given Williams' high profile religious role, 'Well he would say that, wouldn't he?', which makes the views of Canadian sociologist and cultural theorist, Charles Taylor, an important support for Williams' observations. Taylor, who has made the study of the impact of secularity on societies and on cultural and religious expression, his life's work, argues in similar vein. He questions the assumed logic that the mark of advanced societies is a liberation from religion (Kearney, 2016 p.76). On the contrary, he says, the evidence clearly suggests that 'religion is here to stay' (ibid) and he proposes that secular, pluralist societies need to find more conducive ways of including and responding to the significant cultural and social impact and import of religion, rather than various unhelpful strategies of dismissal, which, of course, merely shore up problems for a later stage. However, he also poses deep challenges for those who are religious in such pluralist societies. He argues that they must, learn again, as it were, how to argue for the divine and for the transcendent, rather than to presume that an appeal to the divine and transcendence is self-evidentiary and sufficient. In addition, he recommends strongly what he calls, 'a recovery of traditional religious resources', a 'reconnection with inherited narratives, imaginaries and liturgies (ibid p.84) that might meet contemporary problems and dilemmas more convincingly for those living in pluralistic societies' and in what he frequently calls, 'our disenchanted universe'[31] (2007). In this thesis, I argue that pilgrimage is one such 'traditional religious resource', which has much to offer 'the disenchanted' of contemporary societies and its resurgence in the contemporary era is worthy of being counted among the '*interrupting emergences'* of our time, and which is, almost against the odds, already experiencing recovery.

By way of a concluding section to this preamble on the contemporary context then, let me articulate some of the curiosities and anomalies within which this re-emergence of (or, in the case of Lough Derg, an enduring fidelity to) pilgrimage as a practice, has arisen. The first point develops directly out of the pervasiveness of secularity described above, and the varying ways in which religion has been relegated more and more to the private sphere. So dominant in

[31] Referenced in dialogues with Kearney's 2016 Re-Imagining the Sacred and elaborated upon in much more detail in Taylor's own seminal publication, *The Secular Age*, 2007

this movement in western Europe and in North America and Canada, that Taylor calls this time 'A Secular Age' (2007). Yet, in 'full public view', in this secular, pluralist time, pilgrimage to traditional, religiously sacred places has been re-emerging and by such significant numbers of pilgrims, as to challenge all semblance of its relegation as a 'private-only' practice. Secondly, amidst a multiplicity of options for travel adventure, walking trails and other outdoor pursuits, remarkably large numbers of people have been choosing pilgrimage on traditional routes and in and towards traditional ancient places as a preferred option for their period of 'time-out'. The 'why' of this, given these powerful influences in our contemporary context, surely deserves some attention and exploration. Might one of the spokespersons from Hart's hypothetical "arguing camps" mentioned above, have some clue about this? Here one of them articulates yet another curiosity of post-modernity, how it has become ironically 'a site for the 'post-secular':

> an opportunity for people to develop critiques of modernity and its brash rejection of the divine. Postmodernists are right, there are no fixed essences, all is differential flux. But they are mistaken when they think that this implies that there can be no values, no meaning, nothing at all, or worse, that it suggests a world of perpetual assertions and counter-assertions of the will to power (2007, p.11).

This is echoed in Coakley's perception that despite the characteristic fragmentation of postmodernity, it has also offered an unexpected opportunity,

> the era has injected fresh energy in some theologians as the fragmentary nature of much of the discourse has ironically challenged a complacent secular universalism and allowed for a theologically informed voice to re-emerge (2013, p.31).

One of those informed and re-energised theological voices, I would suggest, is Anthony Godzieba (of prior mention), who repeatedly concludes that we have now moved into a period of *post-postmodernity*. Enumerating persuasively the particularities of the journey that theology has taken during modernity and postmodernity both (and similarly to Hart above), but he is especially critical of the many missed opportunities in Catholic theology in recent decades to grow upon what he calls the, *Aggiornamento Theology* of Vatican 2 (2003), and the refusal of many to engage in constructive conversation with the diversity of contemporary cultures that have been emerging since then (2007). He is

stingingly critical of much of what he calls the postmodern, evacuative discussion of disembodied "religiosity". He believes that:

> ...the heyday of that is over, and along with it, the anti-humanism and the curt dismissal of "truth" that accompanied it. My argument is that attention to the *particular* in history and culture, as well as a focus on the body and bodily performance, is a way to articulate and restore a deeper sense of "the human" and of what is at stake in theological anthropology.[32]

The kind of restoration of a deeper sense of being human of which Godzieba so powerfully speaks, and to which I will return frequently, is perhaps not as well served by what I perceive as a lacuna in his challenges, in that he does not himself illuminate (nor indeed name), any particular bodily practice and how it might exemplify. By contrast, I will argue, that contemporary pilgrimage *is* one such bodily practice and contains within it significant capacity for restoration of much of what makes us more deeply human. Thereby, I would hope to contribute additional input to this fresh articulation of theological anthropology which has found new voice in postmodernity.

Another observation of the contemporary context relates to the contrasting journey had by the technological and the human sciences generally, throughout postmodernity, and some of the intended and unintended consequences of that. For example, theologian Heather Walton notes 'the sharp shift in late capitalism towards a communication economy and a triumphant domination of virtual reality, a world of signs and immaterial wonders over other cultural forms' (2014 p. xv). Bentley Hart has a similar concern when he affirms the 'extraordinary fruitfulness of the scientific method, achieved through a severe narrowing of investigative forces', but bemoans deeply how this same 'severe narrowing', involved also the 'wilful shedding of an older language of causality that possessed great richness but that also seemed to resist empirical investigation' (2020). There is much evidence that the scientific method and its commitment to empiricism continues to hold elevated status in socio-political discourse, debate and decision-making, which, at the time of writing in a global pandemic, has, arguably, reached one of its most powerful hours. Alongside the human

[32] In a clarification of the background to his use of the term, 'post-postmodernism' and offered in private email correspondence of March 4th, 2021, and used here with his permission.

sciences, the technological sciences accelerate towards, heretofore unimaginable dominance in human affairs and, indeed new products and/or biotechnological interventions continue to outpace the versatility of ethical frameworks to guide humanity in their use and possible misuse. Hence these domains are undoubtedly in the ascendent and have become, for many, the trusted source of knowledge and guidance, with all the concomitant power such depth of trust imbues.

Religious institutions know all too well the self-deceptions such absolute power can engender and often find themselves looking on at the powerful, global and 'gladiator-like' forces in the 'contemporary colosseo', but now, mostly from the side-lines. This low level of trust in and reduced affiliation towards religious institutions, particularly of a Christian persuasion in the Northern and Western hemisphere, is a most relevant contextual element in this contemporary study of pilgrimage, as it is in marked contrast to not just the rise, but the surge of interest in pilgrimage along traditional routes and to traditional sites, shrines and sacred places, as we shall see below. The bold theological efforts in the midst of postmodernity, and from among the wreckage and debris caused by institutional corruption, have not yet fully interrogated this contrastingly, much sought-after practice, for its meaning. And, although not entirely unexplored terrain, in this thesis, I intend to draw attention to some of what I perceive are the missed contours of that terrain. In the perusal of pilgrimage literature below, I cite the influence of the Turners' opus on pilgrimage (and of course more recently in line with postmodern critique, now "deconstructed"), as a prism through which to explore the meaning of pilgrimage in the Christian tradition. However, by way of continuing these concluding observations regarding the ironies and anomalies of postmodernity, let me bring in another challenging theological voice, Martin Koci, who stresses, what he believes is the appropriateness of contemporary Christians having to sit deeply into the liminality of these times - becoming (and indeed likely remaining), 'a shaken community'. He turns the experience of fragmentation and 'grand narrative' deconstruction on its head and invites us, instead to perceive, the fragmentation (and indeed to perceive *through* the fragmentation), as an indispensable element of the process of contemporary seeing:

> The Christian representation is always fragmented because it represents the difference between the event and the represented. If we take the example of the Eucharist or the Incarnation, Christianity represents what is not representable. Nevertheless, the representation is operative. The representation does not produce a quasi-objective image of reality. Rather, it is the human way of dealing with reality (2019).

Theology therefore, certainly has had its challenges during postmodernity and still there is much evidence of new and resilient life. Yet one of the human sciences which we might surmise has benefitted much from the empirical bonanza of the contemporary moment – the psychological - has had to work resolutely also with some of the reductionist tendencies of the all pervasive influence upon it of the, at times narrow, scientific worldview. The rich, layered and mythologically-laden language of Carl Jung and his successors, in the mid to late 20th Century, for example, is in vast contrast to some of the more recent, neuroscientific discourse of the 21st Century. The latter is replete with extraordinary detail about the almost atomical level of neurophysiological intricacy that is manifest, for example, in the human body and yet, in the absence of the former, somehow something fundamental about the 'mysterious, greater-than-whole over the sum of the parts' view of the human person, can become somewhat eclipsed.

A final observation worthy of note is the emergence of Pilgrimage Studies. It is perhaps possible to argue that *pilgrimage studies,* as a genre of academic study has been "begotten" by postmodernity. There is a distinct theme in much of the literature which underlines the need for and celebrates the achievement of the release of the study of pilgrimage from the 'narrow fields of religious studies or medieval studies' only (Nickleson et al, 2018). Furthermore, recent theorists from within the ranks of contemporary pilgrimage scholars, have been tackling what they perceive as the dominance of 'the anglophone, anthropological perspective within the sub-discipline' and have proactively sought to bring to the attention of the pilgrimage student and researcher alike, the complexity and multiplicity of experience, writing and reflection on pilgrimage increasingly available from other parts of the world (Albera & Eade 2015 & 2019; Reader, 2015). The genre's openness to and indeed relishing of the growing networks of multidisciplinary pilgrimage research, is akin to a postmodern 'watermark' - that

willingness to surrender claim to 'absolutist truth' by a particular knowledge discipline and instead offer shared and contesting perspectives alike on a common, cultural pattern.

Hence, the entire literature review from the three 'conversation partners' of this thesis is located in this fluid and complex historical moment of postmodernity, where the varying fortunes of theology, psychology and indeed the newly, emergent *pilgrimage studies*, continue to be profoundly challenged by that same context, a time when, arguably, nothing less than the sustainability of humanity and its common, planetary home are at stake. I opened this preamble on context citing Felski's urgings to be more humble about what is possible to achieve when undertaking the task of contextualisation. A further insight from her is, I believe, a useful last word in terms of reviewing this small selection of discourse and debate pertaining to contemporary pilgrimage:

> Time is not a tidy sequence of partitioned units, but a profusion of whirlpools and rapids, eddies and flows, in which objects, ideas, images, and texts from different moments swirl, tumble, and collide in ever-changing combinations and constellations. New actors jostle alongside those with thousand-year histories; inventions and innovations exist alongside the very traditions they excoriate; the "past is not surpassed but revisited, repeated, surrounded, protected, recombined, reinterpreted, and reshuffled" (2011, p. 578 and concluded with a citation from Bruno Latour (1993)[33].

3.1.2 Preliminary Notes 1: On Hermeneutics

The particular phenomenon under the spotlight of this research is the embodied experience of contemporary pilgrims and the influence of that experience on the overall meaning and impact of the pilgrimage on the pilgrim. Or to put it another way - how is the bodily challenge of contemporary pilgrimage on pilgrims to be interpreted, particularly theologically? Hermeneutics is the name given to the theory of interpretation and is the subject of this first set of preliminary notes. Hermeneutics concerns the relationship between two realms, says Jeanrond, in his illustration of the development and significance of theological hermeneutics,

[33] *We have never been modern* (1993) Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

the realms of a text or a work of art,[34] on one hand and the people who wish to understand it on the other (1994, p. 1). However, understanding, he argues, 'is not an automatic and unproblematic exercise', but is rather, 'circular and spiral in nature' and, 'demands our active participation in recreating text'. He cautions against the assumption that understanding and interpretation mean the same thing and proposes instead that interpretation be considered as an umbrella, with understanding as one dimension of it (Ibid, p.2).

In developing this point, Jeanrond refers often to the multi-dimensional aspects of the *hermeneutical circle*, (ibid, beginning on p.5), naming those dimensions as he goes. He is elaborating on the hermeneutics of text rather than works of art. I have represented his dimensions in this spiral including:

Illustration 3: The Hermeneutical Spiral

[34] , Jeanrond later documents how the whole Christian tradition came to be considered officially, as a second "text", given the post -Reformation development in Catholic theology of the 'two-source theory' (1994 p. 35).

The movement around the spiral includes paying attention to all the stages, for example, 'preparedness to perceive the part-whole relatedness'[35]. He strongly asserts that while theological thinking may have a different focus to other disciplines of human knowledge with its commitment to ultimate questions, which are 'trying to understand God's revelation in the universe', it needs the disciplines of the application of both general hermeneutics and its own interpretation theory so as 'to be able to proclaim in our human language' its core message in a world-wide conversation on all aspects of the human search for meaning (ibid, p.181).

Bernard Lonergan adds a critical new dimension to Jeanrond's view of the hermeneutical circle by stressing the need to shift from a view of theological hermeneutics that sees it as an individual scholar's act. His hermeneutical method, (illustrated afresh and comprehensively from a combined reading of several of Lonergan's texts, Ivo Coehlo, 2012), is similarly described to Jeanrond's as, 'a spiralling process of deepening interpretation'. Coehlo demonstrates the development of Lonergan's thought, and honours the contribution of his exposure to psychology and phenomenology in this development. He notes Lonergan's shift from understanding theological interpretation as an individual, scholastic habit and instead recognises how he shifted to the view that it is truly more of a communal achievement. Mindful of the steep challenge of the pluralist historicity of the moment, Lonergan suggests that what is required of theological hermeneutics is to consider it,

> …a framework for collaboration in creativity[36] and, more particularly, a normative pattern of related and repeated operations with ongoing and cumulative results, then I believe one will find ways to control the present uncontrollable pluralism of theologies, one will cease to work alien, alone, isolated, one will become aware of a common site with an edifice to be erected, not in accord with a static blueprint, but

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[35] This stage acknowledges that the text being inserted into the hermeneutical spiral is already a part of some larger whole or other; it is imperative to continuously bear this interconnection in mind – any textual part can only be fully understood in relation to the 'whole cloth' of which it is part.

[36] I acknowledge my own good fortune to being part of just such a collaboration as I developed this thesis. At numerous stages, my supervisor, other theologians in the department and elsewhere, feminist theologians in the department and elsewhere, gave me critical feedback, advice, suggestions and challenges. A paper co-authored and presented by my thesis supervisor and I is further evidence of this collaborative endeavour and an example of the 'normative pattern of related and repeated operations with cumulative results' which Lonergan sees as essential to the hermeneutical endeavour.

> under the leadership of an emergent probability that yields results proportionate to human diligence and intelligence (ibid*,* p.196).

Christian Theology, it could be said, has enjoyed a dominant place at the table of philosophical discussion on the meaning of human life, experience and personhood for many centuries, up to and through the early Enlightenment, so much so that, as Jeanrond reminds us, a 'generally held conviction is that only post-Enlightenment hermeneutics could be considered to offer 'critical' reflection, as it was only then 'free of theological concerns' (ibid, p. xi). Today, such discussion is multivocal, dizzyingly diverse and often cacophonous and Christian or Catholic theology's place at the table may not always be guaranteed and may even, on occasion, be contested. Conway acknowledges and then assesses the impact this change of receptivity *in the world* has had upon the Catholic theological community in particular (2006). Beginning with an important truism that ' …in some shape or form, division and debate is coterminous with the history of Christianity itself' (ibid, p. 110), he points to a pattern of 'hardening of certain ecclesio-religious positions' in the 21st Century. He calls for 'a possible *via media'* (becoming more 'both/and' than 'either/or', in terms of position; a willingness to listen to and learn from the position of the perceived other and so enter confidently the conversational affray with all its doubts, ambiguities and confusion), as a more authentic way of speaking a word into our postmodern cultural context (ibid, p 119-120). Conway's 'via media' has echoes of Coakley's idea of '*in via'*, (…'the task of theology is always in motion, *in via*, always undoing and redoing itself'), and she is as concerned as Conway that contemporary theologians not retreat into fixed anti-foundational, anti-contemporary philosophy and anti-secular) positions, believing that 'giving up now on the possibility of rational debate between denominations and religions, and especially across the secular-religious divide, would be a fatal move, particularly in light of the newly charged significance of religion in global politics' (2013, pp.17-18).

Indeed this pattern of movement to more polarised positions is observable in almost all other contemporary contexts also – politics, economics, environmental discourse, social media and from the spokespersons on all sides of the many so-called, 'culture wars'. Such a pattern in theological circles is understandable

then by way of response, in a time of what many perceive as one of a deep global shift in consciousness (Sacks, 2017, Wilbur, 2017, Delio, 2021). Pope Francis has put out a resolute call to theologians on all sides for a renewed sense of 'synodality' as a preferable (and ostensibly counter-cultural), approach to theological discussion as well as to pastoral discernment and planning (Ivereigh, 2021). The implications of this challenging cultural context for hermeneutics generally and theological hermeneutics in particular, for the kind of research carried out for this thesis, is a requirement to be as critically attentive as possible to the internal dynamism of the hermeneutical process. In psychological research and discourse about hermeneutics, a similar dynamism is also required. For example, in *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*, (IPA)[37], the hermeneutical circle is described as a process which,

> …encourages researchers to work with their data in a dynamic, iterative and non-linear manner, examining the whole in light of its parts, the parts in light of the whole, and the contexts in which the whole and parts are embedded and doing so from a stance of being open to shifting ways of thinking what the data might mean..... Moving between these parts and wholes is one way of gleaning meanings from the material which can themselves be examined and amplified' (Eatough & Smith, 2017, p.198).

A final word on hermeneutics worth including is the fact that both theology and psychology, alongside all other discourse, have become subject to what the philosopher Ricœur named, 'the hermeneutics of suspicion'. Rita Felski, summarises this hermeneutic succinctly when she describes it as, 'the name usually bestowed on [a] technique of reading texts against the grain and between the lines, of cataloguing their omissions and laying bare their contradictions, of rubbing in what they fail to know and cannot represent' (2011 p. 574). However, I was curious to discover that Ricœur became so frustrated with what he considered repeated misreading of this term, that he eventually abandoned the phrase. And perhaps his charge is epitomised here by Felski, in her use of the phrase 'rubbing in what they fail to know'. Alison Scott-Bauman seeks to redress some of the misconceptions and retrieve what she prefers to emphasise as, Ricœuer's 'archaeology of suspicion' (2009). She stresses that he

[37] I will return to IPA to elaborate further when I do a more detailed illustration in my Research Methodology Chapter

had not, in fact, set out to become gratuitously sceptical. On the contrary, she adds that he had challenged a quite dominant discourse thread in postmodernity, usefully summarised as, 'we believe we know more than others'. She works to restore his emphasis on the ethical demands of reading text and developing hermeneutical techniques based on the belief that, 'we can never know enough' (2009 p.5).

Each of these points of guidance on hermeneutics - the need to pay attention to each element of the spiral/circle of the hermeneutical whole; the ways we give due regard to what is theologically particular, and, thirdly, to be willing to square up all interpretations to the truth that, 'we can never know enough'– are three I would seek to uphold, as I proceed. In my second set of preliminary notes below, I cover and uncover the other critical base of this research study - the use of *experience* as source for primary data.

3.1.3 Preliminary Notes 2: Working with Experience – The Possibilities and Challenges

One of the key sources being inserted into the hermeneutical spiral of this research is the experience of pilgrims from the two aforementioned pilgrimage sites, the Camino de Santiago and Lough Derg[38]. I must therefore clarify the meaning I intend by my use of the term 'experience', as well as appraising what the literature says about some of the possibilities and problems of mining human experience as a source or resource for new knowledge.

At the level of dictionary explanation, *experience* is defined as a proficient level of skill/maturity or accomplishment at something; or a verb, meaning '*to encounter or undergo something*'; and some definitions include a qualifier by adding '*and how that encounter/undergoing makes you feel*'.[39] The idea of encountering or undergoing something is certainly included in what I mean by 'experience', given that I am interested precisely in how the pilgrims I interviewed encountered their pilgrimage journey as they undertook it. I am also interested in how they felt about their pilgrimage as they recall it happening and how they

[38] I understand in doing so that there is an immediate 'multiplier effect', in that all the pre-understandings and biases of my pilgrim participants are thereby entered also.

[39] Cambridge English University and Merriam-Webster online dictionaries

continue to feel about it, in the moment of offering that recollection to me in being interviewed about it. Therefore, an actual encounter/event, the feelings evoked by it, a person's own testimony of it, an acknowledgement of new feelings evoked in the retelling, yes these are all included in what I intend by experience. And yet, that is not all.

Noting how frequently the term 'experience' is invoked and yet how rarely it is explained or defined, Leidhold attempts to scrutinise the nature of experience and trace a history of it (2018). A Voegelin scholar, he notes that Voegelin himself, who offered an influential treatise on experience in, *Anamnesis: On the Theory of History and Politics* (2002/1966), never actually defined exactly what he meant by experience. Leidhold tackles this omission by distinguishing between content and structure. If we limit our definition of experience to content, then all we have is 'a compilation of various experiences'. 'If we want to define experience' Leidhold argues, 'we must focus on the structure instead'. This shift is crucial, he declares, because 'content explores *what* is experienced whereas structure focuses on *how* we get in touch with reality' (Leidhold, 2018).

In tracing the evolution of experience he begins with the Palaeolithic period through to the present day, and convincingly concludes that experience as a structure is not immutable but has rather changed over time. The three core components of this structure, he suggests are: the experiencing person, the something experienced and the reference between these two poles, which he names as *participation*. This participation, he elaborates, is multi-level and can include sensation, perception, imagination and symbolization. He notes, for example, that ideas of 'consciousness' and 'the unconscious' are elements of participation pertaining much more explicitly to the discussion of experience in the modern era and thereby offering confirmation of his hypothesis that the *structure* of experience changes over time (ibid, 2018).

Dermot Lane, affirmingly, welcomes the recovery of experience in Christian theology as one of the most significant developments of the twentieth century after what he describes as 'something of a magisterial ban against its use in theology' (2003/ 1981, p. 5). He describes well the origin and impact of this

'ban' which he believes contributed to a kind of apartheid between theory and practice, between grace and nature and, perhaps, most perniciously, he believes it was 'inconsistent with the witness of the theological tradition and Christian living' (ibid, p. 5). He proceeds to signal alarm however about the 'slipperiness of experience', because, he cautions, 'it can be made to mean just about anything one wishes it to mean'. He goes on to stress the need for precision in the use we make of it and the meaning we attach to it, if experience is to become a genuine source of theology (ibid, p.7).

In exploring the experience of pilgrims, I too wish to be precise in my meaning as well as cognisant of the multi-dimensional interpretation of experience rather than the much reduced often superficial manner, with which it can be referenced, even in some academic discourse. For example, the term 'experience' can often be used in a one-dimensional manner to mean a transient moment that induces a particular, but nonetheless fleeting feeling in a person, therefore an understanding of experience equated with sensation, as Leidhold summarised earlier or what Lane, above, calls 'subjective emotionalism' (ibid, p.8).

In agreement with Leidhold's layered meaning, Lane says that first and foremost experience involves a human subject and a reality but crucially some form of encounter between that subject and the priorly-existing reality. (This is similar to Leidhold's idea of *participation* above.) He stresses that no one experience can ever disclose the totality of reality. What Lane adds, and which was not emphasised sufficiently by Leidhold, I would suggest, is that our understanding of experience always relies on something larger than the individual. Lane calls that something larger, 'community':

> Our individual experience must be tried and tested against the corporate experiences of the community', …(composed he says of) 'the inherited wisdom of the community we live in and the tradition we were brought up in (ibid, p.10).

Lane, writing this somewhat before the full force of the erosion of homogenous community tradition began to be fully felt, (in Ireland, particularly), was not to see how complex a reference to 'the community inheritance/the tradition one was were reared in' might become so quickly. That said, his citing of Lonergan's 'two

worlds of experience' is helpful. Firstly, *the immediate*, perhaps most obviously embodied in the way a child experiences life; and secondly, *the mediated*, which is much more a feature of the way an adult experiences life and living. The movement from *immediate* to *mediated*, involves not only a change of self-consciousness, but an opening into the world of meaning. It is this level, Lonergan suggests, what he calls 'secondary depth-experience', and located within the world of meaning, that opens up the possibility of a further movement – towards talk of religious experience (ibid, p.12).

However, given what I said regarding the fragmented connection to inherited theological traditions, which is often the experience of many contemporary pilgrims, this final movement towards the realm of 'religious experience' is not, by any stretch, a given. In some instances, the mere suggestion of such an interpretation is not only undesired but rejected. In other instances, people sometimes simply conclude, 'such and such was quite a spiritual experience' and are content to leave it at that. However, the skill of a theological reflection method or indeed access to the kind of 'collaborative theological partnership', referenced by Lonergan, is rare in my experience and sometimes, entirely absent or simply unavailable to people. I cannot help but wonder if many contemporary pilgrims may occasionally miss out on potentially richer reflection and perhaps even lose out on long-term nourishment, which may come from being able to mine their experience for such theological import. This is a possible lacuna I would wish to address later in this thesis. Lane poses three questions designed to offer what he calls, 'criteria of appropriateness', to help judge whether some particular experience might be deemed to be a religious experience. He calls this first filter 'experience in the broad sense' (ibid, p.25).

- Does the experience include a sense of the power & presence of the transcendent?
- Does the experience effect a genuine desire for conversion?
- Does the experience concur with the religious experiences of others in the community?

I could imagine adopting these criteria to scan some of the experiences recounted by pilgrims on Lough Derg or along the Camino and there would be a number of responses in the affirmative and in many cases, to all three questions. However, when Lane comes to his second stage, moving from the broad sense of possible religious experience to a detailed schema, through which we could interrogate whether or not it truly qualifies or not (ibid p.26), lies a whole territory of assumptions and presuppositions, pretext and use of religious language that many contemporary pilgrims no longer traverse nor even share. The plausibility of adopting such a schema without question, I believe, has been much eroded by the complex mix of elements in the discourses of postmodernity and this represents a significant theological problem of our time. Nonetheless, Lane's movement to a somewhat more rigorous second-level interrogation of our experience, is an intuitively correct one. This is not because we need to ensure some kind of external hierarchy about what is "in" and what can be "dismissed", but rather because the archaeology of the interior life requires it, the nature of the human pursuit of questions of ultimate mystery, the *a priori* gift of incarnation, as the Christian tradition might describe it.

Hence, when I write about *the experience of pilgrims* for the remainder of this thesis, I intend something akin to Leidhold's idea of experience as a multi-layered structure and Lane's idea of experience as a three-part movement from primary experience to secondary depth experience and perhaps finally to religious experience, bearing in mind the sizeable caveat mentioned above in regard to this sadly, often elusive, final stage of working with experience. Experience of pilgrimage then, as well as being about paying attention to feeling, sensation, perception also includes the narrative of and about conscious participation in the 'organism-environment-field of pilgrimage', as the Turners called it (1978, p.22). As I recount the findings and develop the discussion on those findings, I will illustrate what the research reveals about the specific structure of pilgrims' experience of their 'pilgrimage reality', building on these generic components of Leidhold's model. He stresses that there is no getting away from the fact that experience 'is always subjective', even when we are aiming at 'objective' knowledge (2018). However, Coehlo's thought is an encouraging antidote to this potentially impossible task of working with

experience as a way of articulating something more academically 'objective'. He describes Lonergan's hermeneutical method, as 'the contemporary stage of the ascent to universal viewpoint (or 'horizon', as he calls it elsewhere, 2001 p.196). It is this enlarged understanding of 'experience', inclusive of this possibility of 'gradual ascent to universal viewpoint', that I have endeavoured to bring to this research. I thereby hope that 'experience' in all these senses which I have illustrated, might become a more dependable 'source' in the research effort of offering a new perspective on contemporary pilgrimage. I am mindful, all the while, that using experience as a data-resource, and therefore as theoretical ground, is not without its problems, as some of the debate below will now outline.

The invocation of experience, whilst central to the psychological premise, for much of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and, which as Lane recounted above, has made a welcome return into theological discourse, has also, it must be acknowledged, become a tiresome trope for some, and suspect for many, as a basis for saying anything significantly meaningful in either philosophy or theology today. For example, in the same article referenced earlier, Conway acknowledges that 'in the postmodern context all appeals to human experience are suspect' (ibid, p. 118), and advocates avoiding 'on one hand a 'totalising' of human experience', which, he continued, 'would now be anachronistic, and on the other, articulating Christian identity in such a way that it is closed and defensive leading people to separate from their culture and seek some kind of 'sectarian asylum' (ibid, p. 119).

Some decades earlier, in an arguably less contentious time, Edward Schillebeecks too had noted a temptation among some theologians to adopt 'an anti-modern, culture-inimical dogmatism or fundamentalism' and urged instead a theology that 'appreciates the gains' of our age, and its enduring 'dream of a more humane world' (Boeve, 2004 p.201). Furthermore, he stressed that in order to offer a 'meaningful and intelligible theological word', we must first 'have a real relationship with our ordinary, every-day experience with our fellow-humans in the world' (ibid p.202). Schillebeeckx's developed a theological hermeneutical model which incorporated experience as a critical ingredient in a

way that enables me to intertwine both these concepts of my research-interpretation and experience. In more recent years, Lieven Boeve has re-presented Schillebeeckx's model, with an addition of his own which, I suggest, addresses that problem in Lane's schemata above in terms of offering more plausibility in the contemporary context.

3.1.3.1 Schillebeeckx's Model of Experience and Boeve's Elaboration of it

This research project began by recording conversations with pilgrims about their recent pilgrimage experiences. These are pilgrims shaped and influenced by their twenty-first century context, with its formative legacies from the past and numerous interruptions from all manner of emergences in the present. Given the challenge named above of initiating and completing the movement of reflection on experience from 'ordinary' to the religious and the theological, I found Boeve's outline of Schillebeeckx's hermeneutical schema particularly helpful. Schillebeeckx stressed that 'theology was in need of a hermeneutics of experience before embarking on a system of hermeneutics of the Christian tradition' given that,

> …it is not by any means certain that every real aspect of human experience (pilgrimage experience) will be expressed in the self-understanding of Christian experience, means that… the task of the theologian is to bring about a correlation between what is humanly meaningful and what is meaningful in light of the Gospel (ibid, p.202 - bracket, my own).

The research process in this thesis followed this sequence of first engaging in a hermeneutics of contemporary pilgrimage experience before attempting a correlation with Christian tradition. Boeve offers an elaboration of Schillebeeckx's hermeneutical model, which he called 'recontextualisation'. At the turn of the new millennium, Boeve and others formed a research group, entitled, 'Theology in a Postmodern Context' (Hoskins, 2006), and it was from such deliberations that he and others suggest that recontextualization might be a way forward for any contemporary theology project dealing with the challenges of the contemporary era. The concept of recontextualization, he says, functions both descriptively and normatively. Firstly, as a *descriptive* category, the invitation is to analyse the contextual emergences, what he calls 'contextual

novelty', and how it puts pressure on historically conditioned expressions of faith and their theological understanding. Rather than be tempted to resist and fortify over and against such pressure, he stressed the need to engage critically with it and recognise how we too are co-constituted by it. The second movement, what he calls the *normative* category, involves taking on the critical challenges of our postmodern context, in which assumptions can no longer be made about shared paradigms. However he turns that into a challenge of working together with others to gain new insights by making the link between faith and context. As Boeve puts it, then we might 'come to a contemporary theological discourse which at the same time can claim theological validity and contextual plausibility' (ibid , p 31).

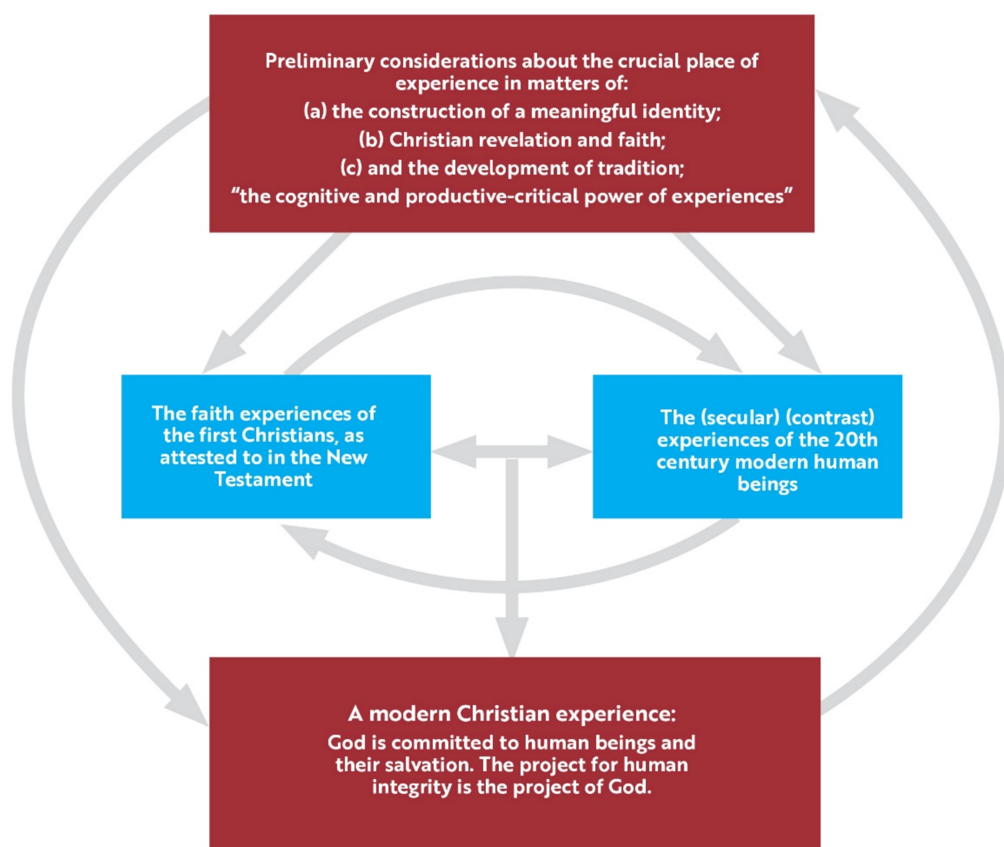

Illustration Hermeneutics and Experience: A Schematic Presentation (Boeve 2004, p. 223)

Illustration 4: Hermeneutics and Experience: A Schematic Presentation

In such a schema, the category of experience, Boeve contends, serves at least two purposes. Firstly he says,

> it makes it possible to describe in a new and dynamic way the very particularity of Christian faith, which is embedded *in an ongoing history of interpretation and experience*, of concrete liberating praxis, in which God, in the history of Israel and most particularly in Jesus Christ, has revealed God's self as a God of human beings. …Second, through the notion of the contrast-experience, the category of experience serves as an instrument to sustain or to found the universal truth and meaning claims of Christianity. Because Christian experience has an intrinsic link with what is at the core of all human experience, what is the experiential element in all human experience – the desire for human integrity – there are good rational grounds to be or to remain a Christian (2004, p. 224, italics my own).

One of my intentions in this thesis is to attempt to weave such a 'recontextualisation' process into my reflection on the practice of Christian pilgrimage in the contemporary era and hopefully to offer a 'plausible and valid' contribution to theological discourse on it. My analysis of pilgrims' experience is aided by schemata like that of Boeve above, rooted as it is in Schillebeeckx's helpful understanding of the inherent interpretive dynamic of experience and the possibility of deepening that primary experience by interposing it with insights from the collective wisdom (2004, p. 209). I have been immersing that analysis into the kind of multivalent hermeneutical circling spiral, as outlined by Jeanrond, Lonergan and also feminist theology, as I will note below. I perceive that pilgrims are and have been re-inhabiting this ancient traditional practice with fresh intent and new interpretation. In particular, I explore *embodiment as a fundamental hermeneutical principle*, now guided by Boeve, Godzieba, Beattie, Ross, Copeland and others. Indeed Godzieba includes in his '*five aspects of experience'* (built directly, as he credits, upon Walter Kasper's 'rubric of natural theology'), an observation that, 'experience becomes a way… into mystery', an openness that he insists is 'nothing less than the transcendental horizon of all human experience' (Boeve et al, 2015 p.108).

In summary then, posing the possibility that pilgrimage remains, 'a portal to the Sacred', a 'way into mystery', 'an opening towards the transcendental horizon', in the contemporary era, and in suggesting that the experience of the body and embodiment during pilgrimage, may be the shape, maybe even the substance of

that portal, means that such experience has primary significance in my research process, my findings and my discussion on those findings. Given, as Boeve said that, ‘Christian experience has an intrinsic link with what is at the core of all human experience’, the embodied experience of pilgrims, in all its humanness, is a core ingredient in my hermeneutical spiral. This concludes preliminary notes on my use of two foundational bases to this research, ‘interpretation’ and ‘experience’. The review of literature can turn now to the core subject of my research, in short, the pilgrim body. Let me outline how I intend to proceed.

In *Section One* below, I first offer a review of pilgrimage studies, paying particular attention to themes which pertain to the main areas of my study and in particular to the research questions concerning embodiment as well as a variety of interpretation of that experience. In *Sections Two and Three,* the trawl of literature turns more centrally to the main focus of exploration in this thesis on pilgrimage – the human body and embodiment. I seek to distil from the two remaining conversation partners, some of their key insights. In so doing, I offer a rotating prism of perspectives, including, the body as subject in theology, phenomenology and philosophy; the incarnated body; the feminist challenge to the incarnated body and finally, the psychological body. Throughout, as I did in the preamble on context above and in my preliminary notes, and where relevant, I make direct connections to my thesis arguments and to the gap in knowledge I have perceived and intend to address. I conclude the three sections of review with a summary of these main points of interconnection.

Section One: Pilgrim Bodies and Pilgrim Studies

3.2 A Review of Pilgrimage Studies Literature: An Introduction

Literature on pilgrimage could be said to be have two broad categories. Personal accounts of doing pilgrimage, or amalgams of personal stories from a number of pilgrims, is one such category. The authors in both cases often include some broader reflections on pilgrimage also. Historical versions of such accounts have been an invaluable source of additional data for pilgrimage historians as do the contemporary versions for scholars in our own time. The distinct change in recent decades is the sheer volume of personal literature becoming published in both traditional and new ways. The *blog* medium, for example, has become particularly popular among pilgrims on the Camino.[40] A number of Confraternities of St. James[41] also offer archives of personal accounts.[42] Irish Spirituality scholar, Bernadette Flanagan, followed Philip Sheldrake's call for spirituality studies to return to 'full-blooded, kataphatic practices' in her study of pilgrimage as a 'spirituality on the move' (2019 p.181). She observed patterns in the subject matter and narrative style of contemporary pilgrim accounts. In a recent virtual presentation of the same study[43] she offered a helpful thematic inventory of such literature from the mid-twentieth century to the present, which I have converted into tabulated form in Table 1 below. The shifting emphases of authors therein may in itself be a worthy cause of further investigation. This type of literature has been most helpful in confirming and contrasting data gathered in my own research process which is of course also based on reflections from personal

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[40] July 1st, 2021 Google search reveals a 59,900,000 count in response to 'a Camino Blogs' query, and is an indication of the veritable explosion in personal account literature. There are now websites dedicated to categorising the blogs of others, see https://www.caminoadventures.com/blog/best-camino-de-santiago-blogs/

[41] Confraternities is the name given to groups of lay people who gather regularly to pray and reflect in devotion to and in the pattern of particular saints. Although they are a less popular form of spiritual devotion today, many such groups remain active in the global Catholic Church. Confraternities of St James have a particularly strong affiliation with the Camino de Santiago.

[42] For example, the Confraternity of St James in London, England have a particularly rich archival account of personal stories, cited by the research work of Celia Gossen and referred to later in my own research also.

[43] Co-founder & Co-Director of the M Applied Spirituality with the Waterford Institute of Technology, staff offered a number of spirituality research seminars in recent months as part of the inauguration of their new research hub, *SpirSop*. The particular presentation which included this gathering of themes was offered virtually on Feb 19th, 2021.

experience. However, the review of literature below focuses much more on the second category of pilgrimage literature, that of pilgrimage scholarship.

Timeframe	Patterns of Emphases & Themes
1960-1990	Pilgrimage as Religious tourism – distinctive visits to particular sites
1990-2000	Pilgrimage as 'Spiritual Journey' – the inner world of the pilgrim their behavioural motivations in search of inspiration and awakening
2000-2010	Pilgrimage as Sacred Mobility – a way to gain deeper perspective on life; a distinct postmodern / Kafkaesque trend – the departure away from here; the emphasis almost more on what we are leaving behind
2010-2020	Pilgrimage as series of 'experiential moments' – deep encounters with oneself; a raft of autobiographies which are much less focused on rituals at a Sacred Centre and much more about how the experience is affecting one's life and consciousness

Table 1: An Inventory of themes in contemporary personal accounts of pilgrimage (Flanagan, 2021)

3.2.1 Pilgrimage Scholarship

As mentioned in the opening paragraph to this chapter, there remains some debate among scholars as to the universality of pilgrimage-making as an ancient human practice. A study of the patterns and rituals of nomadic groups, for example, whose lifestyle has endured from the ancient through to the post-modern and, in many parts of the world, would indicate a number of recognisable elements of pilgrimage-making intrinsic to them.[44] Moore-Quinn suggests simply that no matter where human beings are in the world, they *move*. And, because 'we are meaning-making creatures', she continues, 'humans imbue their movements with symbolic importance' (Nickerson et al, 2018, p.5). Post et al caution against a tendency, like perhaps that of Moore-Quinn and others, to 'interpret all sorts of movement ritual as pilgrimage'. They query the premise that 'the many quest patterns' discernible in popular culture, can all be categorised as pilgrimage, mostly because of all the assumed "as ifs" – 'as if there was already clarity about the profile and motives of pilgrims and the effects of pilgrimage'. Of course, they bely here some of their own defining hallmarks of

[44] For example, semi-nomadic ethnic groups such as Irish Travellers/Romany Gypsies/ the Masai of Kenya; and full-time nomads such as the Berber Tuaregs of the Sahara (Algeria, Mali, Libya and Niger) and Tibetan Yak Herders.

pilgrimage – clear pilgrim profile; distinct and discrete motives for taking on the pilgrimage and discernible effects on account of or subsequent to the completion of it (1998 pp. 26,25). Such contrasting positions between sharp, purposive definitions as against more inclusive, multi-perspectival descriptions of pilgrimage, hint at the contrariety of views and opinions regarding definitions, and the numerable possible and actual arguments among theorists over what does and does not constitute pilgrimage. I will return to the challenges of definition, shortly.

An area of consensus by contrast is, widespread acknowledgement of the remarkable contemporary rise of interest in pilgrimage-making and the concomitant rise in the academic study of it (Eade, 2020, Margry, 2008). In the years preceding the global pandemic of late 2019, pilgrimage-making had experienced a significant surge.[45] Documented annual estimates regarding numbers of pilgrims had varied anywhere between 250,000 000 and 400,000 000.[46] As well as globally renowned pilgrimages associated with each of the world's major religious traditions (and indeed shared holy sites for at least three of them, for example, Jerusalem as signature for Judaism, Christianity and Islam), there are any number of local pilgrimages to revered places and/or in honour of revered persons. There is also a growing group of non-religious or secular pilgrimages often catalysed in response to twentieth and twenty-first century

[45] At the time of writing (Summer 2021) most pilgrimage routes and sites across the worlds have had to close due to the Covid-19 global pandemic. In 2020 a 'socially-distanced' Hajj was permitted at Mecca. (New York Times, July 20th, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/22/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-hajj-mecca-pilgrims.html) In April 2021, the Indian government gave permission for the Hindu, *Kumbh Mela* Pilgrimage, (and other pilgrimages) to take place, considered subsequently as a leading contributor to a surge of Covid infection there in subsequent weeks and months. https://www.indiatoday.in/coronavirus-outbreak/story/1701-covid-19-cases-detected-at-haridwar-kumbh-mela-in-past-5-days-1791279-2021-04-15)

[46] For example, McIntosh et al indicate that, 'more that 330 million people embark on traditional major pilgrimages in Saudi Arabia, Iraq, India, Japan and Spain' and they furthermore cite an estimate that 'one third of all international travel includes some form of pilgrimage or spiritual travel'. (2018, ix))

global issues such as peace-making[47], the climate crisis[48] and other justice issues.[49] In addition, distinct elements of the pilgrimage process are evident in the phenomenon of grief /memorial tourism[50] (alternatively called thanatourism[51] or dark tourism). These became significantly more popular during the latter part of the twentieth century with visits, for example, to holocaust sites; and in the early 21st Century, catalysed by First World War centenary celebrations, when many 'pilgrimages' were made to the "killing fields of France" and other European countries, as well as to war memorials in different cities in all continents, particularly those which honour the war dead, by naming them individually. As Greenia points out wryly 'definitions of what constitutes 'pilgrimage'[52] as a human phenomenon may be deeply subjective and hotly contested - but no one wants to be left out' (2018 p.13).

Returning to Moore-Quinn, who makes the important point that the very word 'pilgrimage' in the English language, gives 'a precision to the nature of sacred travel' that other languages, like Dutch and German, have had more struggle with (Nickerson, 2018, p.5; and also acknowledged by Post et al, 1998, p.239). Reader agrees that while the etymology of the word pilgrimage is associated more

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[47] Mildred Lisette Norman named herself 'Peace Pilgrim' and traversed the United States repeatedly on foot from 1953 after she had made a vow to '*remain a wanderer for peace until humankind learned the ways of peace'*. She died during her seventh such pilgrimage in 1981. A second peace pilgrimage taken by two Indians from Kerala, Satish Kumar and his soul-mate Menon began in 1962 with a walk from their homes to the four global capitals of nuclear power, Moscow, Paris, London and Washington. On the instruction of two women whom they met on the Indian border they brought with them packets of 'peace tea' for each of the four presidents of these world powers asking that they would promise to drink a cup of peace tea before they would 'press the button' (i.e. use atomic weaponry). Their experiences are recounted in Kumar's book: *Path with no destination: The Long Walk of a Gentle Hero*, (2001 Eagle Books). Listen also to podcast of interview with Katish on their experiences by Will Geithin of *Conscious Frontiers*. https://consciousfrontiers.com/about/

[48] Numerous rallies are held in many countries on the climate crisis issue but in recent years an interfaith group have organised an annual pilgrimage in a bid to raise awareness on the level of crisis and offer a forum for young people of faith in particular. See http://climatepilgrimage.com

[49] For example, the *Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* walk around the central hub of the Plaza de Mayo at 4.00pm on Thursday afternoons, to continue pricking political consciences, raising awareness and as a ritual act of honour and remembrance of the '*desaparecidos*' - their adult children, "disappeared" by the military Argentinian governments of the 1970s and 1980s.

[50] See Brigitte Sion's '*Memorial Pilgrimage or Death Tourism: A Jewish Perspective*, in Liturgy Journal's Pilgrimage Edition Vol 32:3, 2017

[51] See A.V. Seaton's study of 1996 article, '*Guided by the Dark: From Thanatopsis to Thanatourism',* International Journal of Heritage Studies, Vol 2, Issue 4

[52] At my first *Sacred Journeys* Conference, (see Footnote 18 below), in 2018, I was intrigued at the earnestness with which a young New Zealand scholar, Giselle Bader, made for the inclusion of the Appalachian Trail as pilgrimage. ('*Thru'-hiking and Pilgrimage* – The Invention of Secular Pilgrimage Routes'). It was only the beginning! See '*Event Running and Pilgrimage*, 2019, Janice Poltrek-Donato, IJRTP Article 10, Vol 7, Issue 1 & '*Running: An Inclusive approach to the notion of pilgrimage*, 2016, Sonika Jain, IJRTP, Article 13, Vol. 4, Issue 6.

strongly with Christianity (linguistically linked to the French *pelinerage*, and the Latin, *pelegrinus* and *per ager*, the stranger, going through the fields), but he believes also that there are 'problems with imposing meanings and terms' across cultures, Christian meanings in particular, he frequently notes. In Japanese (Japan is his area of particular pilgrimage expertise), he informs us, there are more than a dozen terms associated with sacred travel, praying and worshipping at shrines (2015, pp. 20-21). Nor is anthropologist and pilgrim scholar, Jill Dubisch, as enamoured by the 'precision of pilgrimage in English' as Moore-Quinn, for she notes similar 'losses-in-translation' of many Greek words which have useful and distinctive nuances in relation to various aspects of worship and sacred travel, which, she believes, get lost when Greek pilgrimage scholarship is published in English (1995). Interestingly, both Reader and Dubisch make reference to their conscious decision to nonetheless continue to 'use the term pilgrimage', despite such losses of cultural nuances, because it is 'viable and valuable', particularly in how it allows for 'cross-cultural comparisons' (Reader, 2005, p.33), and because of the way it facilitates us to be 'struck by the similarities in the practice of journeys to sacred places, even among quite different traditions' (Dubisch, 1995, p.46). Interestingly, in my own native tongue, Irish, there are three (at least) words associated with pilgrimage[53] – *turas* (which refers to the specific prayer and movement rubric to be performed at a holy well or pilgrimage site); *tochar* (which, to my knowledge, is only currently used of the *Tóchar Phadraig*, a pilgrimage trail from Ballintubber Abbey in County Roscommon to the top of Croagh Patrick in County Mayo), and *oilithreacht* which is the more general Irish translation used as the equivalent for the English term, pilgrimage.

Beyond the intricacies of the etymology of pilgrimage and its use in contemporary discourse, another fundamental contest of note in reviewing pilgrimage literature, centres upon definition. What exactly is pilgrimage and what are the elements, in particular, that are embraced by the practice which makes it distinctive from other forms of ritualised movement and travel? Once I have offered a sense of the variety and the subtleties of nuance that some pilgrimage scholars have

[53] I had a short email exchange with Manchán Magan, author of the wonderfully informative, *Thirty-Two Words for field,* (2020, Gill Books, Dublin) a retrieved treasure of etymological sources and variety of precise uses for scores of common Irish words, and these are the three words for pilgrimage known also to him.

observed, I will offer a working definition of pilgrimage that I believe resonates with my research.

3.2.2 What is Pilgrimage?

A fair observation is made by LeSueur that 'until the middle of the last century pilgrimage would have typically been understood in relation to religious practice', whereas the diversity of practice now included under pilgrimage, as indicated above, has greatly multiplied in more recent decades (McIntosh et al, 2018, p.16). Prominent pilgrimage scholar, Ian McIntosh,[54] wonders if 'given the meteoric rise of pilgrimage-making, and the new scrutiny of some of the taken-for-granted parameters around which the study of pilgrimage has been ensconced' (and alluded to above), 'anyone can say, what pilgrimage, in its essence really is' (Ibid, 2018, p. ix). Not shirking the task, he and others have dedicated conversation and reflection to definitions of contemporary pilgrimage. He participated with others in a Symposium in 2017, at the aforementioned William & Mary Institute of Pilgrimage studies, entitled: *What is Pilgrimage?* The subsequent Introductory paper on the symposium (and published in the 'International journal for Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage),[55] opened by listing seven theories, a signal of the thicket of material available on definitions. Perhaps a useful segue into this thicket would be to list first those offered to the Symposium by these three panellists, all also established pilgrimage scholars. Edel Moore-Quinn, whose pithy definition of pilgrimage I referred to above, says again simply 'the human need to imbue movement and travel with symbolic importance'.[56]
Secondly, McIntosh suggests that 'Pilgrimage is a journey within a journey within a journey'. The first pilgrim journey - that quintessential 'setting out in search of universal truths', he continues, is embedded in a second journey -the level and

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[54]Ian McIntosh is the Convenor of the *Sacred Journeys* Conference, an annual gathering of pilgrimage scholars from around the world who share thoughts and theories arising from their research. A peer-reviewed journal of the annual proceedings is published before the subsequent conference. (See… Sacred Journeys website – under re-construction at the moment, May 2021, will add weblink later)
[55] This journal, itself a fine example of published inter-disciplinary discourse and research on pilgrimage, is housed in the Irish university, DCU (Dublin City University) and made available as one among a collection of journals published and archived by TU Arrow Collection of Journals. See https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ijrtp/
[56] Zach Beckstead adopts a similar line in his '*Liminality, Movement and pilgrimage'* and describes human cultural history as 'filled with the creation of symbolic places – sacred forests and rivers, churches, shrines and temples,…a striving for the distant and unknown, and a desire to be moved and to experience the vitality of life'. (2010, p. 386)

significance, (or not), of the presence of other pilgrims. Both these are further immersed in the movement towards the destination site/s. These sites are embedded in a socio-political-cultural context, and undergo constant change in relation to those environmental circumstances and therefore, he adds, can be said to be on their own journey. This third *journey of place* completes McIntosh's triptych of pilgrimage definition (Nickerson et al, p.3).

Finally, George Greenia, founder of the aforementioned *Institute for Pilgrimage Studies*, William & Mary University, offers a number of important contributions to this same deliberation on definition. Firstly, as a fellow panellist alongside McIntosh and Quinn, he expresses a degree of weariness, about what he describes as, 'the unmonitored, if beloved runaway metaphor of pilgrimage', and akin to Post et al, he wonders if, 'everyone is on a journey', then what is the distinctiveness of the pilgrimage journey (Nickerson, 2018, p.1-2). By way of offering a response to his own question, Greenia offers both a definition (quoted in full below), and in his longer contribution to the same journal issue, he names comprehensively what he calls the, 'six premises' and 'seven complementary aspects' of pilgrimage (2018 pp. 9-12). These include a number of important and insightful points based on decades of pilgrimage research scholarship and are highlighted in full in Tables 2 and 3 below. First, his overall definition:

> Pilgrimage may be viewed as a ritualised sequence of leave-taking from one's normal life and social network, then during the trip an immersion in an altered state of 'liminality' or threshold, living usually with a unique polity of strangers which forms its own society or communitas, Eventually there is a reincorporation as someone transformed and endowed with holy experience and gifts that enrich the imagined community that was left behind (Greenia, 2018 p.7 & also in Harmon, 2014, p.9).

Celebrating a physical location as a symbolic site beyond the human realm
Displacement from one's customary locale and daily routines
Undertaking ritualised behaviours, as well as discomforts and ordeals – these are welcomed as essential components of the quest
Being present at a site that has been deemed as significant for non-material reasons - simply being there is enriching, potentially transforming
Accepting the 'transactional' nature of the journey – the pilgrim's effort may result in a major payoff (cure/divine favour/enlightenment) or some other bountiful harvest
Even '*In advance*' pilgrims express a sense that their pilgrimage is capable of producing an enduring memory for later life

Table 2: Greenia's Six Premises of Pilgrimage

The essential and universal evidence of the human being's symbolizing tendency in relation to places, movement and travel; the layered embeddedness of the pilgrim journey and the multi-dimensional nature of pilgrimage in practice are captured, each in turn, by one or other of the panellists' definitions. Aspects of their definitions also resonate with some of my own research findings, which I will come to in later chapters and yet I would also wish to signal a small point of departure.

In Table 3 below Greenia numbers pilgrimage as 'a body-centred enterprise' as the sixth of his seven complementary aspects of pilgrimage (2018, pp.11-12). What's more, by way of lead-in to this point, he adds, almost apologetically that, 'it may be too obvious to mention this but…'. Whereas, on the contrary, in my deliberations on pilgrimage, I argue that perhaps its apparent obviousness means that we 'trip over' how the embodied experience of the pilgrim may in fact be that which facilitates anything else we can say about pilgrimage. I therefore seek to ponder this "apparent obviousness" and perhaps shift the level of priority given to the embodied nature of pilgrimage practice in our descriptions, definitions and interpreted meanings of what pilgrimage is, in our contemporary discourse. In fairness to Greenia, his by-line for pilgrimage as a 'body-centred enterprise' in which he describes it as, 'the physical gesture writ large and choreographed on a finite terrain that emulates the cosmos', indicates that he too is utterly cognisant of the potential 'ascent to the universal horizon' (to use again Lonergan's tilt towards religious experience) towards which the bodily rituals of pilgrimage may lead the contemporary pilgrim.

A belief in the transcendent -the something greater than oneself and one's community
Collective memory - pilgrim paths lead deep into ancient times when there was 'a more clear consensus in the collective'
An ability to resist time itself - pilgrims absent themselves from historical time and opt to live, temporarily, beyond time and its near-horizon perspectives.
Pilgrimage invites, facilitates and even requires a surrender of individualism - a loss of control; a letting-go of our off-trail identity and a welcome change of pace of ordinary life
Pilgrimage invites high-level performance as a human being; a spontaneous and authentic 'triggering of hospitable responses and acts of charity'
An inherently Body-Centred enterprise - 'the physical gesture writ large and choreographed on a finite terrain that emulates the cosmos'.
A sense of incompleteness and open-endedness -even on completion the experience of pilgrimage is never exhausted – a transcendence just out of reach or imperfectly glimpsed

Table 3: Greenia's Seven Complementary Aspects of Pilgrimage

Dr Dee Dyas, Director of the aforementioned *Centre for Pilgrimage Studies* at York University, has already initiated such a hierarchical shift in the significance given to aspects of the embodied experience on pilgrimage, in her account, summarising twenty-five years of research on pilgrimage and place (2020). Alongside an interest in the historicity of pilgrimage, she focuses on the essential contribution of our senses to the overall experience of being a pilgrim (for pilgrims both past and present), and indeed especially to our interpretation of its on-going meaning. Delving, in interdisciplinary fashion, from her first home in theology, into both psychology of place and the neuroscience of the senses, she underlines how 'touch' for example, 'is the sense that makes the world real to us' (2018). Speaking from the experience in England (and primarily within the Anglican Christian tradition), where, arguably, secularity has had a much longer, formative influence on religious practice than in Ireland (or indeed parts of Spain), Dyas has observed, over a long period how, what she calls 'the practice of mapping meaning onto place', has become 'massively revived' in recent decades. She believes that at least some of the reason for this is the mass disaffiliation from organised religion and its store of rite and ritual. In its absence, people have had to seek out other ways to ritualise primarily their experiences of death of loved ones, as well as other personal and community grief, angst and suffering

(2013). In addition to Dyas, a number of other pilgrimage scholars pay attention to the embodied experience of the pilgrim and I will address these momentarily. For now, let me return to the prickly thicket of definitions.

A final contribution to note from Dyas' work is her own attempt at definition. She first acknowledges how the 'wide-openness' of current pilgrimage research has been both helpful (has shaken up assumptions and asked new questions) and unhelpful ('when every journey from wine-tastings to making patchwork quilts can be daubed, 'a pilgrimage'' 2021 p. 12 and 2020). Unlike the definitions above, she explicitly names the essential nature of the spiritual dimension as *the* qualitatively different dimension that pilgrimage has over a simple visit to a sacred place. However, in her researches she noted the number of times a visitor may become 'ambushed by a spiritual experience', thus turning the 'simple visit' into something unexpected and gracious. It would seem that she also wishes to debunk the myth, communicated perhaps by the ubiquitous image of the rucksack-laden Camino trail-walker as the 'signature pilgrim' of our time, when she suggests the following definition:

> Pilgrimage experience is a state of openness to spiritual engagement, through place and journey, whether planned or spontaneous, limited neither by mode of transport nor distance travelled. This encapsulates those who travel with clear intent and those who might find themselves unexpectedly ambushed by, and responsive to, the power of place. (September, 2020)

Despite Dyas' apparent disassociation with the iconic status of trail pilgrimages like the Camino de Santiago de Compostela, Marion Bowman and Tilina Sepp draw a direct link between the way in which visits to Cathedrals in England are promoted and managed and the popularity of aspects of the Camino (2019). They note a number of what they call 'Camino-replication' parallels, with, for example, the inclusion of an accompanying pilgrim walking trail as part of the visit. They quote from the website of the *Pilgrims Way* [57] and its definition of pilgrimage as, 'a meaningful journey to a sacred place'. They note how the promotional material adds that such journeys provide 'the chance to "walk through" those issues that we have on our minds, whatever they might be' and

[57] https://www.pilgrimswaycanterbury.org/why-pilgrimage/

‘to reconnect with our cultural heritage and the natural world - as well as to refresh our faith or seek spiritual direction’ (ibid p.86). An insightful perspective overall, Bowman and Sepp include these examples as evidence of what they describe as, ‘the caminoisation, heritagisation of religion and spiritualisation of heritage’ (ibid p.86).

In the broader field of Pilgrimage Studies and Scholarship, their work along with scores of other articles and books, are indicators of what can only be described as the extraordinary catalyst which the upsurge in pilgrimage-making along the Camino de Santiago has become in terms of pilgrimage research studies, literature and replications[58]. ‘Within the contemporary history of European pilgrimage’ they suggest, ‘the Camino of Santiago de Compostela enjoys particular prominence and exerts distinct influence’ (ibid p. 75). It even has developed a sub-genre status within Pilgrimage studies ‘Camino studies’ (ibid, p.4), or ‘Jacobean Studies’, as it is referred to by others (Post et al, 1998 p.58).

3.2.3 Body and Embodiment in Pilgrimage Literature

Earlier I challenged what I perceived as Greenia’s remark about ‘the obviousness of pilgrimage as a body-centred enterprise’ and repeated my intention to review the priority given to its importance in contemporary pilgrimage with my thesis. This is not to say that ‘body’ has *no*t been the subject of much pilgrimage literature, for on the contrary, there are many such examples, a few of which I will reference specifically. In a later article, Greenia offered a most informative study of the medieval body on pilgrimage stressing how such pilgrims often ’bartered’ their bodily afflictions on pilgrimage to repay debts to God and/or outraged neighbours. He refers to the fact that there was a strong element of, not only penitential pilgrimage during this time, metered out by priests as a reparation process for sin, but that also during the same era there was a punishment system within civil authorities called ‘judicial pilgrimage’ (Greenia, 2019 p.45).

[58] Not all such replications have been well received, Mc Intosh notes that in his homeland of Australia all these replications, bar one, (*The Bundian Way*), completely negate and/or ignore the aboriginal country and history over which they tread in pursuit of their ‘Camino-replication’ trail. He views this as an unforgivable omission in the contemporary context. (‘Walking for Justice and Reconciliation’ Paper and Video presentation to Sacred Journeys Virtual Conference No. 8, July 2021)

He adds that such public penance was most often used as a 'weapon against citizens of substance, not against the poor' and was also used against prominent consecrated Religious at times (ibid p.46).

The contemporary pilgrim by contrast, and certainly on both pilgrimages in this study, voluntarily makes the decision to go on pilgrimage, and so their decision is more reminiscent of the early centuries of Christian pilgrimage when it was also a voluntary undertaking and described by Turner as, 'an act of supererogatory devotion' (1973 p. 198).

In an issue dedicated to *Pilgrim Bodies*, Sara Terreault pens the Introductory chapter, with the simple but clear declaration that 'the body is where pilgrimage happens' (2019). She describes pilgrimage as 'a cluster of performative practices of movement through time and across space, originating and substantiated in the lived flesh of pilgrim bodies-in-the-world' (ibid p. 1). She also includes phenomenology as a useful framework and briefly explores Christian doctrine of the body (ibid p.2). She too cites the theology of Incarnation and notes some of the fraught ambiguities historically and into the present (ibid p.3). Terreault acknowledges the deeply formative discourses from wider philosophy, including contemporary philosophy and she believes that 'both Christian and post-Christian culture are still overwhelmed by the glamourous pull of disembodying dualisms' (ibid.4). 'An attentive examination of pilgrimage' she cautions, 'will quickly put the lie to any tidy categorisations' she adds, including, as a section below will describe, between those of tourism/pilgrimage or spiritual/religious (ibid p. 5). Difficulties of definition notwithstanding it is clear to her that 'in the wide range of practices (under the umbrella of pilgrimage), there is discernible, a basic desire for transformative experience that transcends the quotidian, one that by its very transcendence might effect some kind of (religious? psychological? emotional?) consolidation of identity' (ibid p. 6; use of question marks in bracket, author's own). Through movement, she summaries later 'pilgrimage transforms space into self-transformative place' (ibid, p. 7). Hence there are some similarities in our theses, particularly on the embodied experience of pilgrims, however, many of the points I will later make are undergirded by primary research and analysis from contemporary pilgrims.

Philip Szporer took a different angle, making interesting points about the body in both pilgrimage and avant-garde dance, particularly through the lens of, performative movement practices. Although he had set out promisingly to place them in what was described as "fascinating relationship", I think he foreshortened the possibilities by not making stronger connections therein. However, he offers an insightful conclusion, one which builds on Terreault's idea of the kind of transformative possibilities that may emerge when the pilgrim places their pilgrim body in particular motions, in particular places, when he adds:

> 'The action of removing oneself from daily routine whether on the traditional pilgrimage route or by being placed in {dance and movement}- responds to people's urge to 'find themselves.' A relationship is forged between movement and memory, aspiration and ecstasy, for both traditional pilgrims and {dance} participants (2019 p.115).

John Eade took a contrasting and rather disturbing view of the body on pilgrimage when he took a fresh look at the changes in emphases of devotional practices introduced in the pilgrimage at Lourdes, the Marian Shrine in the South of France (2020). He sought to examine the lens (quite literally) through which this pilgrimage is viewed – through an exploration of images taken and reproduced by cinematic camera and more recently by smartphone cameras (ibid pp.23-28), as well as one section in which he explores a sculpted tableau of Our Lady 'located near one of the main gates to the sanctuary' (ibid p.33).   In a number of insightful turns on the concept and practice of "gazing", he examines the behaviour of leaders, pilgrims, helpers and even the impact of surveillance coming from increased security at entrances to the shrine. He notes with historical annotation how the 'sick body' became a more dominant focus of devotional practice in Lourdes which he notes, meant that "healthy bodies" were gazing at 'sick bodies' (ibid p.23), and he includes the practices in the healing baths as a further example (ibid pp.30-32). He worked as a helper in the baths for many decades so his view is not akin to some moralising tannoy on the side-lines, but rather, one could say, as an "insider" who is searchingly wondering about the moral questions that such practices raise for us.

Pilgrimage and other performative gestures of devotional practices are defining features of a number of other world religions also, including, for example, Asian religions, both in Hinduism, (particularly with Bhakti and Yogic traditions) and in the Hare Krishna traditions. Kerry Martin Skora, observes *mudrã* through a phenomenological lens, (*mudrã* is the practice of adopting postures/gestures with quite particular placements of limbs and hands), and he describes it as 'an embodied gesture that simultaneously gives rise to an awareness of Being, as well as being a reflection of Being, an imprint of it' (Holdredge & Pechilis, 2016 p.92). It struck me that his reflections about the practice of *mudrã* could equally be said about the performative gestures and activities of pilgrimage. For example he says 'the purpose of engaging the practice of *mudrã* as a bodily technique is to precipitate bodily transformation, a new way of being in the body, of comporting oneself in the body, thereby unsealing a dimension of reality that was previously hidden' (ibid, p.93) . He adds subsequently 'it (the *mudrã* practice), calls the practitioner back to the body at the pre-conceptual level of bodily felt-sense' (ibid p.97). One of the editors of this same volume to which Skora contributes, Barbara Holdredge, also explores embodiment in these Southern Asian religious traditions and at one point describes pilgrimage pithily and profoundly as 'bodily performances {in the service of} ritual negotiation of sacred space' (ibid, p.179).

3.2.4 Other Primary research on the pilgrim body

A small number of scholars have engaged in primary research on the embodied experience of pilgrims and they have adopted quite different methods and emphases. (See for example Harmon, 2014, Peelen, 2008). Brennan Harris, (another contributor to the *Pilgrim Bodies* Issue previously cited), looks at the physiology of walking pilgrimage (2019). He acknowledges at the outset that physical hardship or suffering can be a catalyst for spiritual renewal and how they have been important practically and theologically in the religions of both East and West (2019 p.85). He did empirical research with pilgrims on the Camino routes and investigated levels of cardiovascular, metabolic, musculoskeletal and environmental stresses, (such as light, hypo-/hyperthermia and altitude), noting a whole raft of interesting variations. He also examined overall fitness, (including commenting on what happens to the 'highly fit'),

injuries and the influence of preparation and training (ibid pp. 86-92). Although his emphasis and analysis was on the physiological, he stresses that the physiological along with the overall impact of the pilgrimage 'are symbiotic' and suggests that the pilgrimage challenges may be part of discovering or rediscovering the physical nature of the human body for pilgrims (ibid, p.93).

Sean Slavin's study is also based on Camino pilgrims and he too examines the physiological activity of walking but, by contrast his emphasis is on what he calls the 'spiritual aspects' of the practice. In so doing, he more successfully than Brennan Harris, I would suggest, manages to elucidate the symbiosis between the two. He conducted ethnographic field work over three pilgrimage seasons in the mid nineteen-nineties, as he walked the Camino himself. He touches upon some findings that resonate with my own, and hence some of these, I will return to later. He offers a rich reflection that continues a strong theme from other pilgrimage literature - how the embodied experience of pilgrims is part of a whole new way both of experiencing materiality and its constant openness to mystery, to the transcendent.

> 'The practice of walking allowed us to understand and explore a nexus between the body, self and the world. It thus demonstrates the many complex ways in which the body, situated within specific material circumstances, helps to produce experiences that are profoundly spiritual. These experiences are not opposed to the body, nor do they transcend the body. They respect its materiality and its presence, but also allude to a mystery beyond (2003, p. 16).

There is also evidence of a more cynical view among scholars concerning the embodied experience of pilgrims. Bouldrey defines the pilgrim as 'the most recognizable descendent of the ascetics' (as in Desert Fathers *et al*) and describes the pilgrim as the one 'who walks toward the shrine and away from the world' (2018, p.16) With humorous suggestions like 'the first thing a Camino pilgrim feels after blisters is, special' we soon discern his stance 'concerning the spectacular austerities' (the title of his piece, ibid, p.17). He interviews the owner of a 'refugio' (a type of basic hostel common to the pilgrim path), in Rabanal, who distinguishes between the genuine ascetic pilgrims and the "stunt pilgrims". The latter she has no time for, she declares and she does not mind telling them that they are 'roller-skating down the aisle of my Church', for she

considers the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route, ‘a holy place’. Despite his cynicism and scepticism, I noted Bouldrey’s comments regarding his personal re-entry after the completion of his first Camino. Taking a month to work through the transition, he describes various things he tried to do to help himself. It seemed as if he were trying to somehow ‘manage’ or ‘tidy away’ his own experience of transformation (2018, p.20). He finishes the piece with a powerful anecdote of his encounter with another pilgrim, *Jesus the Gypsy*, which further suggests he had certainly experienced significant, perspective-changing encounters, as part of his pilgrimage experience. As such his reflections are an example of how the pilgrim continues to try and integrate the experiences of the pilgrimage long after the physical completion of it (ibid pp.22-23).

Research and reflection on the embodied experience of pilgrims on Lough Derg is less numerous, but what has been published has, arguably, more depth and substance than in the some of the more ubiquitous, contemporary literature on the Camino. Given that the Turners, pilgrimage scholars of such world-renown and respect, included Lough Derg as an exemplar, (one of only four pilgrimages globally), has been a rich resource for my study (1978). Their section on Lough Derg, however, is largely more descriptive than interpretive in its particulars (ibid p.104-139). They include reflections and add further descriptions from numerous others. Importantly, the Turners cite the impact of the bodily ‘disciplines and privations’ of pilgrims on the development of ‘collective fraternity and equality’ among them, as further evidence for their signature theme - the emergence of *communitas* on pilgrimage. (See section below on the Turnerian paradigm for more on this theme.)

Anthropologist, Lawrence Taylor, has published a number of works on pilgrimage as part of his elucidations on what he calls ‘moral geography’, which he defines as ‘the ascription of moral values as well as symbolic meaning to landscapes in order to use them in projects of collective self-definition’ (Taylor & Hickey, 2015 p.96). He locates this tradition of imbuing landscape with this kind of collective self-definition project in the Hebraic tradition, what he calls ‘biblical, edge-ward journeys into wilderness’, describing them as ‘a particularly powerful form of movement, defining sacred self, passage and site’, whether that site be at an

established sacred centre or remotely located on a dangerous edge (ibid). The Irish, he repeats often in his works, had also a very well developed practice of journeying for sacred purposes to wild, remote edges, and also including there or on route, challenging penitential practices. Lough Derg, a particular source of fascination for Taylor, (and for many as he acknowledges), is a prime example of such powerful movement. He ably traces the unlikely ascendence of this remote edge in the 'moral geography of Europe' of the medieval era and indeed raises searching questions about the possibility of Lough Derg as a contemporary equivalent. Taylor's reflections are juxta-positioned with Hickey's journal-like entries of her more recent experience of doing the pilgrimage. A photographer-artist, the depth of reflection of their shared work, is further enhanced by the inclusion of some of Hickey's powerful and telling images[59] (ibid pp.124ff). The bodily suffering 'it's penitential character', Taylor perceptively continues, 'puts one in painful contact with oneself and one's country in a material, barefooted sense. This suffering helps to produce in concentrated form, that quintessential Irish combination of bleak loneliness and hilarious camaraderie. It allows, even demands, a contemplative space, in which to reflect on this in whatever way suggests itself' (ibid p.119).

My supervisor, Professor Conway, alerted me to another primary research study conducted by German scholar, Siegfried Meier, and published in the early nineteen-nineties. (1992) Indeed, as referenced in Chapter 2, Conway himself published an insightful and rich, theological reflection on the contemporary relevance and possible personal and collective meaning of the Lough Derg pilgrimage (2016) He notes how the pilgrimage rubric on the "station beds", (which will be explained further in the Chapter on Research Methodology), is 'very much a prayer of the body' (ibid p.43); how the barefooted-ness contributes to a 'letting go and a stripping away of the ego' (ibid, p.42) and that the fasting alerts us to the reality of hunger across the planet (ibid, p.44). He suggests the night vigil is about much more than being awake – it is about vigil in the sense of being 'vigilant, vigorous and lively' (ibid p.50). Finally, he adds that what may seem like 'mindless repetition of prayers can lead to more humble and respectful

[59] Another example of this combination of reflections and photographs, was published in 2019 by Veritas, interestingly, as a way to mark its own 50th anniversary as a publishing company, with words by Irish author and photographer, Deirdre Purcell and Liam Blake, respectively.

inner silence' (ibid p.50). Although not based on formal 'primary research', much of the data Conway draws upon is solidly rooted in experience - his annual commitment to joining the rota of staff working on the Island for the pilgrimage summer season and his regular personal practice of becoming pilgrim alone and on occasion through leading small groups of pilgrims. All these experiences give him somewhat of privileged access to the breadth and depth of what the pilgrimage can mean in the inner landscape of contemporary pilgrims to Lough Derg.

The most recent research on Lough Derg was undertaken by Irish emerging scholar and human geographer, Richard Scriven.[60] He describes his research intention as, 'building on recent trajectories in pilgrimage studies which are intervening in the spaces and experiences of the journey, by considering how the transformative dimension is manifested through embodied spatial practices on an individual scale' (2020 p.11). He considers Lough Derg as a place 'instilled with a pronounced, transformative potential through a focus on embodied performances and liminality' (ibid, p.2). In his researches he explores a combination of 'features such as - body and meaning, and performance and place' – and that '{these} meet in the enactments of the pilgrimage'…'Liminalities then emerge in these interactions' he continues, 'facilitating spiritual, more-than representational, and numinous experiences' (ibid, p.6). In an interesting perspective on the various disruptions and developments of the liminal as a social state, he recommends more exploration and articulation on the role of the liminal in the processional, embodied practices of pilgrimage of the Lough Derg Pilgrimage. The most particular thing worthy of deep exploration, he concludes is 'how pilgrimage facilitates transformative encounters'. (ibid p.12). Scriven's wondering about how embodiment experiences on pilgrimage are facilitative of the transformation process in instrumental ways is quite similar to my research questions here. It is my hope that my own focus on this area will further illuminate the embodied intricacies involved in this process which Scriven characterises as transformative.

[60] A draft of Richard's Chapter which he sent to me personally, was then ahead of publication. Therefore, please note, the page numbers cited will **not** correspond with the subsequent, published version.

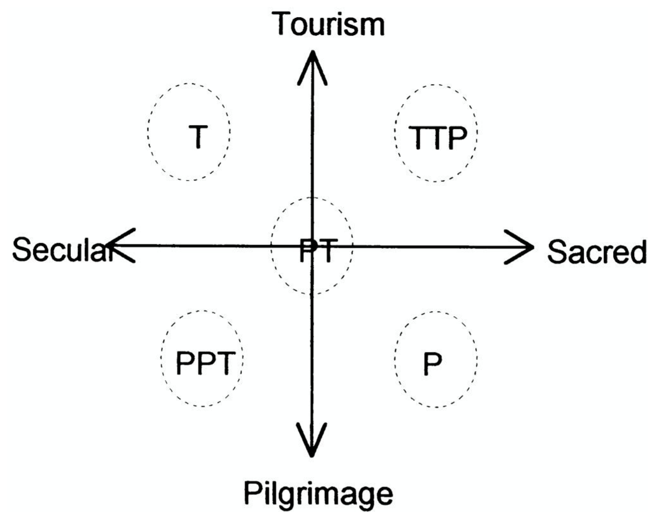
3.2.5 Pilgrim? Tourist? Traveller?

A source of some of the rancour in the early proliferation of pilgrimage studies literature lay in varying positions as to the nature of the line between the pilgrim and the tourist. Geographers, Collins-Kleiner and Kliot focused directly on this line in their study of one hundred Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land, over a twelve month period (2000). They researched a number of pertinent areas like preconceptions of the various holy sites before the visit and the contrast with the reality they found upon arrival and differences between Catholic and Protestant sensibilities and pilgrims perceptions about the political situation there. However, their main conclusion is that it is possible to delineate a spectrum, (indeed it is more accurately a graph), with sacred-secular and pilgrim-tourist forming the axes (See Illustration 3 below). They, and indeed many other pilgrimage scholars cite Cohen's spectrum of tourist experience (recreational/diversionary/experiential/experimental/existential), (2000, p. 58) adding their conclusion that it is becoming more difficult to discriminate between the pilgrim and the tourist in recent years. However, they can say, on foot of their research, that there is a difference in the direction taken. In so doing they play upon the signature, 'centre/periphery' theme in the work of the Turners, to which I will return shortly.

> The pilgrim's motives are to have an experience that will add meaning to their life. They leave their periphery in order to find a centre which will give them stronger belief and a new world…Pilgrim-tourists peregrinate towards their socio-culture centre while traveller-tourists move in the opposite direction (2000, p.65).

LeSueur recognises that many pilgrims may include elements of what are more characteristically 'tourist-like' in their larger journey, but, by contrast, he believes strongly in maintaining the distinctiveness in the pilgrimage journey as well as emphasising its spiritual dimension. He describes it thus:

> …a soulful manner of engaging a land, its people and its story as a spiritual exercise. Pilgrimage is distinct from tourism in its intention, its design, collective rituals and the principles of the day-to-day experience (McIntosh et al, 2018, p.17).



P-	Pious Pilgrim
PPT-	Pilgrim > Tourist
PT-	Pilgrim = Tourist
TTP-	Tourist > Pilgrim
T-	Secular Tourist

Illustration 5: Collins-Kleiner & Kliot Tourist-Pilgrim Graph

Using the example of a pilgrimage he has frequently led to the Sinai desert, in which pilgrims are hosted for a night outdoors, by the local Bedouin people. During this night the pilgrims build an altar with the strewn stones nearby, and share a sacred text, prayer and meal, and LeSueur observes that the desert is soon 'working on everyone'. Although safe, he continues, the pilgrims are not protected from the wild, 'they are at the edge of their comfort, their familiarity, at the edge of their survival, to be at the edge of God. This is the realm of pilgrimage', he concludes emphatically (Mc Intosh et al, 2018 p.19). He expands on this description of the core of pilgrimage, by identifying a number of other elements, which he suggests further confirm its distinctiveness (ibid, pp.21-24). Many of these find resonance with my own findings and I will refer to some of them again, subsequently.

The spark and fire of this rancour over, 'who is tourist and who pilgrim' has become more tame in recent discourse (Beckstead, 2010), and some scholars have dropped it entirely, as a subject worthy of note, preferring simply, to locate

their study of pilgrimage explicitly in the realm of religious tourism (Badone and Roseman, 2004, Mc Intosh et al, 2018, Olsen & Timothy, 2006; Olsen, 2013). William Cavanaugh, by almost singular and lively contrast, contemplates the identities of pilgrim, tourist and migrant, in the context of globalisation and capitalism and reads their reality, both possible and actual, from a position of (political) theological faith. He notes how nation-states (which, he argues, have replaced God and Church as a depository for peoples' faith, in late twentieth century, 'in the West'), facilitate easy movement of capital across borders and yet invest effort and much finance in controlling movement of people and labour across borders (2011). The migrant worker is welcome for his willingness to work for less pay and poorer conditions but is assiduously prevented from having the same rights as citizens of that same land. The tourist and 'pilgrim-tourist' (to borrow a point on the Collins-Kleiner & Kliot graph of earlier citation), are also welcome for their temporary visit and their monetary contributions. Cavanaugh stresses that he uses the three terms as 'types' and acknowledges that in real peoples' lives, the tourist/pilgrim line can, of course, be blurred at times. He adds, as do historians of pilgrimage generally, that medieval pilgrimage is in fact the precursor to what we now understand as the industry of modern tourism (ibid, p.81). (See also Reader, 2005 p.287, Note:89.) Cavanaugh's deeper call to the contemporary Christian, however, in relation to these identities is much more fiercely challenging and discombobulating than arguing over possible blurred lines between tourist and pilgrim. For he suggests that the potentialities in the Christian understanding of pilgrim makes *pilgrim* one of the most appropriate and authentic identities for the Christian person of faith to inhabit in today's context. 'To embrace the pilgrim identity today' he argues, 'is first of all to embrace a certain kind of mobility in the context of globalisation'. ...'The Church', he adds (and referring primarily to the Catholic Church), 'is unmoored', finds itself, he continues 'no longer at the centre but at the periphery of culture'. ...'Christendom', Cavanaugh declares, (in an echo of Koci's thesis in 'After Christianity'), 'is long gone' and along with it the 'Constantinian power and privileges' (ibid, p 82). For all its searing challenge however, Cavanaugh is largely speaking to and about the pilgrim identity as a galvanising metaphor for what he believes is the optimal socio-political positioning of the Christian believer in our global context, rather than offering an assessment of the impact of actual

pilgrimage-making upon the contemporary pilgrim. The resonance of his use of the pilgrim metaphor may well be worth a return, however. In addition his use of the 'centre-periphery' axis indicates again the influence of the Turners main thesis in all manner of reference to contemporary pilgrimage, rippling out into political theology in this case, and indeed into moral/human geography as we noted from Taylor and Scriven above and Collins-Kleiner and Kliot before that. So let us now examine this influential paradigm in more detail.

3.2.6 The 'Turnerian Paradigm' and its contests

Victor and Edith Turner were anthropologists whose field work in Africa was much influenced by the perspective of French ethnographer, Arnold Van Gennep, in his *Rites of Passage*, (1908; 1960). They began to see correlations between the rituals of tribal cultures they had studied and the pilgrimage tradition within their own religious faith, Catholicism. *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: An anthropological perspective* (1978), soon became, and for many indeed continues to be, a signature text in pilgrimage scholarship. Alongside a couple of related articles credited to Victor Turner, they have continued to sound somewhat of a discordant 'rattle and hum' in that same discourse. In part, the discord queries the level of influence that theories about traditional religious pilgrimage, have had or should continue to have upon our understanding of global studies of pilgrimage in contemporary discourse. And, in part there is a genuinely, critical examination of the detail of the Turners' theory and its formative influence on interpretations of pilgrimage since then. Before speaking to these varying positions and given its provenance, let me contextualise what I have described above as the 'emblematic core' in a summary of the Turners' contribution to pilgrimage studies and afterwards its main contests.

The Turners' treatise on pilgrimage, I believe, after exposure to a significant variety of pilgrimage studies literature, remains, as yet, unparalleled. In her Preface to the 1978 edition, Editor Turner likens the pilgrim to one 'embarking on an adventure,… like a spiritual work of archaeology, she is delving in the ancient past for the renewal of the original experience,…not a fusty, dead past, {but} a journey to an actual place, where pilgrims touch the sacred object and then touch themselves'. This, she continues, is the 'archaeology of experience, the

anthropology of actual effectiveness and of the body' (1978, p. xv). She cites Charles Laughlin's conviction that 'the full impact of the religious material of pilgrimage cannot be understood without some kind of plunge into the experience of it' (ibid, p. xix). Such conclusions, I believe, capture something of the quality of the Turners' observations as I read them. They are a kind of contemplative seeing from within, from the place of stepping into the pilgrim shoes, their world and worldview, and yet all the while documenting what was felt, observed and witnessed with an anthropologist's eye. Deploying an authoritative play on Mircea Eliade's signature idea of the *axis mundi, the (absolute) Centre*, in his various studies on the nature of religion, (1961, p. 21) the Turners emphasise an alternate pattern in pilgrimage-making of journeying to the periphery and finding the Centre 'out there' (1973). Their discourse breakthrough grew out of the way they began to make connections between what they had witnessed and observed in Christian pilgrimage with some of the structural components of ancient practices which they had previously studied in tribal cultures. As mentioned above they adopted and adapted the *separation-liminality and re-incorporation* triad of tribal initiation ritual. They were particularly struck by the way, 'communitas', - that 'commonness of feeling', as they defined it at first – which, they perceived spontaneously grows and becomes sustained among pilgrims (1978 p.13). It was to become perhaps the most contested conclusion from their research, so it requires some attention here. The sense of 'a utopian kind of harmony', which some concluded the Turners were insinuating here, has been a particular bone of contention. For their part, in fact the Turners were quite precise in their use of the term communitas and even introduced qualifiers, such as 'normative/ideological and existential to elaborate on particular types of communitas, which they believed they had observed arising among pilgrims. *Normative* communitas, they say, describes the way in which pilgrims 'mobilize and organise resources to keep one another alive and thriving' on the pilgrim journey and 'constitutes the characteristic social bond among pilgrims and between those who offer them help and hospitality' along the way(1973 p.194). They were clear such *communitas* had a temporary nature. However, 'the Turnerian paradigm', as it came to be called, was soon to be challenged as 'deterministic' and insufficiently heterogeneous. Such conclusions came from one of the critiques of the Turners' treatise, which has had more

‘press coverage’, as it were, certainly within pilgrimage scholarship, that of Eade and Sallnow, in their *Contesting the Sacred: An Anthology of Christian Pilgrimage*, (1991) published about a decade or so later. They challenged the idea of pilgrimage as a universalism, particularly ‘a universalism of discourse’, and they argue that the only characteristic universal to pilgrimage is ‘the capacity of a cult to entertain and respond to a plurality’ (ibid p.15). ‘There is no such thing as ‘pilgrimage’, they argue, only ‘pilgrimages’’ (ibid p. 3). In fact the Turners agree and they stress how each ‘pilgrimage has its own entelechy, its own immanent force controlling and directing development’ (Turners, 1978, p.25). Eade and Sallnow also challenge what they perceive as the Turners’ insistence on ‘harmonious communitas’ (1991 p.5). Instead, they contend that most pilgrimages, are, on the contrary, contested sacred spaces in some shape or form, and that what is notable is not that pilgrimage ‘removes the sting of divisiveness’ (Turner, 1973, p. 221), but rather the omnipresence of ‘conflicting perceptions and doctrinal schisms’ (Eade & Sallnow p. 13, p. 14). Post et al, argue that Eade and Sallnow were being provocative in a typical ‘postmodernist’ way, dismissing all prevailing paradigms’. They also wonder how truly “new” their agenda is, in this edited volume and they question whether they have managed to distance themselves from the Turners paradigm as much as they would like to think (1998, p. 54-55). It is worth noting that Post et al themselves declare the Turners’ work as ‘too rigid’ or ‘one-dimensional’ (1998, p.56 and p.64 respectively). Their take is similar to Coleman’s view, who, although he appreciates the new directions that pilgrimage scholarship was to take on foot of this ‘turn on the Turners’, and in a line of argument quite similar to Post et al above, he suggests that, not only might there be less difference between Eade and Sallnow’s ideas of pilgrimage as, contestation of sacred space (and contested discourse), and what the Turners offer with *communitas*, (and he outlines several concrete examples), but, Coleman concludes rather witheringly:

> In my terms, contestation can be seen as parasitic on the communitas paradigm, reinterpreting its analytical and ethnographic significance while also, ironically, keeping the shape and salience of its approach’ (2014, pp.285-286 and more extensively throughout 2002).

Despite this rather acerbic critique from Coleman, he began to collaborate with one of the authors, John Eade, soon after to good effect, and on a number of occasions, in their continued, and it must be stressed, genuine efforts, to reframe pilgrimage for the contemporary era (2004, 2018, 2020). With Sallnow in the aforementioned text (1991), Eade had challenged what they perceived as the Turners much too narrow focus on the place-centred element of pilgrimages, the destinations, the shrines etc. Instead, they suggested that pilgrimage can be better understood by observing it as various combinations of 'people places and texts'. In the 2004 collaboration with Coleman, he added 'movement' as a fourth essential ingredient to their elemental combination of peregrination, in a bid to widen the analytic lens still further. Their addition of this fourth ingredient has particular relevance for my own research.

An arguably more authentically critical analysis of the Turners' insights about pilgrimage was offered by Karen Pechilis, in her '*To Pilgrimage it'*, a work, regrettably much less widely cited by other scholars than the above. She had described pilgrimage as 'a negotiation between competing interests', a number of years previously (1992 p.71). She opens the piece sharing the excitement of the seminal direction the Turners theory introduced to pilgrimage scholarship, noting that up to then almost all of it had been, 'tradition specific' (ibid p.59). She first welcomes Victor Turner's earlier essay (1973), which she describes as a helpful attempt to account for the processes of pilgrimage as a type of ritual symbolic activity. She had hoped the direction he was taking might be useful in setting some ground rules for subsequent academic study of pilgrimage (1992 p.59). She was disappointed that such a hoped for foundation, in her estimation, did not materialise in the Turners' later schema. However, it must be acknowledged that scores of pilgrimage scholars use the Turners' pilgrimage paradigm, particularly that of the 'liminoid phenomenon' (Turners, 1978 pp.1-39) and the *separation-communitas-reincorporation* triad and indeed do so liberally, as the foundation to their interpretation of their own contributions to pilgrimage research (Hill, 2004, Greenia, 2018, Kaell, 2016, Warfield, 2013). Pechilis goes on to highlight what she called the need to, 'identify the cluster of characteristics that are constitutive of pilgrimage and to construct a theory that connects them in an explanatory fashion' (1992 p.62). Perhaps, it was how the Turners distinguished between the

positives of pilgrimage to 'a centre out there' as opposed to their view of the 'factionalism' of journeying to revered local sites that most worked on Pechilis. She wondered if their suggestion was that the importance of pilgrimage resided only in the absence of conflict, a rather unjust reductionism of their in-depth accounts on the phenomenon of Christian pilgrimage, I would suggest (ibid, p. 65). Continuing her critique of the Turners' schema, Pechilis elaborates insightfully however, on several other themes intrinsic to pilgrimage experience, including, for example, the power of pilgrimage stories (ibid, pp.65-71) and the fundamental role of 'home' in the 'round trip', what she called the 'bidirectionality' of the pilgrimage journey (ibid. p.66). In the very fine study of embodiment in South Asian pilgrimage and religion, referred to above and co-edited with Barbara Holdredge, Pechilis and their group of authors had an explicit hope of restoring some parity of theory to non-Western, Anglophone perspectives (2016). The diversity of this more recent work suggests that Pechilis too has long since given up on the idea of 'constructing a (single) theory' that she seemed to have found wanting in the Turner's study.

Critiques and their validities apart, many of the layered themes in what became known as, 'the Turnerian paradigm', continue to offer a sufficiently plausible and helpful treatise within which to test at least some of the findings from my research. In addition *communitas*, as a term to describe the distinctiveness of the mode of engagement between people who find themselves together in a liminal situation, is one I have had a long prior association with, and that association may be instructive in regards to how I interpret it. I was first introduced to the concept in 1989 when our then theology tutor, Eamonn Bredin, used it to describe the kind of relatedness to one another Jesus had invited people to live, should they agree to become his disciples. (Bredin had developed this idea significantly in his previous book, *Disturbing the Peace*, 1985). He acknowledges communitas was an unusual word, but believed it was a necessary corrective to the insistence with which it is often assumed that Jesus was focused on 'creating community'. Community, Bredin distinguishes, is a structure/system created in which people live together with some common purpose. Communitas, by contrast was about 'something far more important, people living *for* each other' (1991 edition, p.139).

In his liminality of chosen position - a Rabbi wandering the peripheries- in the prevailing religiously-segmented social structure of the time, and with his 'liminal actions,' along with his 'threshold stories', Bredin continues, 'Jesus was the incarnation of the Kingdom', the 'basileia'/the reign of God, of which he so regularly spoke, and into which he invited all disciples (ibid p.143). Hence, I never held a view of communitas as some kind of 'harmonious utopia', but rather as a way to describe the kind of solidarity, the social ethic that willingness to step fully into this kind of liminality seems to engender among people. In addition, Bredin was clear that stepping in, would, more likely, draw *on* conflict, rather than remove the sting of it, for it will involve disciples, 'setting their faces against the values of the systems within which they live' (ibid p.147). Given the Turners' precision with their three types of communitas - *Normative* as distinguishable from *ideological* communitas (which they describe as the more utopian version) and then *existential* communitas, (1978 p.194) it is clear to me that this latter form, *existential* communitas, is perhaps a more apt qualifier for the quality of communitas of Jesus' disciples, as described by Bredin here.

Despite these challenges to the Turners' concept of communitas, which Sanchez y Sanchez and Hesp also welcome, for the way it opened up the genre of pilgrimage scholarship, they nonetheless agree that it is challenging to escape the influence of communitas because, they confess 'this communal experience is such a constitutive part of the (Camino) trail' (2016 p.2). I will pick up this idea of 'communitas' again in later discussion on my own findings regarding the experience of participant pilgrims in this research. In addition, two related themes from amongst the Turners' observations, also find resonance with my research – the phenomenon of how one's 'starting-off identity' grows into an unfolding 'pilgrim identity' and, secondly, the impact of performing rituals in sacred places.

3.2.7 The Religious Dimension of Pilgrimage: Some observations about the discussion

Performing rituals in sacred places 'imitating exemplary acts of a god' or 'simply recounting the adventures of mythical heroes' are all ways in which human beings {from archaic societies}, 'detach themselves from the profane and

magically enter the Great time, the sacred time'. So concluded world renowned student of religion, Mircea Eliade, referenced earlier (1967 p.23). The practice of deeming particular places as having a 'sacred' quality is certainly an archaic one. In the Judaic-Christian lineage, as we noted in previous Chapters, the practice of leaving the familiar to follow God's call, as Abraham and Sarah did, to 'go forth from the land of their kinsfolk to a land that God would show them' with, at first, little more than a promise that they would be blessed, (Gen 12:1-3), is at least as old as the early, (and at first exclusively oral), retellings of this Genesis story. The best educated guess as to when the oral account was first written is *circa* 1450BC, which simultaneously thereby records the first documented account of a Hebraic, pilgrim journey. Beyond archaic societies, through the medieval period and the various modernities of the Enlightenment and up to the present day, all three elements of what one might call the Abrahamic prototype - the draw towards particular places, often including a testing out for oneself as to the credibility of the myths and stories associated with that place; a response to a deep, (often internal) call, and an adventurous spirit have each remained as extraordinarily enduring elements of pilgrimage-making and sacred travel generally. In the Catholic tradition, as we noted in Chapter 2, a penitential element (and sometimes involuntarily imposed), became a further significant component, and was notable in historical phases of both pilgrimages in this study and indeed remains an identifiable feature in the Lough Derg pilgrimage to the present day. However, for now, I simply want to note an observation about how the religious dimension of pilgrimage is discussed in pilgrimage literature generally.

There is a distinct difference, it seems to me, between the manner in which the religious dimension of pilgrimage is discussed in historical accounts of pilgrimage by comparison with contemporary pilgrimage. In the former, authors seem to be more confident and certainly less diffident about naming and recounting the various facets of the religious elements of the pilgrimages, in whatever historical period they are researching (Nugent, 2020, Bradshaw & McGowan, 2018, Cunningham, 2018, Webb, 2002). In literature on contemporary pilgrimage, by contrast, there seems to be more reticence, less agreement and certainly more discord about the nature of the connectedness between religion and pilgrimage,

although most acknowledge the original symbiosis. Some of this difference, Post et al believe, can be explained by the significantly different way in which contemporary culture is explored and interpreted; whereas historical research may have more often depended, in part, upon official church history sources, and their general framework. This is an important insight, I believe (1998 p.6-7).

In terms of their own research commitment, Post et al are explicitly and unapologetically focused on pilgrimage as a ritual practice within Christian religions and therefore directly on the religious dimension of pilgrimage, but, as mentioned earlier, they are also committed to multidisciplinary research so as to deepen their knowledge and understanding about that dimension. Although they see the value of Morinis' suggestion (1992) that more attention be paid to the motivations of individual pilgrims than to pilgrimage sites and shrines, his exclusive focus on, 'the journey', in their estimation, completely 'misses the mark' of Christian pilgrimage, in particular (Post et al, 1998 p.55). They also express regret that studies of pilgrimage had become more scarce among theological and religious studies in recent decades (ibid p. 59). I was curious particularly about their demarcation between the psychological and the religious. For example, in a Case Study analysis of Camino Pilgrim 'Mrs. B' (ibid, p 209 ff), the researchers note how their limited findings raised the need for theoretical frameworks to help reduce 'arbitrariness'. They begin by naming relevant psychological theories, like Erikson's human development theory. It was their second and third examples, which piqued my interest – they cite how 'experiences of contrast, especially those triggered by nature can activate (religious) frames of interpretation; and secondly that, 'taking on the role of pilgrim can give rise to spiritual experiences' and they immediately name a psychologist whose social-theory may be relevant (ibid p.219). I am slightly at a loss to understand that although they include qualifiers like 'religious' and 'spiritual' they did not deem these as of sufficiently religious or theological interest to themselves. Earlier, the researchers underline the importance they give to sites of pilgrimage and devote considerable attention to discussion on credible inventories of pilgrimage sites (ibid pp 63-88). Citing one inventory with which they are associated, they define pilgrimage as, 'a religious act for the purpose of venerating a person or object' (ibid p. 85) and pilgrimage sites as needing to meet certain characteristics including, 'religious

feeling as the main inspiration (but, not the sole) for the visitor to that place' (ibid p. 83). Although clarity and articulation of clear limits and boundaries of pilgrimage and pilgrimage places are helpful distinguishers, I will argue that there is also a risk of excluding other aspects of the contemporary pilgrim experience, as 'not religious in nature', simply because they do not fit easily in our existing, and often narrow categories of religiosity (as if that were synonymous with 'religious) or because attention is more focused on the pilgrim's apparent lack of 'proper affiliation' with a particular Christian or Catholic institution. In a similar example, Gardner et al note that in 2005, Archbishop of Santiago, Juilán Barrio Barrio said that 'many pilgrims use the infrastructure of the Camino pilgrimage to create their own private spiritual experience, which has nothing to do with Christianity' (2016 p.69). In the same breath he states how the Church needs to take advantage of the presence of so many people on Camino to begin a new campaign of evangelisation in Spain and Europe.

Roszak, by contrast, has made efforts in a much more positive direction. For example, he says 'the theology of pilgrimage on the value of space, the physical presence in the place of apparitions, for example, is the recovery of relationship, not a magical entry into the 'tunnel of change'. The work of grace is always incarnational, embodied in forms, focused on recovering the fullness of sonship by man'. (2019 p. 35). Although the use of language may not be as inclusive in translation, ideas such as 'recovery of relationship', 'embodiment as incarnation' go some way towards stretching what needs now to be considered religious in nature, by way of pilgrimage experience (2019). Roszak also explores the understanding of the sacred that emerges from contemporary pilgrim's experience and argues that there is 'an urgent need…in emerging post-secular religiosity… to see the world in the sacred manner, i.e. *sub ratione Dei*. The point is not to 'escape' from the world but to experience it deeper, abandoning superficial life and turning to the profound understanding of it' (ibid p. 39).

The beginnings of such a theology of pilgrimage positively articulates a new perspective on aspects of the religious theology of sacred place and indeed the experience of pilgrimage which may be more fitting with and inclusive of the experience of contemporary pilgrims. I understand that pilgrims themselves also

add to these possible exclusions by emphasising that they are 'spiritual rather than religious'. Roszak acknowledges, as I do here, that there is 'an ambiguous nature' to contemporary pilgrimage which cannot be easily reduced to support 'post-secular theses or 'the return of interest in religion'. Given, as Roszak says, that 'the diagnosis is not self-evident', he rightly advocates for further research which is inclusive of a theological dimension which he notes is frequently absent (ibid p. 38). This is an area that I will return to in Chapter 6.

In an important and searingly incisive contribution to this discussion on the religious dimension across contemporary pilgrimage studies literature, Peter Margry edits a volume in which all the contributing researchers 'would like to make a new contribution to the pilgrimage debate'. They focus on a number of contemporary visits to specific locations to determine better whether they are religiously motivated and thereby decide whether or not 'it is in fact appropriate to refer to these visits as pilgrimages' (2008 p. 13). In the opening Chapter, Margry acknowledges that although it can often be difficult to distinguish between the nature of such memorial visits *and* pilgrimage, with candour and considerable clarity, he declares that 'it is contra productive to use the concept of pilgrimage as a combination term for both secular and religious phenomena, thereby turning it into much too broad a concept'. He goes even further by adding that "secular pilgrimages", 'a term bandied about so much today' that it is 'oxymoronic' (ibid p.14). He describes pilgrimage as 'a complex of behaviours and rituals in the domain of the sacred and the transcendent, a global phenomenon, in which religion and *a fortiori* religious people often manifest themselves in the most powerful, collective and performative way'. He acknowledges that apart from the fascination of researchers (suitably charged!), the more important factor in the surge of academic interest in pilgrimage is, 'the great socio-cultural and politico-strategic significance of this religious phenomenon'. Although he is largely supportive of many of Post *et al* theories and conclusions, however, I found his own definitions of religion and pilgrimage to be somewhat more encompassing and therefore less exclusionary than theirs in terms of what emerged in my research findings.[61]

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[61] Margry defines ***religion*** as, 'all notions and ideas that human beings have regarding their experience of the sacred or the supernatural in order to give meaning to life and to have access to transformative powers that

When Oviedo et al researched 470 pilgrims at different stages of the Camino they were curious as to whether the rise in the number of pilgrims was evidence of a 'religious revival', a secular/ 'post-secular' expression of nature travel, or a wider movement of 'eclectic and fuzzy spirituality' (2014 p. 434). Their research was more quantitative than qualitative save for what they call two open-ended questions, and their main conclusion is that the results 'cannot be read simplistically' as confirming any of the categories with which they had started out (ibid p. 433). Interestingly, they believe the results clearly indicate the rise in pilgrimage numbers is not about 'religious revival' and they qualify that by adding, certainly not 'traditional religiosity'. Instead they use Charles Taylor's illustration of two types of contemporary persons as a framework for interpreting their findings – the 'porous self' (the one integrated into a cosmos of religious meaning and values, working largely from a pre-modern mindset) and the 'buffered self' (the flexible and adaptive self to every context yet without any need to understand themselves as integrated into a greater cosmos of meaning, more the post-modern mindset). They found both types among their sample but with greater numbers in the latter group. Taylor's sophisticated development of these two categories of contemporary persons and the polarity of spiritualities he observes is an area I will return to in discussion on my findings. Although Oviedo *et al's* sample was perhaps too large and their research method too generalist for any depth of analysis, perhaps the most important point they make comes when they add that 'the Camino provides a context in which both (i.e. 'the buffered self' and the 'porous self') co-exist' (ibid p.440).

In the Introductory Chapter I referred to what I called the "givenness" of the pilgrimage process. Firstly, let me note my deliberate coupling of 'pilgrimage' with 'process'. The 'tennis-match-like debate' as to whether signifying importance in regards to pilgrimage ought definitively be accorded to 'journey' or

may influence their existential condition'; and ***pilgrimage*** as, 'a journey based on religious or spiritual inspiration, undertaken by individuals or groups, to a place that is regarded as more sacred or salutary than the environment of everyday life, to seek a transcendental encounter with a specific cult object for the purpose of acquiring spiritual, emotional or physical healing or benefit.

to 'place', seems like a bit of a 'theoretical cul-de-sac' to me, (to borrow Coleman's phrase, 2002 p.363). The feminist non-binary 'both/and' comes to mind as does the question as to whether religious inspiration ought to be a pre-existing motive for authentic pilgrimage or can it be an element engendered in the experience of participation. That said, I take on board and intend to address Margry's question as to 'how the religious factor can be identified and interpreted' (2008, p.19) and I appreciate his concern about using terms like religious pilgrimage / secular pilgrimage without 'operationalizing them' or 'without substantial empirical investigation' and agree that this is most unhelpful to the overall discussion (ibid, pp.18-19). All of which brings me back to this idea of 'givenness'.

3.2.8 A Working Description and Definition of Pilgrimage

In the case of the two pilgrimages under the lens of this research, the data reveals what I am calling a "givenness", which long pre-exists the contemporary pilgrim, and the way it offers itself anew as a 'living-world' to each new and intending pilgrim in turn. Lawrence Taylor, of prior mention, but in another text, offers an insightful analysis of contemporary pilgrimage, when he says:

> The plasticity and relative malleability of pilgrimage, the space it often leaves for individual and collective agency, and its ambiguous character as religious or secular activity all contribute to making it a uniquely potent way of maintaining or asserting a moral geography that reconfigures the world for personal and collective purposes (Taylor 2012, pp.209–10).

There is much worthy of 'unpacking' here, but for the moment let me note the nuance Taylor expresses in asserting that pilgrimage - that is, the entity as a whole - offers something unique and particular to the contemporary pilgrim. This "something offered", which I liken to 'givenness', leads me to describe pilgrimage thus:

> *The living world of pilgrimage as process, is complex and potent, an always evolving interconnectedness of many elements, including – place/s, (often but not exclusively peripheral, but perhaps often enough in, what*

some call a 'therapeutic landscape'[62] Maddrell, 2013 p.64), particular locations, engendering story/stories (including often that of a revered or saintly person/event or both), performative ritual/s, (personal and communal both), the promise/possibility of a glimpse of the transcendent, history, hagiography, politics (past and present, local and international), a stewarding community/communities and, finally, a facilitative infrastructure.

This term 'givenness' initially had helped me describe how the internal rigour of the pilgrimage on Lough Derg and along the Camino de Santiago de Compostela, requires the pilgrim to become more body-focused. I was then fortuitously guided towards the work of Jean-Luc Marion and his emblematic themes of gift and givenness.[63] When Marion, also a committed, (if more controversial) phenomenologist, speaks to the idea of a 'saturated phenomenon', he seeks to communicate how the 'surplus' in phenomena means that 'neither concept, signification nor intention can foresee, organise nor contain it' and in that sense it remains necessarily open to 'an ever-emergent complexity of perspectives and meanings' (Robinette, 2007 p. 91). In suggesting that pilgrimage is the kind of 'brimming-over, living-world' as I described above, a sense of such 'surplus' and 'saturation' seem fitting. Marion's sense of the 'givenness' also allows for the 'ever-emerging complexity and new perspectives' which this brief review of some of the salient pilgrimage literature undoubtedly reveals. In Marion's view, the most essential thing is 'to live the meaning of it' (2002, p.46). That said, and as theologian Tom Finnegan advised[64] 'at some stage the phenomenological must spill forward into an attempt to 'distil wisdom' – to articulate meaning; to risk interpretation and to shape definition. Let me offer such a shaping - a definition of pilgrimage as a personal but relational process, mindful as Marion noted that 'no concept is adequate to the phenomena at which it aims' (Robinette, 2007 p.91). Coleman, also helpfully reminds that, while it is important that we

[62] Therapeutic landscapes are those where 'the promise and possibility of more restful psychosocial states are experienced', (citing Conradson 2007), Maddrell, 2013 p.64

[63] In further tribute to the collegiality and collaborative effort that I was fortunate to experience on my theological journey through this thesis, the External Examiner of the 2021 MIC Theology Research Graduates Colloquium, David ? suggested I consider included Jean-Luc Marion's work.

[64] In yet another of those fortunate conversations, facilitated by my thesis Supervisor, which Lonergan suggests make 'theologising, a collaborative endeavour'. Tom Finnegan is also a member of the Theology and Religious Studies Department of Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.

continue to define what we mean by pilgrimage, we also need to remember that no single definition 'matters too much'. He believes, we must resist an assumption that we will 'ever achieve a more precise, universally applicable set of criteria and finally pin down the activity of pilgrimage' (2002 p.362). In fact, he goes even further to say that it would be better to frame our studies with more of a sense that what we are doing is learning more about human behaviour through the prism of pilgrimage as 'case study', rather than focusing on pilgrimage as some kind of solid, unchanging institution (ibid p. 363). Mindful of these caveats, I offer this definition informed by my 'living with' as much as possible, the meaning and import of my respondents' reflections on their experience, my immersion into pilgrimage literature, my practical experience in and further theoretical reading on body psychology and finally one, that I believe might be open to further theological interpretation. The sense of 'a saturation phenomenon', as articulated above, is hopefully retained by always contextualising this definition of pilgrimage as personal process in the *description* of the larger phenomena of the pilgrimage world *as process*, offered above.

> *'Contemporary pilgrimage as a personal but relational process involves an intentional setting out on a journey to very particular places, deemed sacred, special or holy; and while there, or on route there, or both, embodying significant physical endurance and participating in a spectrum of non-ordinary, bodily gestures. In such places, this combination of movement and ritual, for many pilgrims, and including explicitly religious ritual for some, alone and with others, facilitates the pilgrim to become more attuned in their bodily selves, more rooted to the ground beneath their feet, yet simultaneously more alive to others and to the firmament of transcendence'.*

In concluding this section on the ***Pilgrim Body and Pilgrimage studies*** I can testify that it is a fertile field of curiosity, study and debate, and, like all discourse, subject to the challenges of postmodernity. An important outcome from the genre's robust response to these challenges is to underscore that we, 'can no longer take for granted the meaning of pilgrimage for its participants, nor

can we take for granted a uniform definition of the phenomenon of 'pilgrimage' either (Eade & Sallnow, 1991, p. 3). Nonetheless, I sought to challenge the view that the Turners' paradigm was decidedly 'deterministic and problematic' (ibid, pp 2-3) and to re-appreciate perhaps, the rich study of Christian pilgrimage that it was and still remains, particularly given that they had already acknowledged all manner of diversity in their treatise. I noted the more relaxed tenor of debate about the tourist/pilgrim boundary in recent scholarship and also discerned from a selection of primary and secondary research on embodiment some resonant issues with my own study. The mixed and often confusing responses among pilgrimage scholars as to the nature and significance of religious dimension of pilgrimage was another important area of focus.

Finally, I offered a description pilgrimage as a lived-world of multi-layered process and a definition of pilgrimage as a personal but relational process, both of which were influenced by and I believe reflective of the findings from my research. I noted how the descriptions and definitions of other pilgrim scholars also reflect their findings and of course for all of us, our worldview, the quality of our scholarship as well as our auto-ethnographic experience of pilgrimage are other formative elements which shape our perception of this long-enduring, human phenomenon.

Section Two: Incarnate Bodies in Philosophy and Theology

3.3 Introduction: The Body-on-Pilgrimage

In the Introductory Chapter I named the *embodied experience of pilgrims* as the lens through which I intended to research and theorise on contemporary pilgrimage. I referenced the autobiographical source of my interest in embodiment and acknowledged the fraught place of 'body' in discourse and '*Dasein*' both.[65] I offered a working definition of embodiment so as to bring immediate clarity to its provenance in my work and declared my intention to consider the body as, '*a fundamental theological principle'*, in the development and articulation of my thesis. It is ever more clear, as I delve further into literature that to focus on body-as-subject, is far from a straightforward affair. Sigurdson notes that 'our experience of the body is more fundamental than our ability to represent it' (2016 p.35), yet a complexity of representations and conceptions of body are manifold everywhere. Godzieba alerts us that once we focus on such representations of body-as-subject, the notion of 'the self' becomes immediately implicated in the discussion (2007, p.369). This inevitably draws one into the domains of philosophy and cultural theory. Sigurdson stresses that 'the task for a theological interpretation of the body is neither to defend nor to destroy the conceptions that it examines, but instead, in a critical dialogue with them, to contribute to a reflective and constructive theology of the body' (ibid p.36).

Hence, in what follows, as I indicated earlier, I try to distil, from the remaining two conversation partners, theology and psychology, some of their key insights. I offer a rotating prism of perspectives, including, the body as subject in philosophy, particularly the phenomenological view; the theological view, particularly through the lens of the incarnated body; the feminist challenge to the theology of the incarnated body; and I conclude by returning to my earlier definition of embodiment. Throughout the rotation, at times these individual

[65] ***Dasein***, is phenomenologist Martin Heidegger's German and short hand term for the experience of being that is peculiar to human beings. 'Da' translates as 'there' and 'sein' is the verb 'to be" and he couples them to describe the way humans are 'thrown there' into 'being' and existence.

streams interweave and merge for, although each domain has its academic 'sovereignty', the shared ground is the alterity that is, the human body.

3.3.1 'Body as Subject'

Richard Kearney's opening to his shared treatise with Brian Treanor on *Carnal Hermeneutics* deftly pitches, front of centre, the fleshy reality of our incarnation and the multiple hermeneutic realities which continuously arise in our day-to-day-lived-lives, as embodied beings. The nuances of his familial origins in Catholic theology seem still very much to the fore.

> From the moment we are born we live in the flesh. Infant skin responds to the touch of the mother, hands and feet unfurling, mouth open for the first touch of milk. Before words, we are flesh, flesh becoming words for the rest of our lives. Matter, no less than form, is about what matters -to us, to others, to the world in which we breathe and have our being. The old dichotomies between "empiricism" and "transcendental", "materialism" and "idealism" are ultimately ruinous. Life is hermeneutic all the way through. It goes all the way up and all the way down. From head to foot and back again (2015, p. 15).

Stressing that we are not in the first instance 'cerebral sovereign egos but sensing incarnate bodies', he explains the three layers he wishes to include in his use of the term 'sensing' – firstly, it includes the systemic complexity of all that is involved in physiological sensation; secondly, the way we continually try to make sense of things by our process of making-meaning and thirdly, sensing by way of our innate compass, constantly orientating ourselves in space and time 'towards and away from, before and after'. He then roots that three-layered sensing in the deeper well of sense-making which he calls 'wisdom, *sapientia'* adding that colloquially, we knowingly say that 'living well is a matter of "savvy" (ibid, p.18).

Kearney then briefly, but lucidly, traces the philosophical lineage of discourse about the body, marking the gains and losses along the way. In his more recent publication, 'Touch' (2021), he adds more detail still and additional insights about this lineage, including further examples from his home territory of philosophy, but also from a story chest of what he calls 'wounded healing' (much of it through rituals of touch), from Greek literature and biblical sources, and, finally with examples from contemporary psychoanalytic and therapeutic healing. Perhaps

his most potent set of insights are in relation to the contemporary challenges of our increased commitment to digital technology (ibid, p.113ff). We seem to have little cognisance as yet of the potential impact of this change-making technology upon us. Nor are we as yet perhaps curious enough about the implications of our unquestioned dependence on technology for our sensate, experientially-oriented bodies, with their long history of evolutionary sophistication. There are countless intricate, in-built, relational requirements for well-being, neuropathically and environmentally woven into the fabric of embodied being, that digital devices, for all their sophistication, have little capacity for. Kearney deploys Charles Taylor's 'excarnation' motif (ibid p.113), to good effect and speaks to our deeply significant switch from *in*carnation, word becoming flesh, to *ex*carnation, flesh becoming image. Kearney had this book almost ready for publication when the restrictions relating to COVID-19 were imposed, which led to a consequent surge, he noted in 'excarnation pursuits'. He believed it would have taken a major re-working of his book to take on board fully the impact of these restrictions. Instead, he added a 'COVID-19 Coda' (ibid, p.133ff). Here, he expresses a measured hope that the extremes with which our freedom to touch, connect with others, to freely amble and move and relate more widely were so restricted, may have been somewhat salutary for us. He appreciated the fact that a number of what he called 'top level media outlets' (ibid p.136) began to publish quality work from wise voices such as poets, philosophers, scientists and medics during the height of the restrictions. He singles out a small selection, including this abbreviated observation from Julia Kristeva:

> All this hyper-connected exaltation makes us live in isolation in front of our screens. People find themselves more alone today, because although they have words, signs, icons, they have lost the flesh of words, sharing, tenderness, duty toward, care for the other. …We are slaves of the screen that have not at all abolished loneliness but have only absorbed it. This is where the recent anxiety and anger comes from (2021, p.138).

He notes also her conclusion on a more positive note saying that, because the COVID-19 crisis has triggered 'a revelation of life as a whole, starting with everyone's vulnerability with regard to pleasure and sexuality', she believes it is also preparing us for 'a new art of living that will be complex and daring' (ibid). There is considerable evidence in my pilgrimage research of that desire, even

before COVID-19, for reprieve among pilgrims from the already existing demands and allures of the digital age. Phrases like 'digital detox' and 'switching off', as we will note later in my research findings, are among the motivations of many contemporary pilgrims.

Kearney's aptitude for such contemporary critical consciousness in philosophy is not only instructive for the core subject of the pilgrim body, but an example also of what Boeve calls 'the double benefit to theology', of remaining engaged in discussion with contemporary philosophy and other discourse. Such engagement, Boeve stresses, keeps theology sharp about how Christianity can continually renew itself so as to remain plausible as the context undergoes radical change. Equally, theology contributes positively to the discussion by answering the challenging questions from its own renewed understanding of itself and in turn asking challenging questions of its own for the benefit of the wider context (Hoskins 2006, p. 31).

When I offered a working description of embodiment in the previous chapter, I did so tentatively, mindful that much of this discourse about the human body has been and remains, as I said earlier 'vexed and contentious'. Swedish theologian Ola Sigurdson offers a most comprehensive account of embodiment, incarnation and Christian theology. He charts a forensic mapping of the variety of theses and illustrations of human bodies in history, philosophy and theology. Caroline Bynum, a medieval historian, and cited by Sigurdson, notes that 'despite enthusiasm for the topic, discussions of the body are almost completely incommensurable – and often mutually incomprehensible – across the disciplines' (2016, p. 16). Sigurdson believes that the reason for this 'mutual unintelligibility across disciplines is precisely the difficulty of agreeing a straightforward definition of the body'. He also names some of the problems associated with attempting definitions, such as abstractions that reify some parts of bodily functioning only to disembody others *or* doing a kind of violence to the complexity of the human body by reducing it to a singular concept *or* silencing actual, human bodies who do not recognise themselves in some of the objectifying definitions offered by academia. He wonders how a thematization of the body might be both affirming and honest about the inevitable ambiguities and

he puts out the hope that hermeneutic phenomenology might provide an appropriate framework (ibid, p.17). Kearney too acknowledges the significant contribution phenomenology has made in yielding a more fleshy and less text-focused understanding of the body, in recent decades of scholarship. He also bemoans, however, the division between phenomenology and hermeneutics which has occurred as a result and he expresses a hope to restore that division in his own meditation upon the body and on the senses particularly (2015, p. 17). Hence, it is to the 'possible framework that phenomenology might offer', that my literature review turns to next.

3.3.2 Phenomenology and what it brings to the discussion on body-as-subject

Phenomenology, says Dermot Moran, was a philosophical movement of the early twentieth century, which he describes as "announced by Edmund Husserl", and one which emerged alongside a number of other strong and new philosophical currents at the time. Husserl, Moran adds, saw himself as 'a radical beginner, a pioneer of a new way of exploring consciousness' and his aim was to begin a new way of doing philosophy that would bring it back from its abstractions into metaphysical speculations so as to instead 'make contact with matters themselves, with concrete living experience'. Moran also reminds us that phenomenology is far from a singular theoretical outlook but is rather an historical movement encompassing an 'extraordinary diverse range of thinkers' (2000, See pp. xiii-xiv and pp. 2-3).

Martin Heidegger is akin to the founding twin of phenomenology, along with Husserl, although he was soon to veer in a slightly different direction. However, between them they have undoubtedly influenced, and in foundational ways, the work of a number of the major philosophy figures of the later twentieth century. (For example, De Beauvoir, Sartre, Levinas, Ricœur, and Jean-Luc Marion of earlier mention.) Beyond philosophy, phenomenology's influence has permeated psychology, sociology, geography and pilgrimage studies too. By way of a description that perhaps most resonated with the focus of this research project, I found human geographer David Seamon's a good match when he says:

> Phenomenology strives for the actualisation of contact. As a way of study it seeks to meet the things of the world as those things are in themselves and so describe them. It is a discipline based on a premise of 'a certain essence or givenness' in the human condition, that transcends culture, history, place and personality (1980 p.148).

Seamon goes on to say that the core task of phenomenology is to 'unbury and describe that givenness, of which people usually lose sight because of the mundaneness and taken-for-granted-ness of their everyday life-situation' (ibid p.149). The thinker who has possibly most influenced a phenomenological philosophy of the body, perhaps even more strongly in recent decades than when first published, is, Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In his seminal text *The Phenomenology of Perception*, (1945) Merleau-Ponty offers a number of critical illuminations about the human body, which certainly contribute to an 'un-burying of some of the givenness' about the body, which had permeated academic and other discourse to that point. Some of these critical points are particularly pertinent to my research on embodiment and pilgrimage as I will enumerate below.

3.3.3 Being Body rather than having a body

A contemporary and friend, for at least some of Merleau-Ponty's much shorter life, Gabriel Marcel is credited with being the first to enunciate clearly the distinguishing idea between human beings 'being body' rather than 'having a body'[66](1976). The often repeated linguistic turn that we 'have a body', tends to reinforce some of the more harmful dualisms, such as objectifying the body, turning it into 'a thing' and also effecting an artificial wedge between human consciousness, thinking and cognition over and against our human materiality in all the fleshiness of our day to day lives. This was a significantly contrasting position to much of the prior and influential philosophy of the modern era. For example, Descartes' equating the essence of human beingness with the human being's capacity for thought, in his infamous, pithy summary: *I think therefore I am* is the ubiquitously cited and telling shorthand of the essence of this philosophy, without due acknowledgement often, of just how embedded Descartes was among a much larger circle of similarly convinced philosophers.

[66] I noted subsequently that Kearney credits Husserl with this in his 'Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology, book 2, 155ff)

Merleau-Ponty, by contrast, sought to begin differently. Faithful to the discipline of his phenomenological school (albeit an eclectic one as Moran said above), he began with the lived experience of his own body - his phenomenological perception of himself as a living body in dynamic, reciprocating, relatedness to his environment. This living, dynamic reciprocity is, he emphatically underlined, different from and prior to logical consciousness. In fact, logical consciousness, i.e. deliberately thinking about and through what is involved in the multiple minutiae and stages of this dynamism of being-a-living-human-body-in-the-world, would interfere with and interrupt entirely this pre-logical body consciousness. 'Perception', he thereby concluded, is 'existential, a pre-logical act by which the subject takes up his place in the world'. (1962 edition, p. 303). Perception, is not a solely cognitive act, he argued, but rather the human being is an incarnated subject, who intentionally relates to and elaborates upon her ever-present world. Or as Reynaert puts it: 'the subject of perception is not to be understood as an organism that responds to stimuli, but as an embodied subject, that stands in an intentional relation to the world' (2009 p.96). Later Reynaert adds further cogent summary to a number of Merleau-Ponty's key concepts:

> 'Perception has its origin in the vital bond between the perceiver, his body and the world. I perceive, I am sensitive to colours and other sensible qualities, because my body has an original pact with empirical reality. Sensation is a natural co-existence and communion with this reality (ibid p. 98).

Hence the interrelationship of our embodied being in our day-to-day lived-world, in its layers and in its entirety, colours, shapes and informs our perception. (I note and find helpful that Reynaert, includes the term 'embodiment' in his references, but it is not clear to me that Merleau-Ponty ever used such a French equivalent in his writings.) Merleau-Ponty's philosophy pre-existed the fuller development of systems thinking of the 1970s and 1980s, but I believe there are a number of anticipatory hints of this new knowledge in his work. It was offered also decades before some empirical confirmation would come with the emergence of neuroscience, as a distinct clinical discipline, in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, and, hence, Merleau-Ponty's thesis was a bold challenge to the deeply held philosophical position of the time. The prior premise of 'man as a psyche combined with a natural, instinctive organism', had been strongly in possession for a number of centuries; and, not insignificantly, strongly in

possession during a time when there was more 'consonance' between theology and the sciences, as Bentley Hart above noted (2020). This dualism then came to have a deeply pervasive influence on theology, sociology and psychology.

Perhaps because of the way Merleau-Ponty sources our capacity for symbolic function directly and intrinsically in our mobile, moving, lived-bodies, and as an essential function of our embodied existence (1945, p. 141), Maxine Sheets-Johnstone credits him alongside Marcel and Foucault for initiating what she called, *'a corporeal turn'*, one of two major conceptual shifts she identifies in philosophical discourse in the twentieth century[67]. A choreographer, professor of dance scholarship and philosopher, she estimates that the existing dualistic hermeneutic that this *corporeal turn* began to unravel, had been, by then, the dominant prism for about three hundred and fifty years, and what she calls, 'the 350 year old wound' (1990). Significantly, in terms of a core theme of this research project, she is witheringly critical of the term 'embodiment', calling it, 'a lexical band-aid', which she believes does nothing to heal this wound (2009, pp. 2-3). In addition she is critical of much of the reportage and discourse about neuroscientific experimentation which, she argues 'collapses body into brain, - *the* brain, thereby bypassing its (the body's) living reality'. (The brain is an organ and not an organism', is one of her telling and pithy summaries.) While she values much of the knowledge and information about the intricate workings of the brain that this relatively new science is yielding, she believes it serves ironically to 'reopen and widen the wound' as it reduces human and non-human beings to 'lumbering, cerebrally-run robots' and, 'compressing life into a neurological caricature' (2011 p.155 & p.157, respectively). She supports the emergence of the need to 'de-elevate the brain and to begin seriously considering, 'the ontogenetic heritage of adult humans'. That heritage, she says, 'is rooted in movement, in the tactile, kinaesthetic body and in the dynamic congruency of that body with expressed emotions and in the semantic congruency of that body with expressed meanings' (Ibid, p.163). Is this 'ontogenetic heritage', in part, what contemporary pilgrims reconnect to? I believe it is not insignificant that in both philosophy and psychology, much of the rich phenomenological data, such as this from Sheets-Johnstone, is brought to

[67] Sheets-Johnstone names the other as *a linguistic turn* and she credits Wittgenstein with setting this turn in motion.

the discussion directly, and more often indirectly, (as we shall see in the section on *Psychology of the Body* below), by movement and dance practitioners, many of them, women.

The *bodily phenomenon,* (Johnstone's preferred phrase in her usurpation of 'embodiment'), then, is one of 'kinetic-affective-cognitive movement in multiple modulations, and it is anchored', as Johnstone underlines, in our 'animate and dynamic presence in the world' (ibid p.165). Such a summary brings us back to the contribution of phenomenology to our discussion on the body. Merleau-Ponty would have undoubtedly added 'perceptive', to Johnstone's triad movement pattern, but it is clear that he would share her emphasis on the lived-world of the already available. The first philosophical act, he says is 'to return to the lived world of daily experience that lies beneath the objective world of science' (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p.69). Building on this 'first philosophical act', I now turn to explore how a theologian, a sociologist and an 'embodiment philosopher' each develop new somatic models directly out of Merleau-Ponty's 'corporeal turn'. I will also continue to make links between these somatic models and my own research.

3.3.4 The 'Intentional, Multivalent Body'- New Somatic Models

'The cartesian left-overs' that continue to permeate their way into the post-modern era are only part of the problem for the contemporary body, according to Godzieba. He invokes sociologist Bryan Turner's analysis of how capitalism, particularly in more recent decades, has converted the human body into, 'an information system whose genetic code can be manipulated and commodified in the new biotech economy' (2007, p.370). Godzieba welcomes Turner's cogent resistance to this reductionist, commodified view of human bodies (2007 p.375). In what came to be considered a seminal text, *Body and Society* (2008/{1996/1984}), Turner had upturned the more usual sociological emphases on structure, class and function by declaring the body as the more appropriate axis of sociological analysis. His pioneering work had begun even before that when in 1982, he co-founded with others, the sociological Journal of Studies of the same name. In a recent 25th Anniversary issue, he is reflective and, it must be said, quite pessimistic about many of the issues relating to body and

embodiment, particularly in light of the impact and deeper sociological outlook following the current global pandemic (Tamari, 2020). In an overview of his years of academic teaching and publication, he recounts how he used ‘body’ when referring to discourse of the body as an object of social construction and ‘embodiment’ when referring to actual processes and practice in the body (ibid, p.101). ‘Embodiment’, he adds helps us to remember that in reality body is, ‘not a static nor fixed thing’, but ‘a process of coming into being’ (Ibid p.102). Not insignificantly, Turner includes a personal and professional interest in religion as one of three named signature influences in his life (ibid 2020 p.98). One of Turner’s most cogent and enduring theses was his growing insight into the powerful impact that vulnerability has in terms of how humans behave, live and organise themselves. (See, for example, his preface to the 2008 edition of Body & Society.) Increasingly critical of some of the social constructionism, he began to concentrate more and more on the suffering, aging, and disabled body. So strong a view did this become for Turner that he says ‘the body, while interpreted through the lens of culture, is a more or less stable ensemble of acquired practices whose limited lifespan is characterized by an inescapable vulnerability’ (Tamari, 2020 p.102 & more extensively in Turner’s 2008 edition of Body & Society). Vulnerability returns as a significant theme in the reflections of some women theologians cited below and along with Turner’s thoughts here, ought to be helpful guides when this same theme arises from the embodied experience of pilgrims who participate in my own research. Finally, Turner believed that if we are to make any sense of our being, we needed a *socio-theology of embodiment* and in the first of my three readings of the multivalent body, he begins by illustrating three, interrelated aspects, *embodiment, emplacement* and *enselfment* (2001). (For a comparative and visual ease, I have tabulated all three illustrations - Turner’s sociological, Godzieba’s theological and Johnson’s philosophical - See Table 4 below with short, explanatory notes.)

Inspired by Turner’s illustration, Godzieba offers his own attempt (also illustrated in Table 4), to resist the reductionism of some of the post-modern literalist, biologically-driven discourse about the human body, compounded by capitalism’s life-denying rhetoric, by offering his own, what he calls ‘four-fold sense of the body’. He mirrors his somatic schemata on the medieval model of scriptural hermeneutics (literal/ allegorical/moral and anagogical). This hermeneutical

model he commends because of its capacity to acknowledge better, what he calls 'the multivalent nature of truth'. The human body, he insists, requires similar layering, for in illustrating its multivalency, we honour simultaneously, its embodiment, particularity and intentionality (2007, p.371).

Godzieba's fourth valency, the ultimate intentionality of the human body's capacity for transformation, he believes, is the natural climax of the body's 'intentional focus upon the world as its perceptual task' and he supports his contention with a direct quote from Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology:

> 'My experience breaks forth into things and transcends itself in them, because it always comes into being within the framework of a certain setting in relation to the world which is the definition of my body" (2014(2), p. 213).

This leads Godzieba to conclude further that 'the lived body is thus essentially, intentional performance that 'surges towards objects to be grasped and perceives them', thereby embodied action is imbued with intentional meaning (ibid, p.212).

This phenomenological sense of the body's natural 'performative' dimension in its embodied response to environment, is a critical lens, it seems to me, through which to view what might be happening to the human body on pilgrimage. Intentionality is already heightened by the choice to make the pilgrimage; then, the pilgrimage processes, invariably include new and particular rites, rituals and actions that require a shift, not only in the level of daily performativity, but in the nature and content of it; and finally, the environment that the body 'surges towards', is a new one, raising all kinds of piqued attention in the pilgrim by comparison with their regular, 'back-home-habitus.'

Philosopher Mark Johnson, considered a leading contributor to 'embodied philosophy'[68], also offers (along with George Lakoff), a thought-provoking, multidimensional perspective on the body.[69] (See again Table 4 for the detail.) He acknowledges how such an approach might seem to 'carve up the holon' that is embodiment, but defends the approach of naming 'multiple, nonreductive

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[68] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_Johnson_(philosopher)

[69] With Lakoff, G. *Philosophy of the Flesh, The embodied mind and its challenges to Western thought*, 1999, New York, Basic Books)

levels' as a way of trying to be 'remotely adequate to the complexity that is human nature' (2007 p.275). Johnson later built upon this multi-level matrix, which he had first used to illustrate the meaning of the *term* body to elaborate further on how human beings make meaning *via* the body. The process of meaning-making, he argues, is grounded in the body. He discounts the mistaken assumption that meaning-making is a more cognitive, largely idle-bodied, mostly, post-event reflection process. (Wordsworth-style[70]: 'for oft when on my couch I lie, in vacant or in pensive mood'.) Rather, he develops a cogent thesis concerning how we make meaning directly in and out of our embodied, organismic experience, *as* we make our way through the changing situations in which we find ourselves. 'Meaning is embodied', he concludes simply, having outlined the following:

> …we are living in and through a growing, changing situation that opens up toward new possibilities and that is transformed as it develops. That is the way human meaning works, and none of this happens without our bodies, or without embodied interactions within the environments we inhabit and that change along with us. That explains why we should not think that our embodied meaning, understanding and reasoning, could ever be adequately thought or grasped by concepts, symbols, rules or patterns. Our situations are *embodied situations*…Meaning is grounded in the body (2007, p.83 & p.274).

This idea that meaning is grounded in the body pertains directly to the findings of my research. Pilgrims have significant embodied experience and in the heightened engagement of their temporarily changed habitat - the pilgrimage site/pathway and its process –the overall meaning of the pilgrimage is formed in and shaped by 'their touch with this pilgrimage world' to echo further from Merleau-Ponty (1968, p.134). This is a discussion I will return to later.

Godzieba, Turner and Johnson each note their gratitude to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body as the dynamic catalyst for their own more multivalent illuminations of the complex, dense phenomenon that is the human body. In one particularly rich expression of this debt, Godzieba, having named a number of embodied experiences, from the mundanity of struggling to get out of

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[70] From 'I wandered lonely as a cloud' William Wordsworth
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45521/i-wandered-lonely-as-a-cloud

bed in the morning, to the more sublime way in which the body, 'goes electric with sexual passion', he concludes:

> all these moments, when the body outruns our intentions, reveal meanings and configurations of the world that surprise us and that disclose our depth of connection to the world and to others which outstrips any attempt at descriptions. This is because as Merleau-Ponty puts it, "existence comes into its own in the body." In fact, he goes on to claim, "neither body nor existence can be regarded as the original of the human being, since they presuppose each other, and because the body is solidified or generalized existence, and existence a perpetual incarnation' (2007, p.374).

Author	***Physiological***	***Relational***	***Identity***	***Ultimacy***
Turner	**Embodiment**	**Emplacement**	**Enselfment**	
	The ensemble of corporeal practices that give a person their place in the world	The universality of living our embodiment in a particular social habitus	The continuous construction of our self-identity, depending on and arising out of 'successful embodiment in the social habitus' and critically, memory	
Godzieba	**Literal Meaning**	**Allegorical Meaning**	**Moral Meaning**	**Anagogical Meaning**
	honours its biological-empirical substratum	speaks to the disclosure of meaning in the human body's vast repertoire of bodily gestures and embodied actions	looks to the humanizing or dehumanizing character of those actions and gestures	refers to the ultimate intentionality of the human body's capacity for transformation, including, in the religious and theological sense of *theÔsis*, union with God offered by baptism into the dying and rising of Christ.
Johnson	**Biological Organism**	**Ecological/ Social Body**	**Cultural Body**	**Phenomenological Body**
	The principal physical locus of our being-in-the-world	No body exists without an environment, not organism *and*	Our environment is also constituted culturally, e.g. gender, race, class and various modes	The living, moving, pulsing body of our being-in-the-world; (citing Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's

		environment but body and environment, co-evolving...	of body posture and movement - we both inherit and enact culture	‘tactile- kinaesthetic body’)
		that human environment is also intersubjective – we are what we are only in and through others		

Table 4: The Multivalent, Phenomenal Body

3.3.5 Body-as-Subject: The Incarnated Body in Theology: An Introduction

This dynamic interrelationship of body and being which Merleau-Ponty calls ‘a perpetual incarnation’, (a term which perhaps reflect some of the cultural and social influences on his own embodiment in-the-world, as a man of Catholic faith), offers a segue into a more direct exploration of the incarnated body and its relationship to *the* Incarnation, as understood in Christian theology, more particularly, Catholic theology. In the Introductory Chapter, I referred to Laurence Freeman’s instructional idea of the original language of Christianity as ‘the language of the body’. In any living language, vocabulary, grammar and syntax change over time and Idioms and particular words will often develop new meaning and import in response to or through accommodations made towards other languages, as well as, on account of the myriad influences of what we have been calling ‘the co-evolving world’. Just so, the language of the body also changes. Of course, the body is more than a language, it is a living organism in a lived-world, an interdependent world (as we have acknowledged frequently above); it is a social concept, a social reality; a religious concept, a religious reality; a political agent, a political tool; a cultural carrier and culturally conditioned. It is also the only matrix and mode of being that we humans inhabit.

Catholic theology, teaching and liturgical practice, have each had a chequered history in relation to all things of the body. On one hand, Catholic faith is celebrated, nurtured and expressed, (all bodily processes), in sacramental

patterns which are full of materiality, colour, sensation, seasonal variation, physical and symbolic gesture and touch and each Sacrament and accompanying liturgy prizes in some definitive way, one or other of Earth's four elements. Cathedrals, chapels, oratories and sanctuaries of all kinds are adorned with art and precious metals. Sacred music has an esteemed role in sacramental life, the experience of which often inspires the composition of more music. On the other hand, Catholic Liturgy has also included, (mostly historically and by sharp contrast to the above multi-sensorial, phenomenological, elementally and artistically rich liturgies), practices which, in contemporary times, are revealed as shame-inducing and/or discriminatory. For example, the "churching" of women after childbirth, the forbidden entrance of women beyond the altar rails and the forbidden burial in sacred ground or with sacramental rites of prematurely deceased and unbaptised children or adults who died by suicide. In addition, social practices which publicly admonished and punished women who were discovered to have contravened Catholic sexual teaching, particularly, but not only, by child-bearing before marriage, were aided and abetted by local clergy and more senior religious leaders. Although, it was known to all, that the women concerned could not have conceived alone, (unlike the kind of fertilisation possibilities available to some women today), it was rare indeed that such admonishments, public humiliations or life-altering confinements were served upon the men involved.

Although many such practices have now ceased they have cast a long shadow and yet perhaps none as long or as painful as the shadow cast by the prevalence of the sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults by Catholic clergy and some consecrated Religious. Even more egregious has been the consequent institutional cover up by those in authority to protect reputations and the institution without anything like an equivalent concern for victims and their families. Hence, while Catholicism has mercifully retained and maintained a rich and living tradition of 'sacramentality and sensuousness' (Boeve, 2006, p. 778), there remain a number of fraught areas in Catholic theology of the body. Examples include sexuality generally, including the vexed place of sexual orientation; sexual morality, use of contraception, theology of the female body and the absence, as yet, of a theological acknowledgement of already existing

intersexed human bodies or to the more recent social and cultural movements in relation to gender fluidity.

Adrian Thatcher in his Introductory Chapter to the *Oxford Handbook on Theology, Gender and Sexuality,* (2015, a volume he also edits), urges caution in regard to 'two things when handling these topics - language and the pace of social and behavioural changes accompanying them' (ibid p.6). He stresses how 'the contemporary nomenclature', (and, I might add, new understandings and learning, particularly from the psychological sciences), cannot be inserted backways into scripture and tradition. Equally, he suggests that theology cannot remain dismissive of current discourse nor veto what can and cannot be discussed. In corollary, theology must be free to express its own caution about any inadequacies it perceives in some of that discourse and continue to articulate wisdoms from former and older discourse interpreted as in the best interest of humanity (ibid).

As I mentioned in my delimitations in the Introductory Chapter, the boundaries of this dissertation prevent my attending, with any kind of credible depth, to these topics. However, it is essential that I make a small number of pertinent points, and particularly so when I explore shortly, the feminist challenges to the theology of the incarnated body. To begin my own reflection on the theology of Incarnation, I cite the work of one of them, Gabriela Juarez Palacios. In her 'reclamation of the theory of Incarnation' (2018), she summarises volumes of feminist biblical and church teaching criticism, by simply concluding that the great problem with a patriarchal worldview of scriptural interpretation and theological teaching is that 'it authorises the supremacy of the male gender' (ibid,p.110). The feminist deconstruction of such a worldview has sought to understand and articulate the Incarnation in another way. In 'an ethical feminist interpretation of the incarnation' (ibid p.109 and citing Rosemary Radford Ruether's principle of feminist theology), Palacios sees not 'the incarnation of a male but rather the incarnation of a person who is a prototype of humanity' (ibid p.110).

Her articulation of such a movement is reminiscent of what Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza calls 'a shift from an androcentric to a feminist paradigm, since paradigms determine how we see the world and how we conceive it' (1983 p. xxi). Such a shift demands 'an intellectual conversion', she continues 'that cannot be logically deduced but is rooted in a change of patriarchal-social relationships' (ibid). This movement/shift was an element of what I called in the Introductory Chapter, 'my Damascus in Dundalk' where among 'a community of scholars', we were theologically educated to see 'old data in a completely new perspective' (ibid). As I turn now to the core of Incarnation theology, it is not then gender I see, nor a valorisation of maleness, but rather a radical confirmation of the gift of human particularity. Hence, I summarise below a contemporary, theological reading of the Incarnation that I find particularly compelling and one which offers, I believe, not only a 'contextually plausible' theological anthropology for our times, but also one which resonates well with aspects of the embodied experience of pilgrims in my research, particularly in its encouragement of a practice of 'thinking by means of the body'.

3.3.6 Theological Anthropology and the Incarnation

The Incarnation is shorthand for the theological taproot of Christianity, that the Word of God, in embodied co-operation with '*the fiat'* of a young woman called Mary, became human in a particular infant, who grew to become the man, Jesus, first carpenter, then, (or possibly for a time in parallel), Rabbi, and for a few short years, after public baptism by his cousin John, a roaming, Rabbi preacher. The moment - this immersion of the transcendent mysterious Word of God, into the finiteness and vulnerability of human existence – had long been foretold among the Jewish prophets, was God's initiative towards us, and in, 'the fullness of time'. Apart from the final few public and 'partially-documented' years, this moment was lived by Jesus in the almost hidden obscurity of material, corporeal particularity of ordinary family, community and religious life in the historic, biblical town of lower Galilee, Nazareth. Kearney believes that, 'the radical meaning of incarnation was often muted in mainstream Christianity', but that it was undoubtedly 'there from the beginning' (2021 p.74). Theologian Lieven Boeve returns to this radicality when he summaries:

> The event of God's unique self-revelation, occurring as it does within a particular human life at a particular place and time, also indicates God's positive judgement on the suitability of humanity, human embodiment, and the particularity of its historical situatedness for the mediation of divine love and salvation (2006 p. 779).

In the same article, Boeve describes 'Creation, Incarnation, and Resurrection' as forming 'an indissoluble continuum in the light of revelation', and furthermore underlines how an understanding of 'body' is fundamental to all three of them, especially the body as a locus of encounter between God and humanity. 'Any mention of the body', he continues, 'leads back to the body of Christ,… especially his human body' (2006 p. 778).

Godzieba illuminates this radical relationship further when he says:

> The body's paradoxical status - radically particular, and yet open to universal solidarity - is both confirmed and intensified by the Incarnation. …Incarnation is God's embrace of limitation and vulnerability from within. Christ takes on every bit of human vulnerability …embodied life's rootedness in God,…has its ultimate destiny in *theôsis*. Thus we become holy not in spite of our lives but because of our lives (2014, p. 112).

Continuing this theme elsewhere, Godzieba implores those of us involved in contemporary '*recontextualisations*' of theology, to take responsibility 'to draw upon the richness of all epochs and genres of the Catholic tradition in order to plunge into the postmodern discussion of God, push past its often evacuative (and at times even gnostic) characterizations of transcendence, and exercise', what he calls 'the sacramental imagination' (2003, p. 230). Later broadening this to 'the incarnational-sacramental imagination' he believes it is 'absolutely necessary for getting at "the truth" of the body' (2007, p. 263). Mention of such a practice sparked my interest given the theological project at the heart of this thesis.

Godzieba acknowledges that his idea for such a practice is borrowed from the phenomenological analysis of imagination by Kearney of prior mention[71]. 'The

[71] In his analysis, Kearney notes paradigmatic shifts of human imagination through the epochs - the pre-modern, *theocentric* and *mimetic*, the modern *anthropocentric* and *productive* and the post-modern *parodic* and *ec-centric*. The current 'ec-centric' turn, Kearney elaborates, dethrones both the 'Theos' and the 'Anthropos' of previous eras for what he, fairly scathingly calls, 'acts of *briocolage*, which involves juxtapositioning fragments of meaning that it (the era and people of it), has not created and turning image into reality'. Two alternative faculties of the imagination are required, says Kearney, if we are to 'break free of the

first and most effective step in this direction', says Kearney in summary of his own practice is 'to begin to imagine the world as it is could be otherwise'. Godzieba exercises his own critical imagination to point out some of what he believes are shortcomings in Kearney's analysis, but holds onto his valuable, 'theory of otherwise'.

> This framework of "the otherwise" provides a way of bringing the Catholic commitment to incarnation and sacramentality into direct conversation with contemporary aestheticized culture that is suspicious of religious metanarratives. Christian religious practices and beliefs are the believing community's activation of its poetic imagination, its response to the revelation of God (2007, p. 368).

Pilgrimage is one such Christian religious practice and given the surge of interest in it in the contemporary era, it is, I would suggest, already in some kind of 'direct conversation with our aestheticized culture that is suspicious of religious metanarratives'. As an interlocutor of snippets of that conversation among pilgrims I've interviewed and others I have read, I seek to 'think otherwise' about it and hopefully come to 'know differently'. 'A proactive way of imagining and articulating the realities of the self and the social imaginary beyond the constraining limits of celebrity consumerism', says Godzieba, 'is to think by means of the body, so that we might craft a more robust Catholic theology of embodiment'. This is part of the task I believe I have set myself in this thesis.

Godzieba's idea of the incarnational-sacramental-imagination is akin to Michael Paul Gallagher's *spiritual imagination*. Expressing the view that contemporary culture, 'in its grand project of secularisation', has perhaps, Gallagher says 'its greatest effect, maybe not only on our ideas or our religious practice or institutional belonging but on our spiritual imagination; …{leading}, not only to a reduced public role for religion but a radical change in the symbolic sensibility of a people', which, he believed, raises an 'anthropological concern for what is happening to our collective horizons of meaning' (2006). Gallagher quotes a haunting line from poet Seamus Heaney's poem '*Out of this world*': 'The loss occurred off stage'. 'Thinking by means of the body', in regard to contemporary pilgrimage, could mean many important things, some of which I will return to, but

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technological and ethical quagmire of the postmodern context', the *critical* imagination (to be able to, among other things, discriminate between the authentic and inauthentic in the postmodern context), and the *poetic* imagination, (to restore our faith in history and nourish the belief that things can be changed).

perhaps the first observation links to this idea of "*off stage*" - yet again, something has been happening: hundreds of thousands of people have been returning to the practice of pilgrimage, seeking out a rigorous embodied process and in the process, seemingly gaining a new, or at the very least, a renewed (and sometimes maybe even collective), horizon of meaning.

'God's intent is incarnated in each particular life, in each particular situation and in the ensemble of lives and situations', concludes Godzieba. He stresses, 'God's desire is always for our flourishing and that there is always more of God's goodness available than anything untoward we experience'. This he calls, 'theology's sweet predicament' one, he pleads, that 'should be shared for the life of the world' (Boeve *et al* 2006, p.795).

This idea of 'embracing theology's sweet predicament', that in every incarnated life, in every time and place, and in the life of every community in every place, there are revealed glimmers of the undergirding kenotic goodness of God, pouring forth to both comfort and transform, is a stirring call, I believe, and invites our recognition, appreciation and co-operation. Indeed, Godzieba strengthens the cry from *call* to *responsibility* when he says elsewhere:

> 'In light of the 'outrageousness of the incarnation we have a responsibility to 'recognize the stunning reality that, despite all our frailties, all the precariousness of our institutions, all the limitations of our categories, God is still wondrously, wonderfully, lovingly, with us' (2003, pp. 230-231).

3.3.7 Body as Subject: The Incarnated Body – The Feminist Challenge

Many of the authors drawn upon above acknowledge the extent to which feminist cultural theory and feminist theology have influenced their thinking and reflection. Furthermore, I would suggest that much of what is articulated theologically, philosophically and sociologically from the likes of Boeve, Godzieba, Kearney, and before that Turner and Johnson, includes the expanded vision of a feminist perspective and numerous of their texts are co-authored with eminent feminist thinkers and theologians.[72] Nonetheless, the visceral challenge of

[72] Heather Walton, in her *'Writing Methods in Theological Reflection'* agrees saying: 'Many of the tenets of feminist epistemology have now become part of the mainstream and exercise considerable influence on present scholarly practice'. (2014, xvii)

feminist theory, and feminist theology in particular, to the biases of some Christian and Catholic theology, doctrine and discourse about the human body, requires, as I indicated above, specific mention. The first serious challenge to traditional theologies of the body undoubtedly came from what is called, *second wave* feminism[73] which saw 'an explosion of research and teaching on women's issues' (Krolokke et al, 2006,) and any number of critical gender and feminist analyses of existing and emerging discourse and theory, as well as analyses of institutional practices and mores. Feminist theology was just one of the many new disciplines which emerged out of this explosion, most of which continue to multiply and diversify, adding (as mentioned in my *Preamble on Context* above), valuable new dimensions and perspectives to academic, social, cultural and religious life.

The way in which male body experience came to be unquestionably presumed normative (Ruether,1983,1985; Daly,1968, 1973); the 'unclean' associations with menstruation and childbirth (Condren,1989); the perceived elitism of maleness associated with ordination to the priesthood (Malone, 2000, 2014); the oppressiveness of the narrow categories of female saintliness, (virginity, widowhood, or redeemed whoredom) (Christ & Plaskow, 1979); the relegation of women's capacity to lead sacred and sacramental ritual to the '*ob-scene'* (as again, in the ancient Greek meaning of, 'off-stage') (Ross, 1993; Schneiders,1991. 1986); - these are among some of the body-related themes which have been ably and insightfully addressed by feminist theologians in recent decades. Shortly, I will speak to some remaining body theology issues which continue to exercise

[73] Historians agree that there have been three identifiable waves in the development of feminism as a body of knowledge and as social and cultural criticism, yet there are differences of opinion as to what might characterise the substance of each of those waves. (Rampton, 2008). To underscore the inherent diversity, some authors suggest that a history of 'feminisms' might be more accurate. (Krolokke & Sorenson, 2006). In fact their twinning of a defining logo with each of the perceived waves is helpful for the kind of brief contextualisation that is possible here. Thus, *'Votes for Women'* signals the emphasis of the suffragette movements of the 19th and early 20th centuries; '*The personal is political'* becomes their dense shorthand for the extensive social, economic and cultural questions, provocations and activisms of the second wave, which was deemed to have begun in the 1960s. The third wave is considered to have been born in the final decade of the 20th Century as women who had not experienced much of the social, economic and political inequalities of their mothers and grandmothers began to question the concept of a universal of womanhood, and indeed the idea of a masterstory of oppression and liberation. In this wave, by contrast, difference and contradictions were more openly embraced and challenging insights were articulated from the complex intersection of gender, race, class, and ableism. In some contexts this wave is referred to as *Grrl Feminism* (an amalgam of Girl and Great) and declarative of an unabashed desire to 'readopt lipstick, high heels and cleavage'. 'The Grrls of the third wave', Rampton continues, 'stepped onto the stage as strong and empowered, eschewing victimisation and defining beauty for themselves as subjects, not as sexist objects of patriarchy'. (2008, 2) By others this wave is called, more simply, 'new feminism'.

feminist theological deconstruction discourse today. However, I first wish to draw attention to contemporary feminist theologians who are also *con*structing theological anthropology with theologies of incarnation which , I suggest are deeply challenging, for all who seek to embody the radicality of the Christian message. They are also, I would argue, examples of 'feminist critical hermeneutics which reclaim Christian theology and reconstitute it as a message of liberation and religious agency' (Fiorenza, 1983 p.36).

3.3.8 Rooted in Bodies, Lives and Practice: Feminist Theological Anthropology

Michelle Gonzalez's summary of the content and task of theological anthropology was one of the most succinct I found (2014, 131-132). Having highlighted her conviction that the three key themes of contemporary theological anthropology are: *difference, the body* and *race*, she concludes her summary as follows:

> 'Theological anthropology must remain firmly grounded in the contemporary situation and not fall into abstract speculation that ignores the very materiality of human life. This emphasis on the hybridity of human identity, embodiment and race grounds this theological anthropology and challenges the discipline of theology to remain rooted in lived religious practices' (2014, 132).

Gonzalez's reference to the 'hybridity of human identity', is a rich one and a breaking open of the binaries of black/white, male/female and rich/poor. Rooted in what she calls the Latina/o context (for others 'Latinx') of South American cultures with their Spanish and indigenous confluences in *the Mestizaje,* and indigenous and African cultural confluences in *the Mulatez*, which, together, she argues, not only reflects more accurately the cultural reality of Latin America but is, in fact, an epistemological standpoint. This embrace of the cultural mix and ambiguity of *mestizaje-mulatez* she declares, is furthermore 'a theological starting point'. It is an expression, she emphasises, of solidarity with all other marginalised people of colour (ibid, p.134). Although Spanish cultures, past and present, are expectably present on the Camino de Santiago Pilgrimage, this is not what makes Gonzalez relevant for this research. Rather, it is more her emphasis on *hybridity*, as both a dimension of human embodied identity and as a theological starting point that may have relevance for the pilgrim identity, to which I will return. (In truth, we are all hybrids, as contemporary genetic DNA

testing has proved, despite the desire among some for hypothetical 'racial purity'.)

Gonzalez also quotes from one of the other luminaries of contemporary feminist theological anthropology and political theology, M Shawn Copeland, and she enumerates her five convictions about the anthropology of the human body. Not unlike Godzieba above, Copeland's five includes:

- an understanding of the body as a mediator of divine revelation;
- the significance of the body in shaping human existence as relational and social;
- an emphasis of the creativity of the triune God as revealed through differences in identity;
- an embodiment understanding of solidarity;
- and the role of the Eucharist in ordering and transforming bodies (2014, p.138).

Recovering the body, not only the female body, is considered by both authors as a central feminist theological task. Honouring the fullness of their own identities in terms of both race and difference, Gonzalez and Copeland challenge the way in which incarnational theology has been desecrated by historical slavery, and its current manifestations - the subjugation of economic migrants, the on-going displacement of political refugees, and human trafficking. Copeland would add to this list 'all remnants of the colonizing mind.' Pointing out how Jesus' body was also marked by social and political violence and how his body remains marked in resurrection, Copeland makes a powerful case for eucharistic solidarity as a countersign to violence towards bodies (2009). What she calls the 'solidaristic life praxis of Jesus of Nazareth', his associations with rejected bodies and his willingness to give up his own body, all encourage contemporary Christians, she believes, to identify and critique the ways in which human bodies continue to be rejected, exploited, and excluded.

As these feminist theology scholars testify, the capacity for the suffering human body to find a place of recognition, acceptance and redemption in incarnational theology is immense and is as true of the domestic sphere as the political sphere,

as Elizabeth O'Donnell-Gandolfo exemplifies in her exposition of the power of love and vulnerability. Taking her experience of the challenging aftermath of becoming a mother for the first time as her phenomenological starting point, O' Donnell-Gandalfo explores deeply and intimately the contours of maternal love (2015). The visceral awareness of both the beauty and the fragile vulnerability of her first-born, both as an infant and she immediately realises, 'for-always' as a human being, becomes an initiation for her into a veritable theological conversion regarding Incarnation, embodiment, love and vulnerability. The enormity and the challenges of maternal love, in both its shadow and light, become grounds for her complete reappraisal of divine love. Although the pattern of challenging traits of invulnerability as attributes of God is a strong theme in much feminist theological discourse, O'Donnell-Gandalfo seeks to retain it in one very particular area – the invulnerability of God's love.

> …invulnerability is that dimension of divinity that offers vulnerable human beings…an unchanging love on which to draw for courage, resilience and resistance, in the face of horrors, suffering and violence (ibid, p. 233).

This invulnerability of God's love, out of compassion for a suffering humanity, becomes in the moment of Incarnation, she underlines, the vulnerability of human infancy. Although infants, who survive the vulnerability of their early years, grow into stronger more resilient beings, enduring vulnerability is an unavoidable dimension of their being human, she recognises. Attempting to assuage, protect against and deny that vulnerability is often the reason, she suggests insightfully, that some human beings inflict suffering on others and violate their vulnerability. Therefore, the incarnation of the invulnerable love of God as this vulnerable human infant, 'is a profound anthropological lesson about who we are'. A challenging suggestion that we, 'should aspire to inhabit our vulnerability in a world of great suffering and loss', leads her to this powerful question:

> If even God incarnate embraces relationality and embodiment, along with the dependency and the vulnerability that they entail, then who are we to attempt to eschew these human realities with assertions of autonomy and unencumbered self-control? (ibid, p.234).

She skilfully works with three maternal narratives, the biblical stories of Mary of Nazareth particularly the Nativity, (and in refreshing, embodied detail, ibid, pp.225-239); the personal and political stories of Leymah Gbowee, the Liberian peace activist and Nobel Laureate (ibid, pp.270-310); and finally, the personal account of Mary Karr, (a North American memoirist), as she recounts her childhood with her physically and psychologically abusive mother (ibid, pp. 147-173). The invulnerability of God's love as the ground of courage and resilience in the face of immense suffering, the capacity for solidarity with the vulnerable other, even when your own pain is acute and potentially life-threatening, as well as an ability to consider and then pursue reconciliation processes with the perpetrators of personal, social, and political violence, are just three of the gritty themes Gandalfo-O'Donnell interweaves into her theological anthropology of motherhood.

Gonzalez, Copeland and O'Donnell-Gandalfo present these life-giving and liberating readings and imaginaries of embodiment revealing radical gospel messages of Incarnation of how littleness (the infant body), woundedness (rejected bodies everywhere) and solidarity (with marginalised people of colour) are among the critical challenges of our times.

3.3.9 Extant Issues in the Broader Body-Discourse of Feminist Theology

Jane Moulaison and Sarah Coakley bring us back to the broader canvas of feminist discourse on the body, embodiment and theology of the body. They both critique some of that discourse in important but distinct ways. Moulaison questions the essentialism she believes is present in some feminist theological discourse, particularly that of Harrison, Hayward and Isherwood as well as what she believes are some of their uncritical celebrations of a kind of singular, female-body-positive. Is there a 'curious reaffirmation of traditional sexual dualisms' here, Moulaison wonders, 'except', she continues, now they are in reverse and it is women who are 'especially connected to the divine and to the world of nature' (2007, p.346). She also fears that the language and context of some feminist theology is so, 'out of step', with the language used in Church 'certainly the Churches I attend', she adds, and this leads Moulaison to perhaps her strongest critique of some of this theology - that it seems to be 'far removed'

from the workings and experience of the Christian community, which she considers 'a central feature of theology' (ibid p.349). Where Moulaison's critique develops another point of interesting resonance for the findings of this research, is when she turns to wondering about the location of the Christian woman's body within the body of Christ. She calls for an analysis of how church practices are inscribed upon the gestures and bodies of members in them. She invokes the phenomenological idea of *habitus*[74] - the generating principle which shapes and coheres over time, an internalisation of movements, rules, gestures and other patterns of behaviour into recognisably distinct 'social practice' (ibid, p.354). She argues that, on the contrary to some feminist perception, not all liturgical practices render women's bodies oppressed nor repressed, but rather that liturgical practices can become a place not only where narrow and restrictive gender stereotypes are challenged, but that *the play* of liturgical celebration can 'blur and disrupt the boundaries between divine and human, church and Christ and male and female' (ibid, 356).

Pilgrimage is an ostensibly religious practice and in some cases it includes liturgical elements, and with a long, although in large part, independent association with the local and broader Church. The processes, intrinsic to both pilgrimages of this research, invite pilgrims into a particular *habitus* – a set of practices, gestures, and movements that, in the shorter three-day pilgrimage of Lough Derg, or the longer six weeks-six months sojourns on the Camino - become internalised soon enough to become, one could suggest, inscribed upon the bodies of the pilgrims. The impact of this inscription on the emerging pilgrim identity and the question of the location of the pilgrim in the wider body of the Church are points I will return to in the later discussion.

Coakley takes a much broader lens than just feminist theology and deftly critiques patristic texts, enlightenment philosophy and post-modern discourse of many hues in her 'recontextualistations' of Christian theology. Close to the turn of the millennium, she joined others to explore the relationship between religion

[74] Moulaison draws here upon the work of another sociologist-philosopher with strong phenomelogical influences in his writings, that of Pierre Bourdieu, who developed his theory of 'habitus' to elucidate the complex, sometimes unconscious norms of body, action, thought and expression which help to maintain class distinction and thereby the privileges and reserves of the elite. (See particularly, Bourdieu, Pierre, *On the State: Lectures at the Collège de France 1989-1992* (2019) Polity Press: Cambridge).

(diverse Christian and non-Christian) and the body, and in the *Introductory Chapter* of that text, she acknowledges that 'the explosion of thought and literature on the subject of the body in last decades begs a question of definition that is not easily grasped, let alone answered' (1997 p. 2). She also wonders rhetorically 'why bodies are so simultaneously ubiquitous and yet so hard to get our hands around' (ibid p.3). Coakley suggests that part of the inevitable aftermath of the dissolution of 'grand narratives' in postmodernity, is that the body 'has come to bear huge, and paradoxical philosophical weight, …subject to infinite, variable social constructions'. (ibid). She cites Turner's insight (he of earlier mention and another contributor to this same volume), regarding how the body, under that weight of contesting discourse, has become 'infinitely problematised and elusive' before she offers a simultaneously humorous but stark conclusion:

> Devoid now of any religious meaning, or of the capacity for any fluidity into the divine, shorn of any expectation of new life beyond the grave, it {the body}, has shrunk to individual fleshiness; hence our only hope seems to reside in keeping it alive, youthful, consuming, sexually active, jogging on (quite literally), for as long as possible (ibid, pp. 3-4)

Returning to Catholic Theology in particular, a number of documents penned by John Paul II became the first, discrete and official Church teachings on theology of the body since Vatican II. (See Theology of the Body and the subsequent, Letter on the Dignity of Women, *Mulieres Dignitatem,*[75] considered as akin to a summary of the core content of the former). These texts are recognised as strongly and unequivocally affirming of the dignity and goodness of the human body, as the *imago Dei* of a loving God, in ways that are somewhat reparative of the suspicion of bodiliness and particularly female bodiliness that was more characteristic of some pre-Vatican II theology. Whilst this has been a welcome teaching for some (West 2003), John Paul II's theology of body has also drawn serious critiques from a number of others - Feminist theologians (such as Ruether (1995) and De Franza, (2015) and moral theologians alike (Curran, 2005; Ashley,1985). Emerging Irish scholar, Alyson Staunton offers an incisive and

[75] *Mulieres Dignitatem* was the apostolic letter on the dignity of women by Pope John Paul II and published on 15 August, 1988. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19880815_mulieris-dignitatem.html

comprehensive account of these critiques in her thesis on *Female Embodiment* from the Patristic Era to the present (2019). She notes that the narrow and selective scriptural references drew the ire for some (See Johnson, 2001 and 2015), whilst the old chestnut of the reduction of the role of the female body to her capacity for reproduction is the most problematic factor for others (Sowle-Cahill, 2014). Arguably, the most disturbing critique of official Church theology of the body and its implications for the female body in particular, has come from Tina Beattie. When *Mulieres Dignitatem* suggests 'that the encounter between God and Mary in the annunciation is a unique and decisive moment for women in salvation history, when the mediation of God's covenant through patriarchal genealogies is ended, and woman becomes the medium of the new covenant', it all seems to have exciting implications', Beattie at first suggests. However, she soon begins to argue differently, from what she called 'a closer read'. She notes that *the Letter* is really speaking more metaphorically - of a covenant with the persona of woman, with universal womanhood, the emphasis more on a metaphor for humanity's relationship to God than with actual women. She concludes with the rather depressing summation that *Mulieres Dignitatem* on top of *Inter Insigniores*[76], in her opinion, excludes the bodies of actual women even further, culminating in her quite devastating conclusion that 'the female body is effectively written out of the story of salvation' (1999).

More recently Beattie returned to these themes but in the context of a more constructive, albeit also deeply provocative frame. Beattie is exploring the lens of gender in Scripture (not *through* the lens of gender, as she stresses (2016 p.103). She proposes a new 'playful reading-in' (ibid p.106) of the creation myths in Genesis in particular, given how foundational they are to John Paul II's theology of the body. The substance of her piece which includes insights from medieval and contemporary art as well as from Catherine of Siena's Trinitarian mysticism, deserves a much more thorough 'read and response', than the one precluded here by the delimitations of this work, and as was referred to earlier. However, I would wish to include a couple of points which resonate directly with

[76] *Inter Insigniores* is a document issued by the Sacred Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith with the approval of Pope Paul VI https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19761015_inter-insigniores_en.html

this research work. Firstly, it is her version of the new, organic Christian community, as one sacramentally united with one another in the body of Christ, and beyond social, sexual and gender divisions and a reiteration of Paul's baptismal vision in Galatians 3: 27-28. She stresses how this vision is in stark and incongruent contrast to some of Paul's other teachings, as in, 1 Timothy 2:11, for example (ibid p.112). Might something of this vision of community be among the glimpses caught by contemporary pilgrims?

Secondly Beattie, (and drawing on Gillian Rose), speaks of 'Christian personhood as situated in the space of encounter between the infinity of love and the infinity of law', "a broken middle", which she adds is 'full of ambiguity, tension and paradox'. Yet she concludes with a determinedly biblical hope:

> For those shaped by the Roman Catholic tradition, in this space of finite, fleshy life where hope and desolation together form the shadow dance of the Christian soul, …{we} call out in prayer and not in despair, …in a language of *jouissance* laden with insatiable longings for wholeness and peace…(ibid p. 116).

Apart from these few pertinent points, I repeat the impossibility of giving these important challenges to a contemporary theology of the body, credible attention. I am also aware that in choosing to focus on a reading of Incarnation theology as a fundamental locus of revelation for all human beings, and concentrating on the human particularity of Jesus that it may seem to some that I am avoiding the problem of his maleness. It is likely that the first theology of the body proper I read was Sallie McFague's *Body of God,* (1993) and in defence of my theological choices here and to conclude this section on the incarnated body and *the* theology of Incarnation, I wish to return to her idea that 'every era has its Christ': the Patristic era had Christ ascendant, the medieval era the suffering Christ and the modern era the historical Jesus. The Jesus of the twentieth century, McFague concludes, is 'paradigmatic of God's love for bodies'. Contesting discourses on the theological body are weighty in both senses of the word, and they bring to mind again Turner's observation that the voluminous output has not so much added understanding and perspective as much as to paradoxically render the body somewhat more 'elusive' and 'problematised'. In many ways this dynamic is mirrored in psychological discourse, and it is to the body in psychology that I now turn.

Section Three: The Psychological Body

3.4 The Psychological Body: An Introduction

Similarly to theological discourse, the body in psychology has been equally subject to the socio-cultural-philosophical mind-body dualisms of modernity with its assumed hierarchical movement from the 'lower (less dependable)' matter of the physiological body to the 'higher, more sophisticated faculty' of mind and intellect. The fathers of modern psychology, which is of course a much younger discipline than theology, Freud ('the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego' 1923 p.15), and Jung ('somewhere the psyche is living body and the living body is psyche, …an undiscoverable unity…a unity as dependent on the body as it is on the psyche' 1970), were both explicitly inclusive of the body albeit to varying degrees, in their writings and clinical work. However, it is clear that it has taken many more decades and a myriad of other influences for the body to be considered more holistically by their many followers. The perspective of body as a multidimensional, living, interconnecting organism; dynamically expressing itself in capacities of intellect and will (among numerous other aspects); shaped and re-shaped in profound ways by its relatedness to the environment it inhabits, particularly to other living organisms in that environment; rather than a perspective of body as an individual and distinct, (and a lower) substratum, to these more esteemed faculties, is a relatively recent premise for psychology. I mentioned in the Introduction to this overall review of literature that given the vast scope of the psychological domain, I would narrow my lens to psychology focused particularly on embodiment. Like other human sciences the derivatives of psychology count among their number the applications of psychological knowing expressed and practised in some kind of clinical setting. Psychoanalysis and psychotherapy are two of the more ubiquitous. In turn, psychoanalytic and psychotherapeutic practitioners reflect on their experience in these clinical settings, offering their new learning and insights in an iterative manner which expands and develops the received wisdom on the psychological body. Hence the number of relevant works is legion and the insights are rich and multivalent, requiring choices to be made, which may lead to significant exclusions in what follows.

3.4.1 Phenomenology and Psychology

The work of Eugene Gendlin might be a useful segue into a review of pertinent developments regarding the body in psychology since he was also deeply influenced by Merleau-Ponty in his psychological theorising and in his practical approach to the core of his life's work, a practice which he called *Focusing*.[77] In turn, I continue to develop the conversation between my three main disciplines. Gendlin honours Merleau-Ponty's breakthrough regarding perception as an embodied and constantly interactional process with the environment and yet understands himself as going further.

> I stay close to Merleau-Ponty, but I move further in the direction in which he already moves: He greatly enriches and enlarges what can be meant by "perception." He finds the body's interaction and intentionality prior and presupposed in perception. I move further in these directions (1992, p.341).

Gendlin then argues that despite the interactional breakthrough made by Merleau-Ponty, that 'we have direct, unmediated knowledge of the world and other people through what he calls "the Flesh" (Totton, 2020, p.40), he made a fundamental 'traditional error'.

> Perception inherently involves a datum, clear or unclear, something that exists *for* someone, happens *to* someone, or is present *before* someone. Perception remains a being-for. If one begins with perception, then interaction seems to consist of two individual percepts… Of course one knows that percepts do not exist alone; they pre-suppose a body; they do not float alone, first. But if one begins by considering perception, the percept puts itself first and divides the perceiver off, puts the perceiver behind the percept, and renders the body as merely a perceiver (1992, p.343).

Gendlin insists that a further push is required to give the necessary primacy fully to the body and not first to perception.

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[77] Totton says the central technique of Gendlin's Focusing is: '…to identify a life issue and become aware of a bodily state or experience that accompanies it; then to gently interrogate that "felt sense" until a shift occurs. (Totton, 2020, 30) Although focusing is often perceived as individualistic and non-relational, Gendlin stressed the effectiveness of the method is in its companion dyads, given that "the relationship is of first importance, listening comes second, and focusing instructions come only third" (Gendlin, 1998, 297).

> There is an implicit interactional bodily intricacy that is first—*and still with us now*. It is not the body of perception that is elaborated by language, rather it is the body of interactional living in its environment. Language elaborates how the body implies its situation and its next behaviour. We sense our bodies not as elaborated perceptions but as the body-sense of our situations, the interactional whole-body by which we orient and know what we are doing (1992, p. 352).

While this philosophical argument over 'firstness', may seem somewhat semantic to our postmodern worldview, it is important to say that Gendlin's expression of 'whole-body sensing of our situations', is one of a number of important developments in the psychology of the body during the twentieth century. Returning to my opening thoughts to this section on the clinical applications of psychology, *Body Psychotherapy* is one such application. It is an umbrella term used to describe a cluster of eclectic modalities, interventions and practices that developed particularly during the twentieth century. All of them both draw upon, and, in some instances, serve to re-configure and transform, varying psychologies of the body. These psychologies of the body straddle all the main domains of psychology application, such as Psychoanalysis, Jungian Analysis, Psychodynamic Psychology and Humanistic Psychology.

Interestingly, Gendlin had no wish to reify the practice of *focusing* and preserve it only for students of psychology nor indeed psychotherapy clients, but rather intended it always as a practice of sharpened awareness towards improved well-being for all. He worked to impart it to as much of the general population as possible (aided in time and posthumously, until the present day, by scores of others)[78]. Indeed, a critical element of the practice, the establishment of the '*felt sense'* (in the body), has become a mainstream term far beyond the community of *focusing* practitioners.

3.4.2 The Fathers – and Mothers – of Body Psychology

Some of the other developments in the psychology of the body and body psychotherapy are well documented by Nick Totton (2020) and Michael Heller, (2012). Totton begins by reminding readers that Freud worked quite literally on

[78] See The International Focusing Institute New York at https://focusing.org (which also archives all Gendlin's papers).

the body of many of his patients (2020, p. 16) although his psychoanalytic followers over many decades have a deserved reputation for mostly discarding the body in their client work in favour of exclusively talk therapy (Aron, 1998). Totton rightly credits one of Freud's early disciples, Wilhelm Reich, as the pioneer of perhaps the most innovative and enduringly influential body psychology and clinical practice. When he shifted his focus from *what* a child represses to *how* a child represses, he came to an important breakthrough. He became aware of what he called 'habits of muscular rigidity', in his patients, to which he and they, under his guidance, began to pay acute attention. He perceived that the impact of early developmental and socialisation lacunae or oppressions on the growing child became trapped in the musculature of the body, forming into a kind of body armour which in turn had an impact on shaping the developing character of the person. This idea of body and character armoury was to become foundational to much of understanding of the body in psychology which followed in subsequent decades (2020, 18-28). Alexander Lowen, for example, developed directly upon the work of Reich with his *Bioenergetics* work (1976) as did Ron Kurtz with his *Hakomi Method* (1990) and the founder of *Gestalt Therapy*, Fritz Perls, was an analysand of Reich's.

Other non-Reichian modalities in body psychology which were important and influential developments include *Focusing* as mentioned above, Otto Rank (2010) and Arthur Janov's *Primal therapies*; (1981) Christina and Stanislov Grof's *Holotropic Breathwork* (2010) and Amy and Arnold Mindell's *Process-Oriented, Processwork* Psychology. (See Process Mind, Mindell 2010 or Sitting in the Fire, 2014/1995.) In addition, a number of body therapies developed in which involved direct interventions on the body of the patient/client and with explicit goals of physiological adjustment, improvement/healing, for example Feldenkrais, Rolfing and Craniosacral therapy. The respective founders of each - Moshe Feldenkrais, Ida Rolf and Andrew Taylor were each, in their turn, convinced of and had developed new expertise through their investigative working from a 'whole-system-sense' of the human body.

When Judith Herman began to notice similarities and dissonances between her work with soldiers returning from warzones in the 1970s, and women who had

experienced crimes of sexual violation, she forged the beginnings of *Trauma Therapy* and her writing about her experiences expanded the categories and understanding of psychopathologies of anxiety and trauma[79]. (For example, she is credited as the first theorist to name *Complex PTSD*). Trauma Psychology and clinical treatment of trauma have continued to be significant, perhaps even critical contributors to psychological and physiological knowing about the workings of the human body in recent decades. Pertinent to later discussion on the findings of this research, it is important to mention a more recent adjunct to the field of Trauma Psychology, Thomas Hübl and his developments in the field of collective and intergenerational trauma. His interest was first piqued when he lived and worked in Germany, and when leading contemplative, spiritual retreats with large groups there, he noticed, time and again, spontaneous collective eruptions of pain and anguish among members in various settings, but all relating to similar themes - the continuing impact upon them, in-the-present, of the holocaust and the country's recent historical record of political oppression and involvement in the promotion and implementation of Nazism. This ignited a passionate quest within him to understand better what was occurring and to learn how he and others might work in the collective field on developing healing responses to collective trauma, in pursuit of which he hosts a bi-annual Collective Trauma Summit.[80] Hübl's intuitions about the pervasiveness of collective trauma echoes other discourses and hypotheses regarding group/collective experience such as those found in Systems theory[81] and the Theory of U, (which works to amplify the creativity and intelligence of what it calls 'we-spaces')[82]. Hübl's thesis has also found empirical validation in other

[79] Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* (Pandora Press, 1994) became a signature text in Trauma Psychology and trauma treatment. She was the first to draw parallels between the impact of sexual crime and the impact of experience in warzones and simultaneously critical about the differences in how these experiences were treated and discussed psychologically, socially and politically.

[80] https://thomashuebl.com/collective-trauma-summit-2020-the-power-of-collective-healing/ Most recent event was virtual 108,000 participants from over 100 countries and led by 45 international speakers.

[81] Systems theory is the interdisciplinary study of systems, a study which emphasises the interrelationship between all parts of a system with one another and the constant feedback loop with the system's environment. It underscores how every system is also more than the sum of its parts and classifies systems at a gross level into: active, passive, open or closed. In active and open systems particularly emergent and synergetic activity is common. Growth and adaptation are essential characteristics of systems which survive major change from within and from multiple environmental pressures.

[82] A more recent upshoot of Systems theory can be found in the work of Otto Scharmer, Peter Senge, and others who emphasise the potentiality of the collective to discern and influence the emerging future when it is committed to what could be described as quite contemplative practices of deep listening and attentive presence.

ways, such as from psychiatrist, Dan Siegal among others, who have begun to emphasise again the fundamental inter-relational dimension of not only character development but of brain development and the impact of both traumatic imposition and missing experiences of adequate love, care and affection on the young, developing human. For example, Siegal makes observations such as, 'intergenerational trauma is now epigenetically traceable'.[83] The pertinence of these developments regarding the body in the collective in relation to pilgrimage studies lies in questions and curiosities about both the impact and import of the group and the broader collective dimension of contemporary pilgrimage. I will return to this in discussion on my findings.

As anticipated above in relation to input from Maxine Sheets Johnstone, a parallel track of body-related knowledge and practice, had developed among dance and movement practitioners throughout the twentieth century, particularly among those who created new movement practices tangential to their primary school of dance, (for example, the creation of modern dance from ballet).[84] Totton's inclusion of this significant contribution, contemporary movement and dance practices which are arguably the most authentically phenomenological body processes of them all, is appreciated. So too is his willingness to note that many of the leaders of the Dance/Movement practices have been women, whereas the formal articulation of body psychology/ psychotherapy into human discourse, (until more recently certainly), has mostly been done by men. He helpfully itemises, and names for the record, how a number of those 'leading men' were directly influenced by the work of particular pioneering women in this innovative dance and movement work (2020, pp.66-68). A coming of age of the dance and movement therapy movement is perhaps represented in the prestigious volume published in recent years by Oxford University Press[85]. Although catering to the currency and popularity of the 'well-being' trope, it is nonetheless akin to a mini-library of the history, diversity of practice, growing body of research and an exploration of the philosophy of movement and dance as

[83] From the text of Siegal's (of Mindsight Institute, @ https://www.mindsightinstitute.com), input to a training seminar, *Neural Integration as a Pathway to Resilience and Well-Being*, in Blanchardstown, Dublin 17-18th June, 2019, in which I was a participant.
[84] See particularly the influential work of Isadora Duncan, Martha Graham, and Gabrielle Roth
[85] The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Well-Being, 2017

artistic form. I believe that the accentuated nature of the performative movements and the ritual elements which are core to dance and movement practice and therapies have much to offer by way of understanding better the accentuated movement and ritual actions of pilgrim bodies and hence their pertinence to this research.

3.4.3 The Emergence of Neuroscience

Totton notes however that despite this significant level of creativity and innovation of technique, and increased sophistication of knowledge and application, developed throughout the twentieth century, body psychology and clinical body psychotherapy remained somewhat 'out of centre and quite ghettoised in itself', with some forms of therapy having, what he called a 'cult-like' reputation. He notes this changed with what he called 'the fillip', that neuroscience studies suddenly gave the eclectic discipline from 1990 onwards (2020, p.31). He singles out Stephen Porges and Deb Dana's work on *Polyvagal Therapy* and Bessel Van der Kolk's, *Our Bodies Keep the Score,* for special commendation in this regard. In addition to these I would add a number of other signature works which, I find, combine depth psychology and neuroscience in more layered and substantive ways such as, Pat Ogden et al's Sensorimotor psychotherapy (Ogden, Minton, & Paine, 2006), and Babette Rothchild (2011). Dr Gwen Adshed's work, writings and teachings on Trauma, Pyschopathology, Attachment and Sexuality are particularly scholarly and insightful and not only are they non-reductionist, they are deeply informed by years of experience and practice with actual traumatised persons whose experience of embodiment has been excruciatingly painful[86] (2021, 2020). Totton later reviews the impact of neuroscience studies and experiments on body psychology and clinical intervention more critically, and wonders if in fact they have contributed also to the development of '…a narcissistic and apolitical tone and a blending with "gym culture".' He remains adamant though that, in truth 'really there is no such thing as the "apolitical", and supports Foucault's thesis of the body as always, 'a contested territory for power' (ibid, p.68). Heller's Foreword writer, Phillippe

[86] I was a participant in her *Adult Attachment and Intimacy, Sexuality and Insecurity* Webinar, NScience UK, September, 26th, 2020. Adshed was accompanied in Part 2 of the Webinar by her colleague psychiatrist, Dr. Anna Motz (2009, *Managing Self Harm Psychological Perspectives*, Taylor & amp; Francis Ltd)

Rochat, is decidedly more pointed about the colonisation of body psychotherapy by neuroscience, when he says:

> The new brain enthusiasm comes at a cost and a loss. Because of its necessary reductionist and mechanistic undertone, it eludes the meaning of human experience in all its complexity and all its basic nondeterministic "messiness" (2012, p. xvi).

Aron (1998), Cornell (2016, 2015), Celenza (2020, 2014), Benjamin (2013, 1988), Shapiro (2009), and Fonagy and Target (2004), all write authoritatively and deeply about what Aron summarises as 'the construction of the bodily self'. These too endeavour to resist a reductionist approach and instead are inclusive of the interpersonal, intrapsychic, traumatic imprints of impoverished early attachment patterns (and the consequent impairment of self-reflexivity). They include the imagination, the capacity for forward intentionality, and other conscious and unconscious dimensions of note and importance. Almost all of them defer to the pioneering work of paediatrician Donald Winnicott, as does Susie Orbach. Her ground-breaking work on the body includes all of the multivalency noted above which, as Totton suggests, is 'imperative'. She bravely and regularly enters also the social and political fray (in her books, podcasts, radio and other media work), and explores and explicates there, how contemporary issues like for example, the prevalence of eating disorders and pornography are socio-cultural-political expressions of dysfunction that require systemic, not only personal and familial attention (2019, 2016,1978).

3.4.4 The Psychological Body: A Conclusion

As we have acknowledged elsewhere in this review, human bodies are shaped, challenged, free/unfree, privileged, pained or persecuted depending on the social and political environment in which those bodies 'live, move and have their being' (Acts 17:28). Almost daily, clinicians of many diverse psychological dispositions meet such living, moving bodies whose being is challenged in any number of ways. They do so as therapists who themselves are living, moving, tactile beings, responding to that same context and who endeavour to offer mindful, bodyful presence through listening, companionship and other interventions towards healing and self-discovery. This potted history of the body in recent body-psychology indicates yet another field of fertile and expanding understanding,

knowledge and wisdom, one which equally has much to offer beyond the boundaries of the therapy room. The work may serve to illuminate some of the core aspects of this pilgrimage research - the embodied experience pilgrim bodies and their and others reflection and interpretation of that experience.

3.5 Mapping the Territory: Chapter Conclusions

In relation to the core research question of this thesis as to how pilgrims embody their pilgrimage, I offered a working definition of embodiment in the Introductory Chapter. By way of conclusion to this section on *Mapping the Territory*, I want to return there, via a final distillation from each of the conversation partners. Returning by the road I have just travelled I will begin with psychology.

Totton, describes embodiment as a 'double term', meaning 'both the *state* of being a self-aware organism', and also 'the meta-level *process* of realising and experiencing that we are a self-aware organism'. This sense of embodiment, he elaborates 'means the moment-by-moment experience of our existence as living bodies, with all the joy and grief, pleasure and pain, power and vulnerability which that involves; and a commitment to exploring 'the organismic aspect of our being, without which we cannot exist but which we always have difficulty fully accepting' (Totton, 2020 p.4 & 2015, see Chapter 1). He is also quick to add that embodiment and relationship are inseparable 'to explore one is to explore the other', they are, he says 'the two main aspects of being human' (2015, p. xvi). A web search of 'embodiment' today (June, 2021), yields 47,500,000 results. There are literally thousands of definitions to be found. The briefest definition of worth that Totton came across was from JP Congar, who says simply, that embodiment is 'being at home in your body', in contrast to being 'alienated from it, feeling like a mind attacked by its body'. In response to this simplicity and accuracy, Totton wonders how we might all, 'come back home and as a result gain access to an eco-systemic perspective that respects life in all its forms, including our own' (Totton, 2020, 68).

In contemporary theology there is evidence of a distinctive 'incarnational turn' in discourse and discussion, not as a rhythmic platitude in an Angelus prayer, but rather in the radicality of what Irish writer and poet, Aidan Mathews calls 'a story

that first and last is a story about margins not mainstream, wayside not the way, and the periphery not the centre' (2007 p.12). He reminds that if we wish to bring radical incarnation into the world, it is 'work done in darkness, bewilderment and breakdown'. 'The God of the Gospels' he continues 'affirms life in the real world of horrific reversal, in the upside down of actual calamity' (ibid p.13). Godzieba, O-Donnell-Gandalfo and Gonzalez were among just three named theologians contributing these new and life-affirming readings of our tradition's incarnational heritage and for a new people of a new time.

Such theology and older theologies are and have been shaped by and filtered through, as was outlined, the prevailing philosophies of their time . In our own time, phenomenology has returned us to the fleshy, non-abstract, perceiving, beingness of the lived-body embedded in its living world, and thereby opens for us, all manner of fresh attention not only to limbs and longing but also to the true roots of thinking, conceptualising and meaning-making.

The Pilgrim Body was where we began our mapping of this territory and after attending to important matters like context and those preliminary notes on hermeneutics and experience, the Section highlighted studies which acknowledged the body as the primary "site" of pilgrimage. Some confusion over what is and is not religious in the experience of pilgrimage, was noted among a selection of other pertinent topics. The section concluded with a description of pilgrimage as a layered, living-world process and a definition of pilgrimage as a personal, but relational process, embedded in the heart of that layered and living-world.

In this thesis, I argue that pilgrimage-making is one of the ways that people today are discovering or re-discovering, what Totton above has called an, 'eco-systemic, respectful perspective' on self, other, God, earth and life. Confidence about my argument arises from paying attention to the data accruing from my conversations with pilgrims as they reflected on their experience. Hence, it is time to introduce in my next Chapter, Chapter 4, the methodology I used to gather that data and to describe the analysis process I adopted in order to drill down into the data and enumerate my findings. The scope of my research lens

was turned to focus in particular on the embodied experience of pilgrims, and so as promised at the top of these concluding remarks I finish this review of a selection of pertinent literature with a re-iteration of my definition of embodiment.

> *Embodiment is a state of being in which a person is simultaneously present to the wholeness of their personal beingness, in moment-to-moment relatedness to the larger context in which they find themselves. The nature of consciousness of this level of embodied presence-in-place may vary, (including capacity or willingness to articulate such), but nonetheless, this kinaesthetic, tactile experience continually arises and informs living, moving and being, each passing moment.*

CHAPTER 4: NAVIGATING PILGRIM TERRITORY - THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.0 An Introduction

In this Chapter I recount the story of my pilgrimage research. In her exploration of contemporary pilgrimage research, Collins-Kreiner (2010b) notes how the focus of such research in recent decades has shifted, like much of the literature reviewed in the previous Chapter, toward post-modernism. She describes a recurring theme in the research literature, of what she calls 'discrepancies between the 'old' paradigm, predicated on the assumption that religious elements lie at the core of pilgrimage' and an alternative approach which outlines shifting boundaries between religious and secular, tourist and pilgrim, other social identities and the negotiations of meanings (ibid, p.441). In many respects, in my research, arguably, I am challenging what has been consigned to 'the old paradigm' as well as asking are we reading the new paradigm too narrowly? Or to put it another way, have we been too confined to 'the immanent frame' as Charles Taylor, of previous citation might put it in our view of what might be motivating contemporary pilgrims (2007 p. 539ff)? Either way, my research methodology does not fit easily into either traditional theological routes nor cleanly into this paradigmatic shift of most contemporary pilgrimage research. However, as the themes of my review of literature signalled, I firstly researched with the intention of adopting a research methodology that facilitated my staying close to the lived experience of pilgrims and gave prominence to their voice in the articulation of that experience. Secondly, I sought to analyse my data, and build an interpretive framework of that data, in a way that also includes the theological as it spirals outwards towards a 'negotiation of meaning', to use one of Collins-Kreiner's phrases (2010b p.461).

The Chapter begins by returning to the theme of sacred place of Chapter Two and further contextualises this research study by recounting facts and figures relating to both pilgrimage sites for the years 2018 and 2019, during which the primary data-construction took place. I then describe my research methodology and its intrinsic ontology and epistemology. Next, I detail the various orientation

instruments I used to navigate this pilgrim territory - the brought researcher, the research design and method, the data construction and data analysis processes. As part of this detail, the Research Participants, arguably the most critical element of the entire research process, are also introduced, initially in a general way and in the subsequent chapter by providing more background and biographical details which nonetheless protects the privacy of their personal data. Finally, I describe the ways in which I worked towards achieving data validation and indicate how I interpreted the data so as to arrive at my findings which will then be outlined in detail in Chapter 5.

4.1 Further Contextualisation Data for Both Sites

Facts and figures for the Periods under Study - 2018 and 2019

Staff at both Lough Derg and the Camino de Santiago sites have formal ways of recording data about their throughput of annual pilgrims. This has been most useful by way of giving larger context to the small cohort of pilgrims who participated in my qualitative study. Although both sites record their data in very different ways, I have tried to twin the nearest corresponding sets of data so as to endeavour to equalise the information I make available here, as evenly as possible.

I take each site in turn beginning with basic pilgrim details, for example numbers and sex. Secondly I include illustrative graphs which track pilgrim numbers over a set period- the previous eighteen years up to and including 2018 in terms of on the Camino and over thirty-five years up to and including 2019 in the case of Lough Derg. Thirdly, I borrow illustrative graphs from both sites in terms of seeking information about motivations. It is important to note that the Camino administration system has a very narrow band of options for motivations – Religious/Religious and Spiritual and Not religious. Pilgrims tick what is most appropriate to them at the end of their pilgrimage. Whereas in Lough Derg, a quantitative assessment of pilgrim motivations is not a regular feature of interaction with pilgrims, although many agree to requests to participate in short video conversations and these have been a regular feature of the Island's social media profile for a number of years. However, in 2019 staff on the Island did a

particular study on all their pilgrims of the three-day pilgrimage season. One component of this study researched motivations and a graphic illustration of the outcome of that study is depicted below with permission.

A. Data for the Camino de Santiago de Compostela

As mentioned above the official Camino de Santiago Pilgrimage Office[87] located in the city, a short distance from the Cathedral, is signalled by the queues of chatting, excited pilgrims eagerly awaiting their moment of validation. The Office records basic data as each pilgrim arrives with their *Pilgrim Passport,* many of them delightfully tattered and page-filled with all manner of stamp decorations from churches and cafes all along the route. As a result of this daily encounter with literally thousands of pilgrims, office staff have developed ways of recording an immense amount of invaluable data on pilgrims. Below, see an initial tabling of helpful figures, which will offer a fuller picture of the wider context in which the pilgrim participants in this study were embedded, for the duration of their pilgrimages during 2018 and 2019. The tables outline the overall number of pilgrims for each year, how the pilgrimage was done, sex and age-range statistics, and the most popular starting off points those years.

[87] http://oficinadelperegrino.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/peregrinaciones2019.pdf
http://oficinadelperegrino.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/peregrinaciones2018.pdf

Table Statistics for Camino de Santiago Pilgrims - 2018 and 2019

YEAR	No of Pilgrims	Means of Movement	Sex Stats	Nation of Origin	Age Ranges	Top Start Points
2018	327,378	Walkers 306,064 (93%) Cyclists 20,087 (6.35%) Horseback 318 (0.10%)	No of Females 164,836 (50.3%) No of Males 162,542 (49.7%) No of Females 177,801 (51.1%) No of Males 169,777 (48.8%)	Spain 144,141 (44%) Italy 27009 (8.25%) Germany 25,296 (7.8%) USA 18,502 (5.7%) UK 7624 (2%) Ireland 2,548 (2%)	30-60 179,450 (53.81%) < 30 87,843 (27%) >60 (60,085) (18%)	Sarria 88,509 (27%) St. Jean Pied de Port (France) 32,899 (10%) Oporto (Portugal) 26,839 (8%)
2019	347, 578	Walkers 327,381 (94%) Cyclists 19, 563 (5,63%) Horseback 406 (0.12%)		Spain 146, 350 42% Italy 28,749 8% Germany 26,167 7% Portugal 17,450 5% UK 9,132 3% Ireland 6,826 2%	30-60 189,505 (54.52%) < 30 92,970 (26.75%) >60 (65,103) (18.73%)	Sarria 96,124 (27.66%) St. Jean Pied de Port (France) 33,197 (9.55%) Oporto (Portugal) 27,924 (8.03%)

Table 5: Statistics on Pilgrims of Camino de Santiago 2018 and 2019

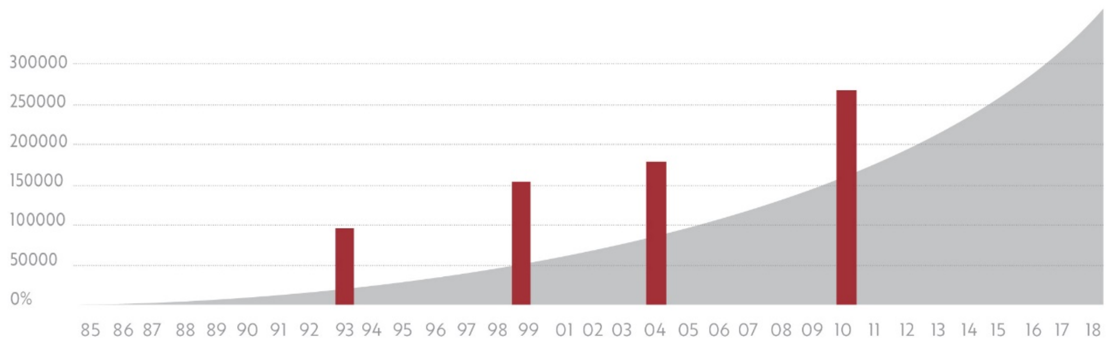

Illustration 6: Bar Graph of Pilgrim Numbers on the Camino 1985-2018

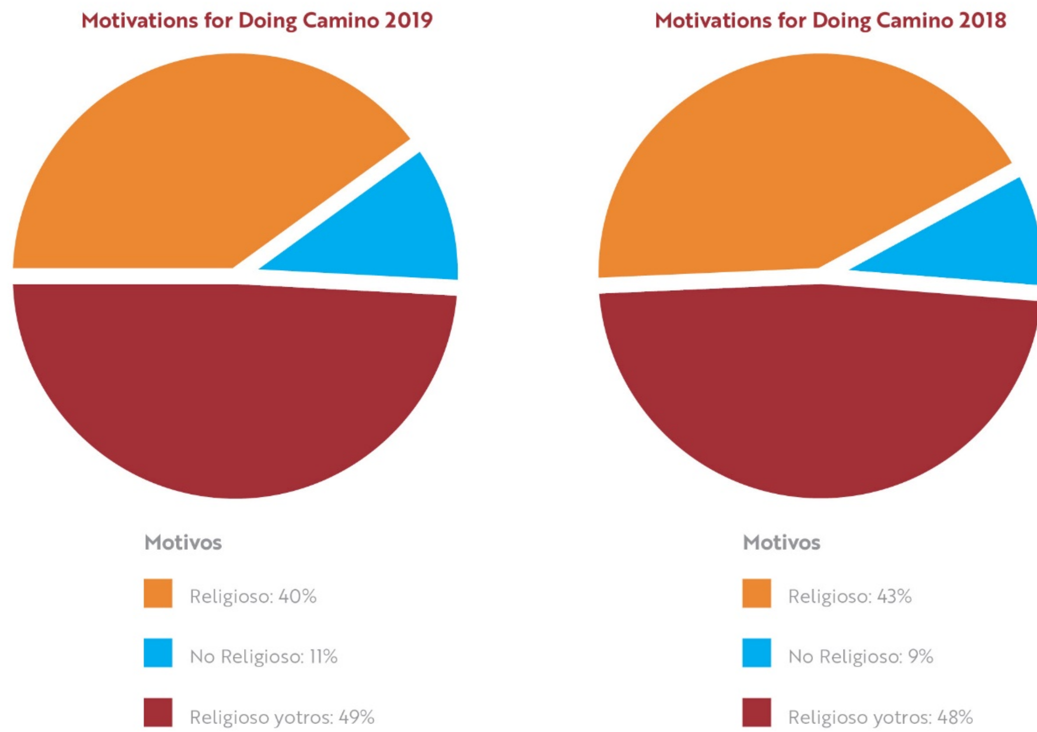

Illustration 7: Pie Chart: Motivations for Pilgrims of Camino de Santiago 2019

B. Data for St. Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg

Year	No of Pilgrims	Sex Stats		Place of Origin	
2018	5224	Female	66%	Ireland (26 Counties)	75%
		Male:	34%	Northern Ireland	24%
				Mainland UK	.5%
				Europe	<.5%
				USA	<.5%
				Rest of the World	<.5%
2019	5269	Female:	70%	Ireland (26 counties)	73%
		Male:	30%	Northern Ireland	22%
				Mainland UK	4%
				Europe	<1%
				USA	<1%
				Rest of the World	<1%

Table 6: Pilgrim Numbers & Nationalities Lough Derg 2018 & 2019

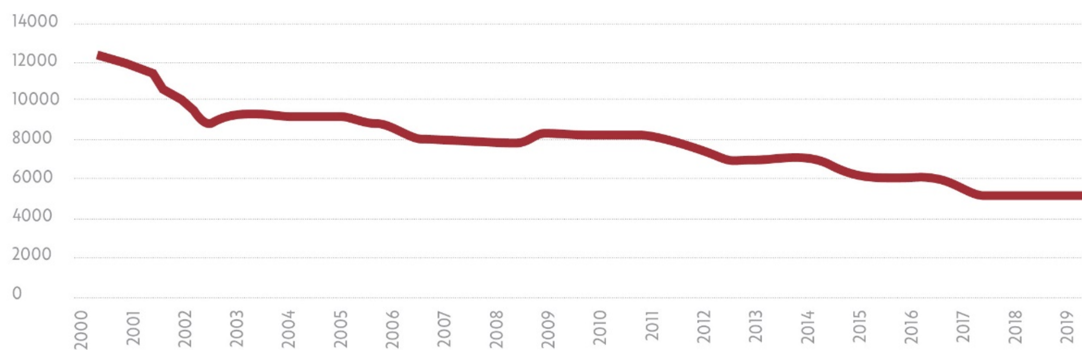

Illustration **Lough Derg Pilgrim Numbers 2000-2019**

Illustration 8: Distribution Graph: Pilgrim Numbers Lough Derg 2000-2019

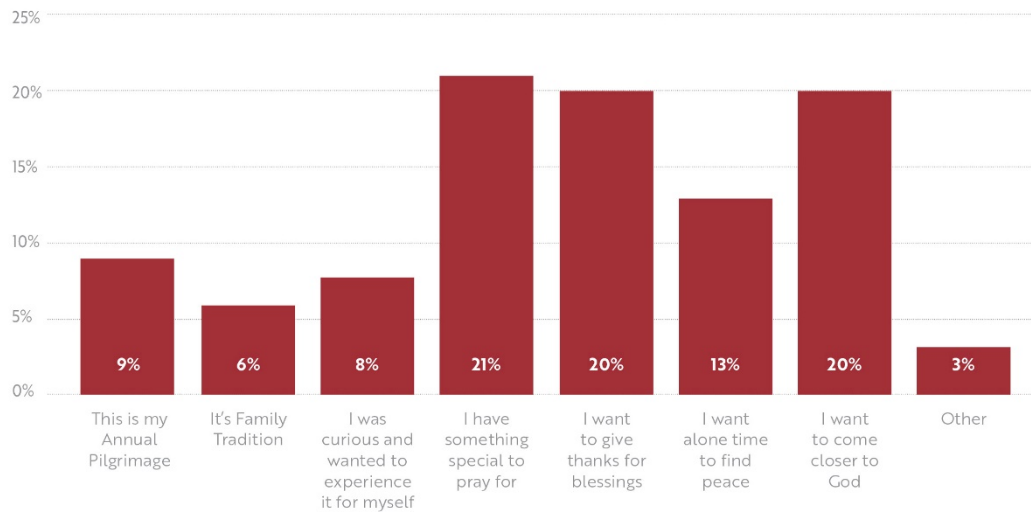

Illustration 9: Motivations for Making Lough Derg Pilgrimage 2019

In terms of navigating the territory, these final sets of facts and figures, from both Pilgrimage Sites, pertaining to the two years during which the research took place, conclude the particularities I can make available in relation to *place*. They help to situate the broader demographic of which the research participants of this study were part as well as raising other possible questions. Next, I proceed to outline my various 'orientation instruments' as I have called them – the research methodology, the brought researcher, the research design and data 'construction' process, the data analysis and, finally, how I approached the interpretation process.

4.2 The Research Process

4.2.1 The Basic Details

Twenty pilgrims who had completed a pilgrimage to either Lough Derg or along the Camino de Santiago de Compostela during 2018 or 2019 were interviewed about their pilgrimage experience. Five of these pilgrims had completed both pilgrimages but over a longer time span. For this sub-group, at least one of the pilgrimages had been undertaken also in 2018 or 2019, with the exception of one, whose most recent pilgrimage had been almost five years previously. The

majority of the interviews were conducted in face-to-face meetings between myself and the interviewee, in a venue most convenient to them. The remainder were conducted remotely, in some cases because the interviewee lived abroad, and in the case of the final few interviews, because of the government restrictions regarding travel and meeting-in-person, due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

4.2.2 The Research Methodology

In the Introductory Chapter, I recounted how my curiosity and interest in pilgrimage, rooted in personal experience, led to this study. As I begin a thorough description of my research process, let me repeat my two research questions:

> How do pilgrims both embody and interpret their pilgrimage?
> How do theology and psychology, in particular, interpret that experience?

The curiosities of my investigation were embodied experience, the meaning of that embodiment for the pilgrim, and how that interpretation resonates or not with theology and psychology. Theology is concerned with questions and concerns of ultimate meaning and psychology is concerned with the meaning of human experience and behaviour. Given that I was asking questions of meaning, the investigative research method I chose needed to be adequate to the task. During the review of literature, I gave detailed attention to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological view of the human body as well as to theologians, sociologists and body psychologists who brought such a phenomenological lens to their own domains and discussions on the human body. As well as discourse, phenomenology has also become an important horizon for research methodologies, particularly so in the human sciences. Phenomenology's appropriateness as applied to my research inquiry, as Spinelli summaries, is because it, 'deals with the attempt to understand more adequately the human condition as it manifests itself in lived, concrete, experience' (2005, 131). In mainstream psychological research the method was further refined and clarified by Eatough & Smith as *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis*, IPA (2017). 'IPA' they say, is concerned with the detailed examination of particulars, first providing an in-depth account of each case before moving to look at patterns of

convergence and divergence across cases. It is concerned with experience, they emphasise, not as in 'the contents of the private mind but rather the *concern-full involvement* by situated participants'. As agents who participate in a meaningful world, Eatough and Smith elaborate, such experience matters and what they termed 'participational-agency', arises from such experience (ibid p.193).

4.2.3 Ontology & Epistemology

Therefore, it is possible to hear again the importance of both experience and interpretation yet this time as to how they are emphasised in phenomenological research methods. In the previous Chapter, I offered an extensive elaboration of the provenance of my use of both experience and interpretation in this particular research study overall. In theological discourse regarding ontology, the territory is again about the ultimate and existential nature of being and existence. In terms of the disciplines of describing my research method there is a requirement to make an explicit acknowledgement of one's ontological disposition. I thereby clarify that I am deploying an *interpretivist* perspective, that is, I work upon the assumption that the interpretation of my research participants and indeed others whom I quote, is the foundation upon which I might construct concepts or any new knowledge. Such an ontological position goes hand-in-glove with an epistemological position which privileges experience. Our ways of coming to know, understand better and immerse ourselves more fully in our world are founded upon our experience, and much of that experience is embodied and relational in nature. In this research study, I wished to give voice to pilgrims and what they came to know through just such an immersion in the world of pilgrimage. As Sloan and Bowe put it 'human science also assumes that lived human experience is always more complex than the result of a singular description and that there is always an element of the ineffable to life. This perspective of human science allows for insight into the complexity and/or broadness of peoples' experience as they engage with the world around them' (2014 p.2). Therefore the strength of a phenomelogical analysis method is its capacity to handle the ever-present complexity of human experience. One of its limitations, as Sloan and Bowe also acknowledge is that it is simply 'hard to get it right' (ibid p. 3); there are so many possibilities when faced with the text of our research participants and their voiced experience. The questions of where to go

to, how to develop the data thematically and how to know what to give attention to, are certainly challenging. One of the ways of ameliorating such limitations is to be as transparent as possible about one's biases and history as researcher and it is to that I now turn. I will address other limitations, for example regarding my data analysis method below and then subsequently more generally regarding the challenges of data reliability and validation using such a research methodology.

4.2.4 The Brought Researcher

Traditional research in the purist scientific models, stressed the need for the detachment and objectivity of the researcher in the research process. However, critiques of such attempts, much of it confirmed by developments in quantum physics[88], challenge the possibility of achieving such pure detachment and objectivity (Oakley, 2003). In recent decades, particularly in qualitative research, there has been an increasing recognition of the role of 'the researcher as an instrument in the research process'. Not to acknowledge the reality and consequences of this involvement, and argue for detachment is considered, by some, to be 'an abuse of power' (Berry, 2018). 'It is through her eyes and ears (and I could add, 'and particular life experience and cognitive lens'), that questions are formulated, data identified, collected, analysed and interpreted' (ibid p.203). Nor is the self we bring to the research, a raw and unmediated one. Rather, the self, according to Berry, is "problematic", in the sense that she is 'a fluid, shifting and fragmented self, constructed in relation to others, gender, culture and ethnicity' (ibid p. 205).

Such thoughts again return me to the triad of conversation ongoing over the period of my research journey, each interlocutor having been afforded voice and perspective in Chapter 3. That conversation continues here as I document these details of my research methodology. I have been attentive to the researchers in feminist theology and researchers in psychology and pilgrimage studies working from a phenomenological disposition. Equally, there are a number of theologians who have also been deeply attentive to this disposition, some of these I have named specifically, for example those who seek to work with incarnation and

[88] See for example David Bohm's, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (1980) Routledge, London

embodiment as 'a fundamental hermeneutic principle' (Godzieba, 2014). Shaped and challenged by these layers of conversation, I made a number of decisions throughout this research process. The first of these was to bring formative and, what I believed to be, pertinent aspects of my personal story to the fore in my Introductory Chapter as a first step in the account of my dissertation process. (See pages 3-7.) The understanding and development of the 'brought researcher' highlighted there, has been further impacted by my engagement in this research study. Morgans, Berry and others believe that *reflexivity* is the instrument that most influences that development and understanding (See Slee et al, 2018).

4.2.4.1 Reflexivity

Berry uses Etherington's helpful definition of reflexivity, describing it as: 'the capacity of the researcher to acknowledge how their own experiences and contexts, (which might be fluid and changing), inform the process and outcomes of inquiry'. Berry continues the elaboration on reflexivity by adding a number of other critical points:

> The experience and self of the researcher is renegotiated in the engagement with the experiences and selves of others, in a process of reshaping and construction of meaning in which both share. Increasingly reflexivity is recognized as an important critical tool, demanding a disciplined self-awareness that makes the presence of the self in the research visible and transparent to the reader. In reflexivity, the writer not only shares her own interpretation and analysis of the material she has gathered, but also makes visible and transparent the impact that the process of research and writing has had on her (Berry, 2018 p. 207).

Reflexivity then, acknowledges the deeply relational nature of primary, qualitative research. The research participants, those who agreed to be interviewed for this study, were a mixed group of people in terms of their position in my relational field, as it were. For example, some were known directly to me, (former students, friends, one I met at a Conference on the Camino) and some were made known to me by others (friends of friends, friends of colleagues, colleagues of colleagues, one who wrote about it online and agreed to be interviewed, after I contacted her and, finally, some recruited by staff in Lough Derg). As Berry says 'rather than being an impersonal voice commenting on the stories of others'

(ibid, 208), I endeavoured to approach the work knowing that these pilgrims were co-constructing knowledge with me, by agreeing to be interviewed, by their willingness to reflect on and interpret their own experience and by permitting their reflections to become part of my constructed data. As I relate then what becomes "our findings" in the next Chapter, it is my hope that I will have maximised their 'narrative agency' (ibid p.208).

4.2.4.2 Researcher Bias

A further element of a reflexive approach is the acknowledgement of the biases that every researcher brings to any significant question or enquiry. I have had a long-time interest in pilgrimage which, as I acknowledged previously, was whetted still further by a personal experience of both pilgrimages included in this study. Prior, visceral experience of the pilgrimages, as a pre-investigation necessity, has been invaluable to me. I also understand that it means that I must exercise due caution, given the inevitable, interpretive filters that all personal experiences create. Equally however, as Corbin and Strauss stress, the beliefs and assumptions of the researcher notwithstanding, important meaning-making can occur because of shared experiences between the researcher and participants (2008). In this study, the truth of this was confirmed for me countless times, for example, when I was asked repeatedly by interviewees - *'Have you done the pilgrimage yourself?* - providing a visceral sense that my credibility and authenticity as researcher, and perhaps even their willingness to 'dig deeper', were all dependent on my ability to answer in the affirmative.

As a practising psychotherapist and long-time reader and life-long student of theology (albeit much of it informally), my perceptual field, regarding the key subject areas of this research, has become more nuanced and complex. While this biographical fact means I bring additional resources and experience to the research, it also adds to the likelihood of additional filtering. It means that I would have been assessing, through such filters, the experiences, perceptions, views, sensibilities and spiritualities of the participants, as the interviews proceeded, and as I transcribed and conducted my analysis. Hence, it was important that I keep interrogating my own negative and positive dispositions in regard to some or all of it. Some of the ways in which I did this were through

frequent self-reflection in my research-journals, conversations with my Supervisor and my Nvivo Tutor, conversations with fellow doctoral students and other members of the Theology department of Mary Immaculate College, particularly during our annual colloquium and, finally, in conversations with other pilgrimage scholars at the annual Sacred Journeys conference, of prior mention.

Phenomenological enquiry 'assumes such an indissoluble interrelationship between the investigator and his or her focus of investigation' in my case, a reflecting pilgrim. Both are said to *co-constitute* one another, and the process of investigation is one of dialogue and disclosure', as Spinelli emphasises (p. 133). Maintaining an interdisciplinary conversation has been an important corrective throughout. I was intrigued that Montuori counts such cautions of the researcher that I have been naming, as 'transdiciplinary' rather than interdisciplinary. His definition of it might serve as a useful summary of what I have been trying to acknowledge by way of the snags and possibilities of my researcher bias. 'Transdisciplinarity is an attitude towards inquiry' he says 'informed by certain epistemological presuppositions and an effort to frame inquiry as a creative process that recognizes as central the subjectivity of the inquirer and challenges the underlying organization of knowledge'. Montuori (2005 p.2).

4.3 Role of the Researcher

In addition to this awareness regarding 'the researcher-in-me', brought to this study, and the relational nature of the endeavour, my triad of influences have offered other helpful guidance, for example about my role as researcher. 'Phenomenology', Spinelli observes 'as applied to psychological enquiry…attempts to establish a more adequate set of criteria for the investigation of phenomena as we actually live and experience them' (Spinelli, 2005, p.131). The primary task of phenomenological research, he continues 'is to illuminate and disclose the make-up, the way of being of any structure in its form of meaning' (ibid, p. 131). The experience seeking understanding in this instance was that of contemporary pilgrims, and in particular, I wanted to stay as close as possible to their experience 'in-the-body', as the pilgrims 'lived and experienced it'.

'The task of theological anthropology in the twenty-first century', according to Godzeiba 'is to formulate an alternative narrative about God, humanity and grace' (2014, p. 106). It must be, he continues 'a more convincing alternative' than some of the vacuous narratives of our time, such as, 'the free market will solve all' or 'celebrities as the mimetic norm'. The great need, he believes, 'is to articulate a narrative that speaks the truth of human personhood, and of God's relation to the person, in a way that speaks to the yearning of the human heart for true happiness, well-being and fulfilment' (ibid p. 107). In my research enquiry, I have been paying attention to such yearnings as expressed by my interviewees, particularly in terms of their motivations for making the pilgrimages and the outcomes of having made them. Attending to both these tasks, the phenomenological, as outlined by Spinelli (*to illuminate and disclose the structure of meaning*) and anthropologically theological, according to Godzieba (*to speak a narrative that speaks to the yearnings of the human heart*), required a number of things of me in my research role. At its most basic it required that I first create a conducive ambience for interviewees so that they might converse and reflect with ease and depth. Secondly, it required that I structured my questions strategically, to ensure both consistency across all interviews and also to ensure dialogue about the key areas of my research inquiry, yet allowing for that freedom of participant-led flow. In addition, it was imperative that I navigated the fine balance of being present in the dialogue as fully and mindfully as possible, aware of all that was "sounding through" my own perceptual field socially, theologically, politically and culturally, and yet, actively 'getting out of the way', consistently enough, to protect the ensuing dialogue from as much manipulation or contrivance on my part, as possible. Having brought to the surface some of my assumptions and presuppositions as researcher, and how this awareness affected the role I assumed as researcher, I now wish to describe the design of my research process.

4.4 Research Design

I found the feminist theology researchers' distinction between 'data gathering' and 'data construction' a thought-provoking and helpful one (Slee et al, 2018). They point out that the data is 'constructed' rather than 'gathered', because it

does not exist independently of the researcher (ibid, p. 17). The format of data construction then which was most amenable to facilitating the kind of dialogue and disclosure I hoped for, was the semi-structured interview. In contrast to a survey questionnaire which pilgrims might have completed in a location remote to me, the semi-structured interview prompted my participants to recall and recount specific memories and tell the story of their pilgrimage, in a dialogical manner with me. In its own way, the conversation becomes yet another experience, a new phenomenon, if you will. As indicated above, the interviews were retrospective, the pilgrimage in question, having been undertaken in the previous year or couple of years. Retrospective interviewing, is a tried and tested method in the qualitative research arena (Flick, 2009 p.158, p.194), even though it is somewhat removed from the tactile-sensual richness of the actual experience that one might have had, for example, if one was interviewing pilgrims in an immersion-type situation, while both they and I were on pilgrimage together. (For example as in Slavin's research cited in Chapter 3, p.80.) More positively, I believe, it opens up the possibility that both the experience of the events of the pilgrimage, and any perspective gained on them in the interim, are both available for inclusion in the interview dialogue. At its core, the semi-structured interview attempts to elicit the meaning attributed to experience by the research participants, which again draws attention back to the pivotal place of, 'the formulation of my questions', which one theorist describes as, 'the one step that essentially determines success in qualitative research' (Flick, 2009 p. 98).

4.4.1 Developing the Questions

Given that the overall research question in this enquiry was particularly focused on the multifaceted nature of the embodied experience of pilgrims, the interview questions were crafted in such a way as to elicit participants' reflection on the physicality of their pilgrimage, the degree of preparation (or none) invested in advance, their memory of the visceral basics, (walking, eating/fasting and sleeping or not) and their accounts of high points and hardships. These were embedded into a larger script of questions which had opening, mid-way and concluding phases. (See Appendix for the full script of Interview Questions.) In the opening phase there were eleven questions mostly of a factual nature such

as – ‘When did you do your pilgrimage?’ or ‘Did you do it alone or with others?’ The purpose here was two-fold, assisting the participant to become more relaxed and at ease and also giving the researcher important practical details about the pilgrim’s journey. A pivotal question in this opening round asked about the participant’s motivation for undertaking the pilgrimage.

In the mid-phase, there were ten questions and these were designed to deepen the discussion and guide the dialogue towards aspects of pilgrims’ experience that may have engendered more vulnerability or difficulty like, ‘what was the hardest part of the pilgrimage for you?’. In addition this section also sought to learn about the level of engagement with other pilgrims and what impact, if any, did these encounters have. Another important question in this mid-section related to the impact of spending long hours out-of-doors on the pilgrimage.

The final phase of the interview process included seven questions which were designed to facilitate the participant to articulate the meaning of their pilgrimage and whether it had any lasting impact on them. For example, returning to the pivotal question of motivation, participants were invited to reflect on how their initial motivation was viewed by them from this post-pilgrimage vantage point.

A sub-set of an additional four questions was reserved for the five participants who had completed both pilgrimages. These sought to elicit how participants experienced the similarities and differences between the two processes; which of them had found more challenging at every level; whether they had a preference and, finally, which of the pilgrimages suited their own, what I had named as ‘spiritual leaning’.

Tarozzi, who was a good guide in terms of Grounded Theory (a helpful referent in my analysis process, as we shall see below), reminds that when the research aim is, (as mine undoubtedly was) ‘to proceed, inductively, and construct a conceptual formulation starting from phenomena and events without the excessive use of pre-established interpretative categories, it has to devise research questions using relatively loose categories and definitions lest it inadvertently constricts the phenomena to be studied inside closed categories’.

He goes on to point out how the concepts which arise in their early formulations need to remain also 'soft and flexible', rather than 'rigidly definitive'. He stresses how important it is that the concepts gradually become more precise through subsequent empirical rigour rather than be shaped *a priori* by what he called 'the consolidated jargon of a certain discipline or field of study' (2020 pp.10-11).

Hence, although I had my *Questions Grid* drafted in advance, I endeavoured to pose them in an open-ended way, and I tried to ensure that the process was flexible enough to include any open, additional question that might invite and allow a participant to elaborate on some aspect or other as the interview dialogue developed. During a critique of the script of questions at an early stage of construction, in one of my College's Research Progression Colloquia, it was suggested that my grid would suit any anthropological study of pilgrimage. The questioner was particularly concerned about the absence of questions of an ostensibly, theological nature. I was aware of this possible reading of the grid and in truth, it took me time to be able to articulate clearly why I intuitively believed it needed to be so. Firstly, Tarozzi's view above helps me to articulate again, the order in which I wanted the theological reflection to arise, always, from experience first. (I have elaborated on this order somewhat in relation to Boeve's Elaboration of Schillebeeckx's Model in Chapter 3, see p.62.) Secondly, in my continuing commitment to reduce the possibility of feeding in from my own personal theological filters, I was strict about what I asked, how I asked it and what I did not ask. When the interviewee used a theological frame or lens by way of reply or elaboration, I freely followed and contributed to the ensuing dialogue. Perhaps most importantly, my careful use of theologically assumptive language was because of my belief that, to paraphrase Godzieba 'alternative, more conducive theological anthropologies will not arise from old paradigms'.

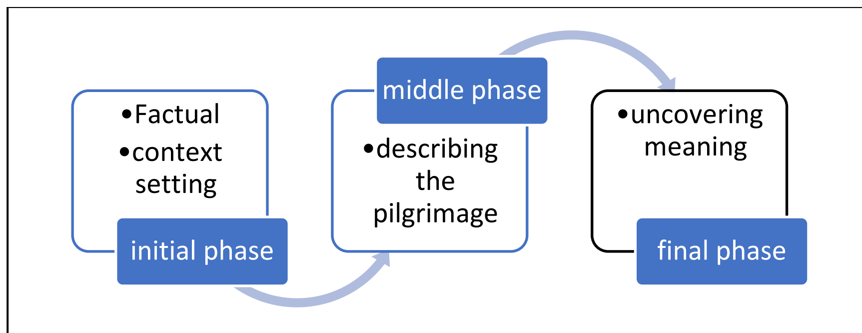

Illustration 10: Question Logic

4.4.2 Protocols and Procedures: Ethical Approval

In June of 2018 ethical approval for the research study was granted by MIREC, (A18-037) the Research Ethics Commission of Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. The application process was rigorous and required detailed information as well as copies of Information and Consent Letters, Promotional Literature and the proposed questions. Potential research participants, as already hinted above were approached and finally secured in a variety of ways. Let me elaborate a little more on these ways.

4.5 Research Study Participants

The Lough Derg Pilgrimage site is staffed and maintained by quite a large group of workers, firstly, a small cohort of more permanent staff (The Prior, akin to the "CEO") / Administration / Communications Manager etc.); and then a larger group of seasonal workers (boatmen/catering/cleaning/retreat & liturgy leaders/counsellors/ guides and general assistants), employed for the duration of the pilgrimage season. Some of the work, for example, staffing the Counselling Service, is offered voluntarily. The Prior and Communications Manager were most helpful in assisting me to recruit participants, through circulating my information flyer, talking to people about the nature of the study and resulting in a list of possible participants with contact details. I then worked through this initial list, securing mutually agreeable dates, times and locations with those who were still prepared to follow-through to the next stage. This led to a second list of interested pilgrims, and as happened with the larger list of Camino pilgrims, it was shorter, but promising. However, upon completion of the interviews which went ahead, I realised I had a gender imbalance in favour of

males, an interesting variable in itself. However such an imbalance does not represent the pilgrim population on the Island adequately, for, as the facts and figures section above indicated, more women than men in fact take the pilgrimage. I returned to the Communications Manager and another short list was worked on willingly. This secured a more credible gender balance in my final cohort of interviewees.

The list of possible research participants who had been pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago, was secured in a manifold way. A first small cohort of potential interviewees was recruited, by attendance (through prior arranged invitation), at a final meeting of a group of intending Pilgrims hoping to do a stretch of the Camino de Santiago de Compostela, beginning the following week. I was invited to speak to the meeting briefly about my study and afterwards a number of individuals signalled interest by providing their contact details. Other pilgrims and indeed the sub-group who had completed both pilgrimages were recruited on a more individual basis, some, as I noted above, previously known to me and others made known to me through word-of-mouth; contacts of members of the Theology and Religious Studies Department; a member of the Department; contacts made at other professional events I attended including an international Conference on the Camino. Finally, one was recruited when I contacted her after reading her online reflections on walking the Pilgrimage in 2018, and she graciously agreed to engage in an interview.

The procedures adopted and decisions made in relation to my sample research group translate in qualitative research literature into what is called 'purposive sampling' (Flick, 2009, p. 122). As my notes below will indicate my sample concurs with three characteristics of purposive sampling – the interviewees, more or less represent a fairly *typical* contemporary pilgrim; secondly, I have aimed at a level of what is called, *maximum variation* within (seeking a measure of diversity from within that typicality), and of course still within certain boundaries; and, finally I have included a sub-group of, what the theorists would call, *critical* cases. A *critical* case is included by researchers to make some aspect or other of the study more especially clear. In this case I deliberately sought out of a sub-group who had done both Lough Derg and the Camino in the hope of making

aspects of the embodiment focus of my study even more clear via such a comparison between the two pilgrimages (ibid, p.122).

4.5.1 Other Notes on my Sample

In my sample, I paid attention to broad demographics in terms of age range, gender and diverse social and educational background. With particular reference to what might be called 'a pilgrim demographic', I also interviewed novice and repeat pilgrims alike, with repeats in the majority. Diversity of race was at the lower range as the more detailed information table on participants in Chapter 5 indicates and there was no diversity in terms of people of colour. This, it must be noted, is also representative of the larger pilgrim population of both sites.

Diverse ethnicity among my group of research participants is also low. This was especially disappointing in terms of Lough Derg as the Irish and English Traveller Populations engage in the pilgrimage in significant numbers, annually. Attempts were made by the researcher to secure participation of representatives from this ethnic group, but unsuccessfully. While a number were willing to converse pilgrim-to-pilgrim, when I did my own pilgrimage, and that was most instructive, none were subsequently willing to engage in the formal interview process. I recognise that such an engagement would have required my using a different, more culturally-sensitive instrument and a longer period of building relational trust, (for example, possibly a facilitated group gathering, a tool which I had used in previous, unrelated research with Travellers quite successfully).

There was also limited diversity of religious affiliation, a majority were baptised Catholics and one Episcopalian, who was formerly Catholic. This limitation in my research sample however was helpful in terms of pondering the significance for the Catholic Church in particular of the enduring interest and practice of pilgrimage-making, in a time of reduced affiliation and practice. Diversity of engagement in formal religious practice was more broadly represented and included, non-practising but 'spiritual', 'non-practising and not particularly spiritual', 'practising regularly' and 'devoutly practising'.

I had numerous other conversations with pilgrims of these or other pilgrimages over the years of the study, many deep and wide-ranging, and in their own way contributing to the overall field of inquiry. However, it is the reflections of these particular twenty, who form the spinal cord, as it were, of my analysis and interpretation.

4.5.2 Introducing my Research Participants

The following table (Table 7) gives an abbreviated picture of my research participant group. A more detailed table with personal and biographical details added will be provided in the next chapter on research findings. It is my hope that its proximity for reference at that stage will be helpful, as I relate pilgrim accounts of their experiences. Anonymity has been preserved through the granting of pseudonyms but it will nonetheless provide a clear sense of their background, age range and at least some hints about life experience.

	Participants	*Camino*	*Lough Derg*	*Both*	*Repeat Pilgrim*
Male	11	2	6	3	9
Female	9	5	2	2	8
Total	**20**	**7**	**8**	**5**	**17**

Table 7: Abbreviated picture of my research participant group

4.6 Research Implementation and Data Construction

Having secured my purposive sample, and formulated my interview-question-grid, based on my overall research questions, I was ready to go into the research field. Semi-structured interviews require confidential spaces in relatively, quiet environments as I wished to record each one in turn, using a small, unobtrusive device. This took a bit of negotiation in some instances. It was of course easier to record the online interviews and the necessary, quiet ambience for these was somewhat easier to ensure, as it did not involve negotiation with third parties.

4.6.1 The Interviews

In the late autumn of 2018, I began the first set of interviews and during the following fifteen months, continued and completed them. The extended time

period allowed for inclusion of both pilgrimage seasons, 2018 and 2019, as well as for the various personal and professional logistics involved in setting up each interview, in the midst of ordinary work commitments. In retrospect, I can also appreciate more now, how the time-gap between some interviews allowed for continued internal ferment in my own reflections, but also ensured a sense of freshness for the next interviewee down the line.

4.6.2 The Transcriptions

I constructed the interview transcriptions myself and this element of the work was also necessarily truncated somewhat by the variety of times and the gaps between interviews. However, as many researchers discover, personal transcribing is a deeply useful exercise, particularly the depth of familiarity it facilitates, in the intonations, perceptions and views of research participants. Their voices become so deeply ingrained that you can recognise the shape and syntax of their quotes at a glance, although these might be scribbled in research jotters among hosts of others. I did have modest assistance from an online application called, *Happy Scribe*. The application translates audio interviews into typed-text. I say modest not because of any difficulties with the quality of its workings as software per se, but rather its clever system could not quite attune to the distinctive, peculiar musicality of the array of Irish accents among most of my participants. However, the application was more useful with both my non-Irish participants. As Flick advises it was important to remember throughout that transcription is not just, 'a technical procedure'. Though a lengthy and time-consuming process, the care taken with this particular stage of the research design implementation translates into the quality of the final documents, and in turn, the quality of the overall data construction process and therefore contributes directly to the analysis and interpretation processes (2009 p. 303).

4.7 Data Analysis - An Introduction

In addition to my growing stack of notebooks from literature reviews of pilgrimage studies, theology and psychology of the body, I now had twenty documents of varying lengths, from twelve to twenty-one pages, of typed conversations with my research participants, the most common length being sixteen pages. I knew there was rich material in these documents, but akin to an underground cave-wall of rough diamond, I had to engage in some kind of process of extraction from that richness, and shape those multiple snippets of conversation into recognisable conceptual units of reflection, so that others too could appreciate them, and so that they might become units to assist learning more about how contemporary pilgrims embody their pilgrimage experiences. 'Knowing is a matter of invention, modes of organisation are not found in the world but built into it. Understanding is creative'. So says Flick, as he tries to explain how knowledge is constructed from experience, when it is mediated via qualitative research (2009 p. 79). He draws on Ricœuer's three stages of mimesis to illustrate the movement we humans engage in, from our tactile, kinetic experiences in and of the world, through to our symbolised representations of that experience in language, cultural artifact and writing. Flick represents this process in a useful diagram (See below, Illustration No.12. 2009, p.78)

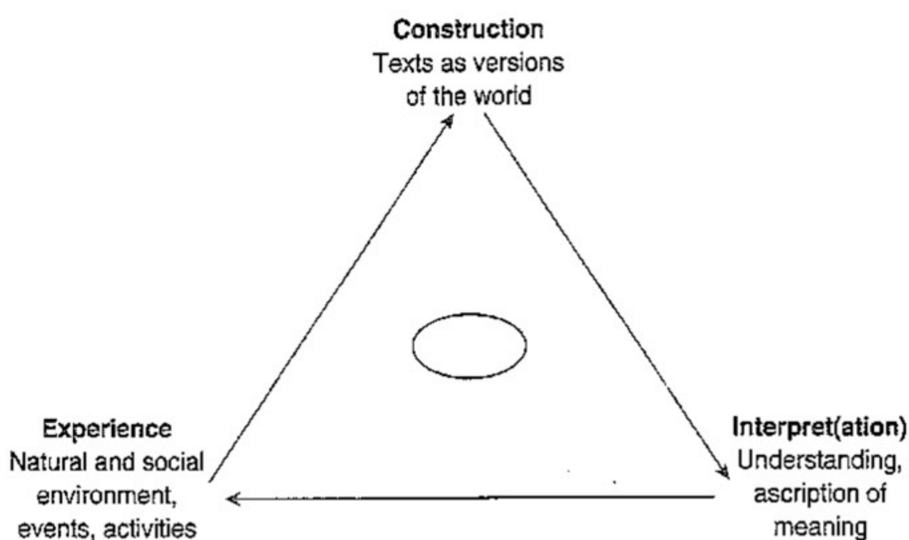

Illustration 11: From Construction to Interpretation

The pilgrims I interviewed had their primary experience of a particular pilgrimage and in our co-construction of data, they recounted their version of 'that lived-world-of pilgrimage'. In a sense, a second stage of 'text-construction of the lived-pilgrimage-world' was required of me as I began the "rough-diamond" processing. This shifted me into data analysis and there were a number of helpful steps that I took which I will outline shortly. But for the moment let me elaborate on Flick's mimetic triangle – the movement from data construction to interpretation.

Denzin & Lincoln offer a most helpful summary of the stages involved in negotiating these three sides of the triangle. I have inserted into their summary, (in blue font), the particularities in my own case. They remind us first that qualitative research is 'endlessly creative and interpretive' adding,

> The researcher does not just leave the field with mountains of empirical materials and easily write up his or her findings. Qualitative interpretations are constructed. The researcher first creates a field text consisting of fieldnotes and documents from the field, … (My Interview Transcripts) The writer-as-interpreter moves from this text to a research text; (My interview Analysis) notes and interpretations based on the field text. (My Memos (see below) This text is then re-created as a working interpretive document that contains the writer's initial attempts to make sense out of what has been learned. (My next chapter, Chapter 5, My Findings) Finally, the writer produces the public text that comes to the reader (My dissertation in its entirety, but particularly, Chapter 5, Research Findings and Chapter 6 Discussion on those Findings). (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005 p. 14)

4.7.1 From Coding to Concepts

As promised above, I will now recount the steps taken in my data analysis process. I needed to engage in a process of data reduction whereby this considerable amount of reflection on pilgrimage experience in hundreds of pages of interview transcripts, my raw data, could be reworked into a more readable

format for myself and others. At the end point of this process I hoped to make a contribution of new knowledge on the contemporary pilgrimage experience. In recent years a number of computer software packages have been designed to make a contribution to the process of qualitative research. By contrast quantitative research projects have enjoyed many decades of computerised assistance, given their more obvious suitability by way of research questions and research outcomes. I had some reservations about a computerised technology as I had a kind of fantasy that it would be a neutralising paradox to hand over my analysis on embodied pilgrimage data to a disembodied cyborg! However, after numerous conversations with committed users and some invaluable, one-to-one training from one[89], I began to use NVivo. NVivo is primarily a most sophisticated way of organising one's data. As researcher, I retained complete sovereignty over the analysis and the boon was that as I inserted that analysis, the computerised system could source and group (and count!) similarities and contrasts, (my 'codes', as we shall see below), with a speed and accuracy that way outmatched more traditional modes.

Coding and decoding are techniques central to Grounded Theory, a methodology whose disciplines I found most helpful in this task of analysing my data. Grounded theory as Tarozzi, (2020) of prior mention, acknowledges, is in fact a constellation of methods. It aims towards generating theory, and theory/knowledge he reassures us, that is 'dense, rational, articulated and systematically interpreted, so that it can account for the reality that is being examined' (ibid p. 5). Tarozzi emphasises that the phenomenological horizon is the theoretical framework underlying his presentation of Grounded theory (ibid p. xi). This means that whatever theory might be constructed, must begin in the data 'a profound and vital rooting in lived experience', as he puts it (ibid p.6). This was very much in keeping with the phenomenological disposition I have endeavoured to uphold throughout the study to date and particularly as regards pilgrims' experience. Another reason that Grounded Theory has been a helpful guide for this stage of my research process is because it is considered

[89] Doris Testa, Senior Research Fellow in Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia is a social scientist with years of experience using NVivo and other software in her own research and that of her students in the human sciences and she agreed to provide training for me. Doris then continued to provide further generous mentorship and feedback as I continued through the stages of my research process.

‘particularly suited to the examination of complex, dynamic phenomena’, whereas other research and analytical methods are more useful to static phenomenon (ibid, p. 8). Pilgrimage, as I defined in Chapter 3 is just such a complex, living phenomenon of many interacting elements. A final element of Grounded Theory that has been helpful in my research analysis, is that of ‘theoretical sampling’. Tarozzi explains theoretical sampling as the progressive extension process that follows the emerging theories and early hypothesising, in order to ‘saturate’ the data by means of gathering further data from other subjects and categories (ibid p.9). This involves first noting resonance between the findings from my small pool of research findings and the larger body of personal accounts of pilgrimage (books, blogs, Confraternity archives, journalistic articles, etc) and across the academic genre of Pilgrimage Studies. The second and advanced task was to immerse the findings into the hermeneutical spiral illustrated in Chapter 3, whereby I would work towards interpretations from my theoretical constructions.

Concepts, Flick reminds us, are the basic building blocks of theory. ‘Open coding in Grounded Theory method is the analytic process by which concepts are identified and developed’. (2009 p. 310) Listening to my audio interviews as I transcribed, and reading and re-reading my transcripts when they were completed, enabled me to ask further questions of the data, to begin to make comparisons and to notice contrasts. I soon began to notice particular patterns and was able to group and categorise these as themes. ‘Thematic Coding’, Flick continues, ‘includes the constant comparison of phenomena, cases and concepts…and leads to the development of theories through a process of abstraction. ‘The codes are formulated first by staying as close to the data as possible and later more and more abstractedly’ (ibid, p. 307). Eatough and Smith describe it well when they say,

> ‘there is a deepening interpretive reading which shifts from foregrounding the {research} participants meaning-making to harnessing that of the researchers. The meaning-making of the researchers includes more abstract properties and reflects their psychological thinking, yet researcher’s thinking is still prompted firstly by the {research} participants’ (2017, p.199).

In the table below (Table 8), I illustrate this movement with a small number of snippets from my data so that readers will note the movement from the co-

constructed text of the interviews to that first level of coding. I had twenty-eight codes when I completed this first phase. (See Illustration No. below for a screen shot of this stage of the analysis process.) The third step involved more of that interpretive layering, moving to what Grounded Theory calls ‘axial coding’. Flick also explains this stage very clearly when he says:

> ‘In axial coding, the categories that are most relevant to the research question are selected from the developed codes and the related code notes. Many different passages in the text are then sought as evidence of these relevant codes in order to elaborate the axial category on the basis of the questions. ...relations are elaborated between the different axial categories {and by linking with one’s overall research paradigm, i.e. “one’s basic set of beliefs which guide actions”, which in my case has phenomenological/psychological and theological dimensions}. From the multitude of categories that were originated, those selected seem to be the most promising for further elaboration. These axial categories are enriched by their fit with as many passages as possible’ (2009, p.312; Note also brackets my own, and including Guba’s definition of paradigm as cited by Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 13)

The final stage is the establishment of theoretical codes, which would become my core findings and iteratively developed from the network of codes and categories.

Name	Files	Referen...	Created on	Created...	Modified on	Modified by	Color
Being Outdoors	20	51	15 Jul 2020 at 13:06	JK	15 Sep 2020 at 18:16	JK	
Everyday practice	2	2	20 Jul 2020 at 09:01	JK	15 Sep 2020 at 18:15	JK	
Catharsis	4	10	15 Jul 2020 at 13:37	JK	17 Aug 2020 at 20:...	JK	
Vulnerability	10	31	18 Jul 2020 at 14:03	JK	15 Sep 2020 at 17:57	JK	
Comparative Insight re bo...	6	18	4 Aug 2020 at 14:41	JK	14 Sep 2020 at 11:25	JK	
EmotionalPsychological c...	11	22	15 Jul 2020 at 13:35	JK	20 Sep 2020 at 14:...	JK	
Fear for personal secur...	2	3	17 Aug 2020 at 16:...	JK	17 Aug 2020 at 17:...	JK	
Enactment of Relationship	13	20	15 Jul 2020 at 12:47	JK	15 Sep 2020 at 17:...	JK	
Growing universal appeal	4	5	17 Jul 2020 at 13:22	JK	17 Aug 2020 at 16:...	JK	
incarnation	2	2	14 Jul 2020 at 09:15	JK	15 Jul 2020 at 13:34	JK	
Lasting impact of Pilgrim...	15	39	18 Jul 2020 at 14:09	JK	20 Sep 2020 at 14:...	JK	
Re-entry after pilgrima...	2	3	17 Jul 2020 at 12:21	JK	17 Jul 2020 at 13:05	JK	
Life Teachings of Pilgrima...	11	27	15 Jul 2020 at 12:59	JK	15 Sep 2020 at 18:...	JK	
Longer term versus short...	1	1	15 Jul 2020 at 13:59	JK	15 Jul 2020 at 14:00	JK	
Moment of deep encounter	2	3	15 Aug 2020 at 16:...	JK	17 Aug 2020 at 16:37	JK	
Moments of transformation	10	25	15 Jul 2020 at 13:24	JK	12 Sep 2020 at 11:46	JK	
Motivations	16	30	15 Jul 2020 at 13:27	JK	15 Sep 2020 at 18:...	JK	
philosopy sociology of pil...	3	7	18 Jul 2020 at 13:53	JK	14 Sep 2020 at 12:11	JK	
Physicality	20	92	15 Jul 2020 at 13:03	JK	20 Sep 2020 at 14:...	JK	
Walking	7	18	15 Jul 2020 at 12:51	JK	15 Sep 2020 at 17:55	JK	
Preparation	17	29	14 Jul 2020 at 09:17	JK	17 Nov 2020 at 18:...	JK	
Realm of Flow Mystical St...	9	23	17 Jul 2020 at 12:08	JK	15 Sep 2020 at 18:14	JK	
Relationship with God	10	25	15 Jul 2020 at 13:02	JK	15 Sep 2020 at 17:...	JK	
Sense of Community	18	62	15 Jul 2020 at 13:38	JK	15 Sep 2020 at 18:11	JK	
Specialness of place	6	11	17 Jul 2020 at 13:18	JK	17 Aug 2020 at 20:...	JK	
Spiritual exercises of Pilgr...	18	61	15 Jul 2020 at 12:55	JK	14 Sep 2020 at 20:...	JK	

Illustration 12:: Screenshot of first level data reduction to 28 possible themes

4.7.2 Limitations of Coding & Use of Memos

One of the first limitations of coding cited by Flick is that by this stage of the analysis the distinction between art and science becomes somewhat 'hazy'. Denzin & Lincoln concur and add not only artistic but by the time they translate into interpretation, the work also becomes political, a point I will return to in the discussion (2005 p. 15). A second limitation is the 'endlessness of options for coding and comparisons… Theoretical sampling could endlessly integrate further cases' (Flick, 2009 p. 316). A pragmatic solution, Flick suggests to this 'potential infinity is to make a break, to balance what was found, and to build a list of priorities' (ibid p. 317). A distinct breakthrough in my own research process was the day I adopted this pragmatic solution and made the break. The instrument most helpful in doing so was a very traditional one, my 'research jotter' which Tarozzi calls our 'memos'.

Initial Codes (My Initial broad analysis)	*Focused Codes (The more frequent themes, 28)*	*Axial Codes (Making Connections)*	*Theoretical Codes (Categories of Embodied experience of Pilgrims, 5)*
Doing it for my grandmother/son/ new baby Doing it with…	For the other…	Significance of close relationships in motivation to do pilgrimage	The Summoned Seeker
Something had been niggling me to do it for a while.. and then I heard that…	Changes in personal situation (or a significant other)	Processing transitions/ life- events	The Summoned Seeker
Going Barefoot The weather /the beauty	How being outdoors was experienced	The bodied self/the embodied self Word Made Flesh The Incarnated Body	Becoming more grounded
Sore knees, thought I was fit, blisters, bites, injuries	Physical challenges	The vulnerable/ resilient body/ the body familiar with suffering	Becoming more grounded

Table 8: Raw Data to Theoretical Code

He describes well the usefulness of these memos, and in ways so close to my own experience, that I believe it is worth quoting this low-key but critical element of the analysis process in full:

> In these memos, the researcher writes the theoretical story of the analytical process, maps the approach he or she has carried out and identifies the directions to be pursued in the future. The analytical reflections written out here build the outline of the theory that will be systematically presented in the final report. They represent an extremely rich wealth of material that accompanies and stimulates theoretical production but does not leave any visible traces in the final product. The reflections in these memos serve as *scaffolding*, and just like scaffolds they are essential for accompanying and supporting the construction of a building but, once it has been completed, they are removed and forgotten about (2020, p. 12).

4.8 Data Validation and Reliability

Qualitative research, by its very nature, is less amenable to the reliability and validity criteria available in the wider field of empirical science, given the subjective and, often, phenomelogical nature of its data construction and data analysis procedures. It is considered more porous to researcher bias, blindness and error than some quantitative methods. Given its 'multi-method approach' and what some consider its 'lack of paradigm purity', there have been many arguments about whether other research methods are superior (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005 p. 2). These arguments have been useful to some extent in that qualitative researchers who instruct research students on the process have named some helpful criteria (Flick 2009;Onwuegbuzie et al, 2012; Sechelski & Onwuegbuzie 2019 and Denzin & Lincoln 2005). It is also fair to suggest that there remains a high degree of responsibility on the individual researchers and their supervisors to pay attention to and be transparent about the details and rigour of the research process.

Hence *reliability*, it is suggested, can be assisted by the overall credibility and procedural dependability of the qualitative method. This involves preparedness to outline in detail the preparation, the research design and approach, the process of ethical permission, all of which I have endeavoured to do above. Reliability, for example, in terms of the findings depends, to a considerable degree, on the clarity with which they are presented. Can the reader, for

example, detect the clear boundary between the research participants perceptions and the researcher's interpretations? I believe I have been sufficiently attentive to that in my next chapter, Chapter 5 when I present research findings. Another criterion of reliability often cited is, consistency across a number of interviewers. This was not a criterion I could adopt as I had personally conducted both the interviews and the transcriptions (Flick 2009, p. 387), which in and of itself provides consistency of approach. Finally, a third area of reliability relates to researcher's transparency in relation to personal biases. I have endeavoured to pay attention to this matter in a number of referred instances previously in the text and again in my section on researcher bias above.

Data validation generally gets more attention than reliability, Flick believes. He also reminds that knowledge, being socially constructed, is notoriously difficult to assess with certainty (ibid, p.387). However, he offers three helpful lists of criteria (ibid p. 394-395). Lather, in her reflection on what she calls her 'seeming obsession' with validation, first defines it as 'the conditions of the legitimation of knowledge in contemporary post-positivism' (1993 p.673). She describes four possible frames for contemporary validity-checking, only one of which, I believe, is applicable to my research, the frame she calls 'rhizomatic validity'. Rhizome as metaphor, as she points out, speaks to the circuitous, networking and non-hierarchical way that such roots operate underground. There is no single root, she emphasises, but rather 'arbitrary branches which can only be mapped not blueprinted' (ibid p. 680). She offers some research examples before concluding that rhizomatic validity is invested, not only in the textual foregrounding of new voices, but also of creating sites in the inquiry where those voices can hear themselves and one another, fruitfully (ibid, p. 681). It is my hope such an approach is evident in my review of literature, my research process and its resultant findings and especially so in my later discussion on those findings.

The ability to enhance the saturation of one's data is another criterion of validation. Saturation is that point when the researcher believes she has retrieved all possible content from the data (Saunders et al, 2018) or as Flick suggested above the moment the researcher makes a break when a significant number of priorities has been reached. Above, I also mentioned Tarozzi's

‘theoretical sampling’ – the task of identifying resonances with other data reserves and theoretical discourse, which I believe I have been doing and will continue to do throughout the detailed illustration of my findings in the next chapter. Sechelski & Onwuegbuzie also stress the usefulness of applying a number of analytical lenses to the same set of data. They offer a long list of options, three of which, I would argue are available in this research process and in the discussion on its findings. The first - *Interpretive phenomenological analysis* which was my primary method as I outlined above; secondly, *Secondary Data Analysis*, which involves the correlation of my primary data with previous studies, which, I believe, has been a significant thread throughout this dissertation and, thirdly and finally, what they call *Framework analysis*. This analysis method is, I would suggest, very similar to the steps I have already outlined above – analysing inductively, allowing for the inclusion of a priori and posteriori concepts as well as identifying, charting, mapping and interpreting (2019, pp.795-797). One analysis method they do not mention is the theological hermeneutic spiral, the engagement of which, I believe may add another layer of depth and complexity to my findings and possibly also to their broader validation.

I add the qualifier ‘possibly’ because the final stage of data validation ultimately involves a significantly larger group than the researcher, and is thereby no longer in the researcher’s hands. As Denzin & Lincoln remind us ‘there is no single interpretive truth. There are multiple interpretive communities, each having its own criteria for evaluating an interpretation’ (2005, p.15). For example, Theological scholars and Pilgrimage Studies scholars in turn, for example, will deploy different criteria of evaluation to assess the outcomes of this research study. As Flick summaries it, the quality of the research process and its outcomes are ultimately confronted by external entities (Flick, 2009 p. 398). This note on reliability and validation concludes my description of my research methodology, paving the way for an illustration of the research’s findings in the next Chapter. Let me first summarise what have I detailed here.

4.9 Conclusion

In this Chapter, in which I described myself as navigating pilgrim territory, I began by acknowledging that my research methodology would not fit easily into either

traditional theological routes nor cleanly into the paradigmatic shift in contemporary pilgrimage research which has developed during postmodernity.

Next I made available some empirical data for each of my two pilgrimage sites by way of further contextualisation of the two pilgrimage sites and processes at the heart of this research.

I outlined again some of the basic factual details of my own research study, and I then described my research methodology, ontology and epistemology. I introduced each of my orientation instruments in turn, beginning with the brought researcher, then my use of reflexivity, acknowledgement of my researcher bias and clarities about my role.

Next, I outlined my research design, clarifying important decisions and actions like, settling on semi-structured interview as my research instrument and settling on twenty participants as my optimum number for detailed analysis. I listed the methods I used to recruit my research participants. I outlined the development and purpose of my interview questions grid, and finally, I noted how I had sought and received ethical approval. I then briefly introduced my research participants, promising further biographical details in Chapter 5 in ways that would not compromise their confidentiality.

Next, I reported on the implementation of my research design. I described what was involved in the interviews and their transcription. From there I described in detail my analysis process and itemised what methods and instruments, I had found helpful. I illustrated the coding process I used in my analysis and I offered a few short sections from my raw data so that I could indicate the stages of movement involved from a sample of participants' conversational reflections and recollections through to my construction of theoretical codes. I noted in particular an important breakthrough when I was able to name that moment of having an adequate number of thematic codes or of "significant priorities" as some researchers call them, one of the recognised challenges in this type of qualitative analysis.

In the final section, I attended to the complexities that come with ensuring reliability and data validation in qualitative research generally and I observed the

ways in which I had sought to address this bearing in mind that the final jury has yet to sit in terms of that assessment.

In the next Chapter, Chapter 5, I will describe my research findings in full which are the outcome of the methodology and analysis process just described.

CHAPTER 5: ENCOUNTERING THE PILGRIM OTHER - A PRESENTATION OF MY RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.0 Introduction

The findings which I present in this Chapter arise from a sustained analytic engagement with interview data from twenty pilgrims of both St. Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg and the Camino de Santiago de Compostela in either 2018 or 2019, as detailed in the previous Chapter on Research Methodology. These conversations, which I was privileged to participate in, were a deep reminder of both the uniqueness of each person and the commonalities of human experience. Levinas is considered to have developed his philosophy 'from a description and an interpretation of the event of encountering another person'.[90] A committed phenomenologist, he describes the foundational basis of this encounter as 'precognitive', thanks to our 'embodied sensibilities'. His life's work was dedicated to a gradual illumination of the impact of 'the other' on the 'self-ego' dyad, particularly the call to respect what distinguishes the other from the self (Treanor, 2006). He offered treatise on, 'the event of alterity', coming from the call to intersubjectivity arising from the other, and he gave remarkably profound attention to the face of the other.[91] His work came to mind as I engaged in the research and analysis process and noted my deepening respect for what these women and men had offered in sharing their experiences. The more I listened, the more their 'otherness' sharpened. My experience of them mirrored an experience that they had also described, and what I had already begun to code as 'an otherness' – as the word that seemed to match best the manner in which the interviewees spoke of meeting other pilgrims on the Camino path or around the stations as it would be in Lough Derg. Similarly, it seemed an appropriate quality to match the way pilgrims spoke of experiences which were beyond the norm and therefore also in some sense, 'other'. Some pilgrims too, as we shall note below, were able to confidently count such experiences as sacred and 'of God', and in that sense in the realm of what is sometimes called 'Ultimate Other'.

[90] Stanford Philosophical Entries 2019 https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/levinas/

[91] Stanford Philosophical entries 2.2 and 2.3.3 https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/levinas/#ThemExpoLeviPhil

Scores, if not hundreds of other pilgrims (this time in the more ordinary sense of 'other'), and their experiences have also come to my attention and occasionally across my path over the research period, through in-person conversations, planned and unplanned, through the many testimonies of contemporary pilgrims who have published, blogged and through those who have participated in the research of other pilgrimage scholars. Hence, for all of these reasons above it seemed fitting to qualify this Chapter, which narrates my findings, as 'an encounter with the pilgrim other', [92]

5.1 Summarising the steps to here

The first research question of this study explored how pilgrims *embody and interpret their pilgrimage experience?* This was the consistent searchlight shone upon the transcript material through multiple stages of data analysis, seeking gradual data reduction, by developing reliable thematisation. The previous chapter outlined this analysis process in detail, the purpose of which was, to arrive at a set of findings that might illuminate the elements which contribute to the enduring significance of pilgrimage as portal to the Sacred for the contemporary seeker.

Table 8 on page 169 illustrated the movement in my analysis from the phenomenological experience of the interviewed pilgrims, through adopting some of the disciplines of the grounded theory approach and finally arriving at a series of theoretical codes. These codes translate into my findings. On the far right column of that Table, the first two findings become clarified in codes which I named as 'the summoned seeker' and the second, 'becoming more grounded'. In all, I came to five such arch-themes, each of which contain an array of sub-themes, some more densely diffused than others. Below, I present and describe

[92] I wish to acknowledge a more negative spin on talk of 'the other' which has also gained momentum in social and cultural discourse in recent decades – that of 'othering', which is in many ways could be read as the diametric opposite to the meaning intended by way of my response to these pilgrim accounts and their responses to other pilgrims. Somatic philosophers and therapists have become more acutely aware of how structural racism, for example, is perpetuated at a visceral level through embodied practices, person to person. (Menakem, 2021) 'Othering' has become the term for a somatic and cognitive practice of distancing from others with a worldview that perceives oneself as the superior and normative human and thereby requiring differentiation from other, lesser beings. It has become a kind of shorthand to describe, in particular, the mindset of structural racism, what Menakem calls 'white-bodied supremacy'.

these findings. I briefly introduced the participants in the previous Chapter on research methodology and in the table below (Table 9), I add their pseudonyms and biographical details. Hopefully these details will help give further context to their accounts, for in this chapter their experience finds voice and the validation of resonance with others. Comparisons, contrasts and paradoxes are delineated and illuminated by triangulation with other pilgrimage research and literature and where appropriate by other pilgrim voices. My second research question concerning *how the embodied experience of pilgrims is interpreted by psychology and theology* brings to my findings the multiple lenses of an interdisciplinary analysis. In Chapter 6, I will develop that analysis further into a discussion on a number of key points suggested by this research. Some of those points will be necessarily anticipated below by the emphases and structure of the presentation of my findings.

5.1.1 The Arch-Themes

In describing the Arch-Themes that I have distilled from my data analysis I will introduce each one in a general way at first and then enumerate the sub-themes contained in that larger theme. The five arch-themes emerging from this research are:

1. The Summoned Seeker
2. Becoming more grounded
3. Ritualising with intent and contentment
4. Meeting the other/otherness
5. Becoming a more expanded, whole person

The order in which I describe these themes became more important as the analysis developed. It could be said to reflect the pilgrim's 'macro-movement' from the early stages of motivation to make a pilgrimage, (the summoning) through three critical phases of the pilgrimage process, (becoming more grounded, ritualising and meeting others), which, in certain measures of potency and degree, can be shown to effect change that can be pitched on a spectrum from incremental to monumental and sometimes with long-lasting impact (becoming a more expanded person).

Table 9: More Biographical Detail on the Research Participants

"Name"	Age	Profession	Nationality	Which Pilgrimage?	Repeat Pilgrim
Arran (M)	25-30	Teacher	Irish	Lough Derg	No
Breda (F)	30-35	Researcher	Irish	Camino	Yes
Brigid (F)	55-60	Catechist	Irish	Both	Yes
Colman (M)	70-75	Psychotherapist	Irish	Both	Yes
Eileen (F)	55-60	Teacher	Irish	Camino	Yes
Eoin (M)	70-75	Farmer	Irish	Camino	No
Fiachra (M)	55-60	Public Servant	Irish	Lough Derg	Yes
Gabrielle (F)	55-60	Psychotherapist	Irish	Both	Yes
Jim (M)	45-50	Medical Doctor	Irish	Lough Derg	Yes
John (M)	55-60	Priest	Irish	Both	Yes
Kay (F)	60-65	Retired Teacher	Irish	Camino	Yes
Lenora (F)	50-55	Professor & Author	American	Camino	No
Liam (M)	50-55	Diocesan Priest	Irish	Both	Yes
Mislav (M	35-40	Web Business Director	Croatian	Camino	Yes
Paul (M)	60-65	Retired Dentist	Irish	Lough Derg	Yes
Rosemary (F)	50-55	School Administration	Irish	Camino	Yes
Sean (M)	45-50	Accountant	Irish	Lough Derg	Yes
Shannon (F)	35-40	Journalist	Irish	Lough Derg	Yes
Teresa (F)	50-55	Homemaker	Irish	Lough Derg	Yes
Thomas (M)	35-40	Editor & Psychotherapist	Irish	Camino	Yes

Table 9: More Biographical Detail on the Research Participants

5.2 Findings: Theme No. 1: The Summoned Seeker

1. The Summoned Seeker
2. Becoming more grounded
3. Ritualising with intent and contentment
4. Meeting the other/otherness
5. Becoming a more expanded, whole person

LeSueur notes that 'people who go on pilgrimage often say that their decision was, in some measure, unusual'. Pilgrims reveal, he continues 'that it was not merely a decision to take a trip; rather, it was more of a knowing that grew and

took hold of them over time…something has called them to make the journey; an inner summons has been heard' (2018 p.22). His insight about his interlocutors reverberates with Brooks' consternation about pilgrims he met on the Camino de Santiago. He quizzed them as to why they were 'taking time to walk the Galician countryside day after day, through boredom, sore feet and terrible hostels', and they were unable to give him, what he called, 'a plausible answer'. He added that they 'sounded perplexed by their own objective, as if driven to make the pilgrimage by some inchoate desire' (Brooks, 2019).

These ideas of 'inner summons' and 'inchoate desire' capture something of the quality of the internal discourse that many of the pilgrims in this study alluded to when asked about their motivations for making their pilgrimage. For seven participants, there was a clarion reason that was particularly motivating and yet the data reveals that there were frequently several factors at play. A glimpse into the internal process of one Lough Derg pilgrim is a useful opening into this investigation of what was and was not a motivator. Arran admitted that one of the main reasons he decided to make the pilgrimage '*had nothing to do with religion at all but was just to get away*'. He then elaborates,

> ...so you know like I wouldn't have been in great form during that summer and constantly on the phone and things like that. And I thought this would be, again out of my comfort zone, something different to get away like you know and... I think that the 'No-Phone' part is brilliant because you completely detach yourself like; like you haven't a clue what's going on off the Island and you don't care either.

From the simplicity and honesty of this first level of reflection, let us parse the deeper contributing factors involved in the motivations for taking and making pilgrimage, beginning with a strongly recurrent one, the influence of another (or 'an-other', as Levinas again might have put it).

5.2.1 Summoned by Close Relationship

For eighteen of the pilgrims, their motivation included some measure of influence from a close relationship and sometimes more than one relationship, as one, John, puts it,

> I was also blessed having good friends who were huge pilgrim people. One of them, sadly, died in 2015 only aged 67 - Paddy. He had done the Appalachian Trail, not as a pilgrimage. Like the Camino that I did is a bit of a doss compared with that. He was actually in danger of being attacked by bears! Yes, he always inspired me. ...He walked from his home place in County Tipperary all the way to Compostela. He went up to Dublin to St. James Church, got his first stamp. Walked to Rosslare then got the ferry across to Cherbourg and then walked all the way through France and picked up the Camino de Frances or whatever you call it. So he inspired me and he used to be always encouraging me to think about it.

Let us return to Arran from the introduction above. He refers to one of his College tutors, a mentor figure, who, later in the interview he acknowledges as someone he, 'deeply trusts', and who first introduced him to the idea of doing the Lough Derg pilgrimage.

> '…He often spoke of Lough Derg and I always heard 'fasting/no sleeping' and things like that. And I just had no interest. But then I said 'do you know what? It's out of my comfort zone. So I'll give it a go'. And then my grandmother as well, she did it years ago. And like she's mentally very sharp, but physically there's no way she'd be able for it now. So it was nice to be able to do it, basically *for* her, like. So there were a few reasons, yeah'.

Hence, in these two short excerpts from Arran's interview, we learn, like LeSueur's pilgrim confidantes above, that he felt something of that 'internal summons, a knowing that took hold over time', when he moves from – 'I had no interest'… to, '…But then, I said to myself, 'do you know what? It will be out of my comfort zone, I'll give it a go'. In addition, his motivation is textured further by his wish to honour his grandmother, to trust his College mentor, his desire to 'get away'; his delight ("*it's brilliant"*) to leave his phone and its many applications behind, and thereby, be offered an opportunity to become, *'completely detached*'.

As Warfield's pilgrimage study indicates primary motivation to make pilgrimage is often 'one step in a larger process' (2014). Elsewhere she continues 'There were typically years of planning, previous connections to the pilgrimage site or people, and events or conversations with others that led to the final decision to embark on the pilgrimage journey' (2013 p. 45). This kind of 'larger process' is confirmed by another of the pilgrims in my study. Lenora, a Camino de Santiago pilgrim, offers the following:

> ‘…Well, of course my husband has Spanish heritage and is from Cuba. Many Cubans have Spanish heritage, unless they have Native or African heritage. And he has a little bit of everything. So he was always interested in Spain because his grandmother was Spanish. But what got him interested in the Camino wasn't just Spain, because we could go to Spain without doing the Camino - it was his father, who's also Cuban and at the age of eighty, he walked the Camino. We were so impressed by that. We kept thinking about it. And so we were reading books about it, being, you know intrigued by it all. And of course his father talked about it as well.

The inspiration of this eighty year old father/father-in-law was intensely galvanising for the couple and her husband’s desire to follow suit grew strongly. Lenora however was more hesitant, for although she loved both travelling and walking she had had a number of surgeries on both her heel and elbow in the recent couple of years.

> … And so I was very hesitant to go… I spoke to my friends and they were like: *What? Are you crazy?...* So I was not that enthusiastic…. As much as I wanted the spiritual part very much and the religious part very much. (I’m an ordained Presbyterian Minister and he’s the Catholic!). I just figured that's not the way I want to get those things, you know? So I resisted it for a couple of years. And he was so interested in it that he finally said, ‘*I'll just go by myself*’. But I'm not one to be left out of an adventure. So eventually I said I’d go. He kind of found a way to get me in, you know.

Again, Lenora permits us to hear some of her internal discourse, her shifting position over time and also how her motivation was coloured by enactments in very significant relationships – hers to her husband and his to her; for both of them to her husband’s grandmother and perhaps most powerfully, the stirring inspiration of her father-in-law.

The motivating relationship in question may also be one known about in the family history but not experienced in any concrete way by the intending pilgrim, like this example from Teresa, who had a mere fragment of a family story.

> The first time - it was a thing which was always in my head because my mother, God rest her, used to talk…she was an only child and lived then in Waterford and I just remember her saying that she brought my grandfather up to Lough Derg to do the pilgrimage but that she didn't do it. Now, I wouldn't have known my maternal grandparents, because they both died when I was little, and even the recollections I have, I am not sure whether they are real or rather through listening to my mother talking about them ‘cause she was an only child. So her family would be very... ammh...I know very little about them although she used to talk about them all a lot. And I always thought that it

> would be nice to do something, like you know, that he had done and that would then be a connection or something with him.

And in Brigid's case, the needs of her brother, recently disabled, were her sole motivation at least for her first and two subsequent Camino experiences,

> My brother had been a mountaineer but had had a stroke which left him considerably disabled. So my husband and I took him to do the Camino for a number of years. I would walk in front of him and we'd put him in the middle, because he had a sight problem too and he was weaker then, (he's much better now, thank God), and my husband would walk behind. He could not do Mount Everest anymore so the Camino answered a kind of a call as to how that part of him might be satisfied. So it was really something very small, but something very important in his recovery.

After one such Camino her brother thanked her for these years of company and sheltered physical challenge but then suggested to her that her next Camino, '*should be just for herself'*. Initially fearful at the prospect of doing it alone, the following year she decided to do just that. She also gave herself permission, from the outset, to have the freedom to return home, should she find it, '*too difficult to be alone'*. She remarks wryly, how in fact her family knew her better, than she knew herself,

> Before leaving I stuck the Camino Map up on the patio door at home and the children said to their father when they saw it, 'You know Dad, she might never come home'!

And this shift in motivation combined with opportunity has allowed Brigid to have much more agency in relation to both her newfound motivation for setting out alone and for her proceeding with the pilgrimage experience overall.

> So from then the Camino became mine, and I wouldn't choose to go on the Camino with somebody anymore. I just like it for itself now. So it's different. It's like a path. I cannot imagine a year when I would not put my toe in the water and go out the door and get going. And I like the whole ... unexpected, what might happen and you don't know who you'll meet; you don't know what you'll be told or what you might share with somebody. It's just amazing. Now it's routine in one way, but then, something fabulous to touch and be involved in, the unexpected, it's like a great seed.

5.2.2 *Summoned in and by 'the Body'*

A subtext in Lenora's motivations above indicates her level of fear about her physical vulnerability in considering taking on the Camino de Santiago, in light of her previous surgeries. Her route of choice was the *Camino Francés* and her plan was to do at least 500-600km of the 845km trail. She was aware that such an undertaking would mean long days of walking, varying ground underfoot and the possibility of further injury and damage. During our interview she recounted at length how much medical advice and clearance and physical therapy she had sought in advance. Hence Lenora's concerns were rooted in her lived-experience-in-the-body before even embarking on the pilgrimage, but notably, not in the sense of appreciation nor trust of its capacity but rather in apprehension and fear that it might let her down in the end or prevent her from completing it.

The motivations of another Camino pilgrim, Thomas, had a similar root in physical vulnerability. Two years before his pilgrimage, Thomas had had a cardiac arrest as he was running a marathon. Luckily for him it was a city marathon as he required emergency hospitalisation and immediate heart surgery. His motivation to undertake a pilgrimage in 2018 became multi-layered. He recalled being surprised at first that, on the surface, this traumatic near-death experience seemed not so prevalent among his main reasons for making the journey. These included celebrating the completion of a recent Master's degree, relocating, as well as a way of processing the recent and very painful separation from his partner. However, as he began to prepare for his Camino he realised that unconsciously the traumatic event loomed quite large in his 'psyche-soma'[93]. For about six months before he began the pilgrimage he realised that,

> 'the physical challenge of endless days of walking was on my mind a lot'.

He had made the Camino pilgrimage some years prior and he would not then have given any thought, he admits, to 'health concerns' for such a trip. However, post his traumatic marathon collapse and surgery, he recounts,

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[93] 'Psyche-soma', derivatives of Greek in both instances and used extensively by therapists, particularly somatic therapists when discussing the psychological as experienced, held and carried and expressed in and by the body.

> 'I was much more unsure of myself and trying not to put pressure on myself in my self-talk and I began saying to loved ones and friends before I left, and indeed to other pilgrims just as we started, that I am just going to keep going until I want to stop and it will be perfectly OK to quit at any time. …And of course there was a fear of a similar cardiac incident recuring on a deserted pilgrim road as opposed to a busy Dublin city street!'

One of the ways Thomas assuaged and managed these fears was to begin to walk intently and frequently in the months preceding his pilgrimage.

> …Yeah, what I did was I began to walk. No matter what I had to do or what I had to get, I walked if at all possible and if the weather wasn't awful. And I also went to the gym quite a bit and tried to gradually increase the pressure on myself physically.

In terms of motivation and preparation Thomas concluded,

> 'So yeah I did prepare for it but I was also prepared to fail, if that makes sense. Yeah that was maybe the biggest preparation – preparing for the possibility of not completing it'.

Using parenthesis for 'the body' in the title of this sub-section brings us back to some of the critical points of discussion on 'body-as-subject' in Chapter 3's review of pertinent literature. We noted there the power of language and discourse generally to shape and codify experience. As Thomas reflects on the contrast between his prior pilgrimage experience and this one, he is touching on that nuance between *having* a body, and *being* body. Some years back he didn't have to worry about 'his body not being up to it'. However, in this more recent experience he had a visceral sense of his vulnerability and he prepares diligently for his pilgrimage but also with wisdom and what I might call, somatic freedom, he also prepared "to fail", i.e. to stop or withdraw if that was in the best interest of his overall well-being . The way he was summoned bodily into this recent pilgrimage was therefore completely new by comparison to his previous experience. As a more consciously embodied being, he is summoned to go again on pilgrimage and all parts of him, including his growing maturity and wisdom and his changed perspective on what his life means, are all available to him as he processes his 'summoning', his decision to go and his preparation for pilgrimage.

For thirteen of the other pilgrims their summons-in-the-body had a less dramatic backstory. For half of the Lough Derg pilgrims, wondering *if* they could do it (i.e.

if they could manage the required physical deprivations and the repetition of the spiritual exercises), was in the mix of motivations; whereas managing long-distance walking over an extended period and being outdoors in the fresh air were stated among the motivating, and for some, galvanising challenges for the remaining two thirds of the Camino pilgrims.

5.2.3 Summoned by religious and spiritual intent

We noted in the Literature Review also that pilgrimage is rooted in religious practice, albeit imbued with some gestures and patterns that may predate formal religion. Also, as noted previously, the particular pilgrimages of this study, in their contemporary form, remain firmly located in Catholic story, culture and spirituality. The motivations of contemporary pilgrims for undertaking pilgrimage are not as uniformly nor as transparently tied to religious intent as perhaps might have been the case for their medieval counterparts. However, for eight of the group of pilgrims researched here such motivation was strongly present.

The concept of intention and intentionality generally became an important one as this research analysis developed, and a topic to be returned to later. But, in the lexicon and practice of Catholic spirituality, intention has particular meaning. To decide to do something, usually something that takes significant time or effort (like a pilgrimage, a novena, or a retreat), as 'an intention' for something or someone else, is often but not exclusively, altruistic, and is a common spiritual practice. Indeed the parlance of pilgrims on Lough Derg often includes talk of 'the intention/s' that brought them there. Liam, a duo-pilgrim (i.e. a member of the sub-group of research participants who have completed both pilgrimages and hereafter referred to as such), for example, recounted how his decision to do Lough Derg emerged out of a conversation by the hospital bed of a good friend who was critically ill. During this bedside vigil, the patient's sister said to him,

> 'If she survives we will do Lough Derg in thanksgiving'.

In the intensity of the moment, Liam agreed, but recalls saying quietly to himself that he would not be doing that, and anyhow, at that moment he believed that it was unlikely that his dear friend would live. He also felt sure that her sister would soon forget this proposal. His friend survived and recovered and he was

held to his promise. Liam stressed how otherwise he might never have considered such a pilgrimage, for, in advance, his overriding sense of it was that it 'seemed bizarre',

> 'All that stuff of deliberately suffering and punishing yourself and reciting rosaries until they're becoming a mantra and walking around with bare feet. It all seems bizarre. I mean, to me it's a kind of "1940s Catholicism" - guilt-ridden, punishing ourselves for our sins, thanking God, trying to earn his love through pushing ourselves and blah-de-blah-de-blah'.

A negative presupposition of the Lough Derg pilgrimage, certainly, but in honour of his friend and her family, he accompanied them and gladly entered the pilgrimage with their shared intention of thanksgiving for her recovery and continued life, which he described as 'a good motivation', and he discovered that,

> 'It {the Lough Derg pilgrimage] works, it shouldn't work… like there's a hundred reasons why it shouldn't work, but it does. That's what I was saying to myself when I came off the island - I don't know why it works, but it does'.

Other forms of more direct religious or spiritual intent were also expressed by others. Shannon, for example, a Lough Derg pilgrim and a journalist, who admitted that her first motivation was purely professional,

> 'I went just kinda' out of nosiness because I thought it would make a good story'.

Yet, soon enough Shannon speaks of a deeper motivation.

> I have in my life been quite religious… I, I suppose I went kinda' wishing that I could get my faith back because I had been really deeply religious as a child. I went to Mass every night as a teenager and I had lost all that. I had completely lost it. So, I think I was trying to get that back in a way. So I thought, you know, if there's one place that I can do it, it's on this island… it's just the motivation of trying to keep the flame burning, trying to keep me.. trying not to fall off the wagon again. Just trying to, you know, renew my faith all the time.

Gabrielle, a duo-pilgrim spoke particularly in terms of the Camino de Santiago and about being very attracted to the whole idea of it,

> I loved the whole idea of it, the idea of being a pilgrim. And in reading about others' experience of it, I loved the whole idea of reflective time and alone time, this was all very appealing to me.

And later in the interview she twinned a more overtly religious intent to this idea of looking forward to simply becoming pilgrim,

> But otherwise, for me, it was mostly about my coming into relationship with Jesus and God… It was about being, being on my own with my God, the God that I have always believed in - who is kind, forgiving, harsh, judging, you know God, God the Father, you know, all these things like any father can be. All of that…it was about *being*, yes. And I find it easier to come into a relationship with God the Father on my own. Not that I can't come more into relationship with other through the Holy Spirit and Jesus, but probably more so, on my own. But, yes, it was about my faith. It was not simply about going for a walk. 'This will be time for me to get a sense of where am I at in terms of my spiritual life and my faith' I said to myself 'and to learn where am I challenged and where I might find the edges for continued growth'. And that stays with me, you know, that clear hope that I had.

5.2.4 Summoned by life-events and transitions

Pilgrimage literature includes several references to the recurrence of 'transition' as motivating factor for making pilgrimage. Such transitions may include a significant change in professional life or can be catalysed by a significant life event, the birth or death of a loved one, or indeed a separation. For ten of the pilgrims in this study too, such factors were in the motivating mix. Liam, Thomas and John all name the space between ending one professional position and assuming another, as creating an opportune time to do the Camino de Santiago. As Liam put it,

> So there was a sense of all that coming to an end. My time in the parish coming to an end and moving on to a new appointment. My mother had died, so there was a lot of endings. There was a sense of taking time and space for myself and having an opportunity to just to do the Camino in a sustained way on my own, checking out a new route. So that was all in there, in the motivation, yeah.

For others the catalyst was even more personal, as for Colman when asked if he remembered his motivation,

> Yes. My grief was mountainous…was abyss like. And I needed a huge space to drop into, to fall into. I couldn't stay around here and find that space. I believed the Camino might give me a vast enough landscape. The fact that my wife, for whom I was grieving, had done it a number of times was also part of it…I had the diary and photographs of her own Camino, so I carried those with me. I felt that this was as close as I could get to her spirit.

And for a third pilgrim the motivation was the personal impact of a professional dispute at work which had threatened to impugn his reputation and good name.

> Basically, professionally I was in a very difficult place, many ongoing difficulties which I couldn't seem to see any end to. And so I went back to Lough Derg to try and ask for some sort of conclusion to the difficulties that I was experiencing. I went three times last year. It was the first time that I have ever done that and it will be the last time.

5.2.5 Summoned by curiosity and a sense of possibility

For nine of the pilgrims their interest in the pilgrimage was motivated by curiosity, curious about their own ability to do and complete it, as mentioned above, but also curious in a more general way about the anticipation of the overall experience of it. Mislav, for example, recalls asking of people '*What is this Camino?'* When he figured out that it was an 800km walk, he concluded it must surely be, '*only for athletes, marathon-types or at least very fit people*'. Certainly not physically fit in this way himself, part of him dismissed it at first, but he admits, 'a curiosity persisted' as he remembers clearly.

> I was curious. And I did some more research. I googled it. I started reading and it really clicked, particularly when I started reading other people's blogs. Yes, I figured out that the Camino is something much more than just a pilgrimage. Much more than just the walk. And it doesn't quite require physical fitness.

And in the same pattern for many pilgrims in this study curiosity, as a presenting motivation for Mislav was textured also by other personal and challenging experiences.

> I decided to go. So it took me about a year to sort things out. And I cannot really articulate what drew me so strongly to the Camino. I know that it was a period in my life where I was definitely in a highly depressed state and you know, total darkness in my life, with no perspective, no hope. And very low self-esteem. I considered myself to be sort of, like a leper, in a sense. Yes, my business failure affected others as well. I felt a total failure, a total nobody and so forth. So, like, you know, I was really down. …And here was something that offered possible comfort, something that might help me break the mould or the mental framework that I was in, even though, I didn't know whether or not I could actually walk those kind of distances.

5.2.6 Summoned by remembered prior experience

As Table 9's listing of Participants above points out, seventeen of the pilgrims in this study were repeat pilgrims. The interview process invited them to try and recollect the motivation for their first experience and some of that data is already included in what is documented above. However, this phenomenon of pilgrims making the decision to return and repeat the pilgrimage is also manifold. For some, a repeat is actually more accurately a continuation, a practical consequence of the way in which the pilgrim has been making the pilgrimage. It is quite common practice, on the Camino de Santiago, for example, for pilgrims to do a certain section of the route on a first visit and to return annually for anywhere between 3-5 years to complete other sections of that route or try out other routes. In terms of Lough Derg, there is a kind folkloric warning to pilgrims not to look back to the island when you board the return boat, as it means you *must* return. In addition, there is a practice of repeating the pilgrimage three times to complete a 'proper cycle of commitment to it'.

Simon Coleman and Ellen Badone both explore this pattern of repeating a pilgrimage in their studies. Coleman wonders if, in contrast to the Turners' idea of pilgrimage as a movement away from the everyday and the mundane to a Sacred Centre out there, that perhaps repeating a pattern of pilgrimage-making is about making the extraordinary a more routine part of the ordinary. Noting the level of return to the Shrine at Walsingham in the United Kingdom he is curious if it is 'also a process of self-conscious repetition, a reinvocation of past visits . . . that draws upon interactions between (individual and group) memory, bodily dispositions and the liturgical scripts provided' (2000, p.156). Badone, mindful of what she calls the 'faded binaries' in prior pilgrimage scholarship, (ordinary/extraordinary; near/out there; centre/periphery;), in her study of the *Tro Briez* pilgrimage in Brittany notes that repeat pilgrims incorporate their return as both special *and* a routine part of their summer (2014b p. 458, p. 465).

As noted for seventeen of the pilgrims interviewed for this study, some aspect or other of the remembered experience of their previous pilgrimage summoned them, quite compellingly, to return. As Thomas again, a Camino pilgrim, puts it,

> 'And I had known from the time that I had walked before that it was…(*searches for word*) I was kind of aware what an amazing feeling it was going to be and what it was going to do for me. And I kind of had… I just knew I needed something like that again, rather than say like a package holiday or something'.

The next four arch-themes will, in part, attempt to unpack the density of 'amazing experiences' which this pilgrim attests to.

In summary then, and in response to my research question *how do contemporary pilgrims embody and interpret their pilgrimage experience,* the data reveals that they are summoned to go on pilgrimage by an intermingling of motivations, arising from their lived-experience of the world – the witness of others, the love of others, love for others and recent challenging and life-changing personal experiences, some of which required a physical and psychological process of transition. Some were keen to underline a primary call. A faith-inspired desire to give time, place and attention to the murmurings of God and Spirit was the primary call for some. While for others that call arose more diffusely, perhaps even ineffably, through a sense of curiosity, possibility and a thirst for spaciousness. The somatic nature, even in this summoning stage, is clear from the pilgrims' responses and is perhaps resounding in the seventeen from whom the remembered, prior pilgrimage is, in part, the catalyst for return. Thus, as bodily beings, the motivations for making pilgrimage for the participants in this research study, were clearly recalled and rarely expressed in the singular.

5.3 Findings: Theme No. 2: Becoming more grounded

1. The Summoned Seeker
2. Becoming more grounded
3. Ritualising with intent and contentment
4. Meeting the other/otherness
5. Becoming more whole

Given the centrality of my research focus on the bodily and physical experience of pilgrims, a significant percentage of both my interview data and findings relates to this area. As Terreault puts it 'the body is the place where pilgrimage happens' (2019). From this plenitude of data, the research process required

coming to a distillation of the impact of the pilgrimage experience on the embodied reality of pilgrims. To name that impact as one of '*becoming more grounded*' helped me to collate a dense concentration of experiences and reflections cited by participants. It also articulates something quite central about the quality of the overall pilgrimage experience as described by those interviewed from both sites. When a pilgrim was able to enter, as fully as possible, the intense physical requirements of the pilgrimage, the dividend, overtime, was found to be deeply energising. Pilgrims found they could be more rooted in the present and the resulting groundedness in the here and now was liberating.

It is important to explicate the meaning of 'grounded', as deployed here. From a psychological perspective, the terms 'grounding' and 'grounded' formed part of a core concept of the work of psychoanalyst, Alexander Lowen, a student of Wilhelm Reich as we learned in the literature review (Smith, 1985). We noted also how the idea of ground was more deeply developed by the School of Gestalt Therapy under the direction of Fritz Perls et al. In the Gestalt lexicon, *grounding,* referred to the process of 'establishing physiological connection with sensations and feelings as they ebbed and flowed (or were constricted) in the body, and, critically, being in strong contact with the ground through the legs and feet' (White, 2014). Neuroscience studies in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, began to confirm scientifically the empirical basis for many of the theories and practices of these early therapists (Carroll, 2003).

The capacities to map and track, with various technological applications, the interconnected, neurophysiological pathways within the human body as well as the energetic shifts and changes caused by any number of stimuli, have all developed exponentially in this newest of sciences. (The eponymous, 'Fitbit', is a good example of the proliferation of such technology). Such stimuli might include, for example the ruminations of our internal world; the duration and quality of our sleep; aspects of our particular psycho-social history; our present-moment contact with other human beings and sentient creatures; our contact with the ground beneath our feet and the impact of the quality of the air around us. (See Damasio 2019, Siegal 2016, Lainus 2015 and Van der Kolk, 2015.) A

number of contemporary theorists use the words ‘grounding’ and ‘earthing’ interchangeably, for example,

> Earthing simply means reconnecting the conductive human body to Earth’s natural and subtle surface electric charge, an {…}activity that systemically influences the basic bioelectrical function of the body. Doing so surprisingly stabilizes the physiology, reduces inflammation, pain, and stress, improves sleep, blood flow, and lymphatic/venous return to the heart, and produces greater well-being (Menigoz *et al,* 2019).

Experiencing physiological and psychological benefits like those itemised in this above quote, particularly *less stressed, improved sleep and greater sense of well-being* were frequently cited amongst the many dividends named by pilgrims on account of their pilgrimage experience.

From a theological point of view ‘ground’ and ‘groundedness’ evoke the Judaic-Christian stories of creation. The powerful metaphoric description in Genesis of the Breath of God, hovering over a dark and formless chaos and creating from that void, a living organism that separated into ground and sky, setting a complex interrelationship in motion which gave birth to the multitude of all living things. Theologically speaking, ‘ground’ is the organic basis for life, the humus of existence and the gratuitous gift of God. An apt dispositional response of the ‘human’, the ‘ground-being’ in relation to this gift of life and existence is one of humility, also derived from humus. The *Book of Psalms* is replete with scores of poems and songs of praise to this God of ground and sky and gratitude, awe and wonder are added to that of humility by way of apt response.

> When I behold your heavens, the work of your hands,
> the moon and stars that you have set in place,
> ‘What is the human that you should bear us in mind,
> the child of Adam that you care for him?
> Yet you have made us little less than gods
> and crowned us with glory and honour’ Ps 8:3-4

Morinis, in a playful use of the Turners centre and periphery ideas about pilgrimage, describes it as ‘the special going out which contrasts to the habitual staying home. It embodies the opposition of movement and stasis, of inner and outer, of centre and periphery’ (1981, p.282). All of life is necessarily grounded, one might say, including everyday life at home, but in the ‘special going out’ of

pilgrimage, pilgrims step out onto the ground of 'an elsewhere' that has all manner of impact on them. Below, the kaleidoscope of sub-themes which merged to form this dense composite finding that pilgrims *become more grounded* , by virtue of their pilgrimage experience, is momentarily re-fractured to look again at what is involved. On the surface some of them might seem unlikely harbingers of well-being. The first sub-theme is preparation.

5.3.1 Preparation

All interviewees were asked about their level of preparation in advance of their pilgrimage. Responses varied all the way from no preparation whatsoever to a six months training programme. The data also indicates clearly the differences in the perception of preparation for these two quite different pilgrimages. For example, phrases like "It's wise to prepare for the Camino" were quite common. By contrast, in the case of Lough Derg, a pilgrim's response might be, 'I am not so sure you can prepare for fasting and that kind of devotional praying'. The data also revealed significant differences in the existing level of fitness and efficacy of the ordinary fitness routines among the research participants. The Camino requires long distances of daily walking over a variety of terrain and for all, bar three of the Camino pilgrims interviewed, some kind of preparation in advance was a conscious commitment.

> I wasn't a walker. I mean, even coming up to it, you know, I had to sort of really decide to do five or six kilometres a number of times a month. I'm actually not a physical-outdoors type of person. Like I don't train, I don't do sports. I don't do hiking. The only exception is the Camino. I don't walk that much, you know. But again, the Camino is different. …I was told there was something called *'The Hikers Way of the Cross'*. It's where you can walk two days around the countryside where individual stations of the cross are located in different churches, chapels or way-crosses or stuff like that. So that was about 20 kilometres per day. So, I just, you know, put on my shoes and started to do that and walking to see whether or not I could – I knew this would be a good test for me to see whether I can actually do 20 kilometres per day.

For two of those who did not do extra preparation in advance, confidence in their existing level of fitness was strong. Gabrielle, (a duo-pilgrim) for example, recalls:

> I was much fitter then. I was in my early forties. I was still running many times a week. I was dancing regularly. I was generally very physically fit. I didn't feel the need to do extra preparation. I was just really looking forward to the whole thing.

Whereas Breda, who would not have had a regular exercise regime, learned the hard way,

> Well, the first Camino I did, I really suffered physically, really struggled, I simply wasn't up to it, but since then I would definitely be more prepared.

For intending Lough Derg pilgrims, prior commitments to specific preparations were few, but six referred to appreciating their level of fitness while there. Arran for example, when asked what kind of preparation he had engaged in admitted,

> None at all. No, I kind of underestimated it, I thought it was one of those things. *'Ah sure, 'twill be grand'*. I had a family function the night before and had a few pints and that's a bad start! It's not until you're actually there that you realize what a mammoth task it is…but, I think, no matter what preparation you'd put in, it's always going to be tougher than you imagine.

And later he added,

> I would be fairly fit, like. I play championship hurling and I train several times a week. And I think that was very important. And it really helps the mental health too And both are a big part, I think, both physical and mental fitness.

Jim concurs,

> I would exercise a few times a week. I would run five or six miles and I mix this up a few days in the week with classes like say, a spin class. I don't think it's necessary to be physically fit. I think it's more of a mental challenge, sure its physically challenging, tiring, but I don't really think if you did a lot of training it would make it any easier. So yes I think yeah the physical challenge is there but it is way surpassed by the mental challenge.

5.3.2 The Summoned Seeker Sets Out

As noted above the first significant movement of pilgrimage-making is the physical act of stepping out. The summoned seeker resolves much of their inner dialogue, the wondering about 'whither and when', and their varying degrees of

preparation, by setting out to begin the pilgrimage. For eighteen of the pilgrims this was recalled as an important moment. A Camino pilgrim, who was going to do it with a group remembers setting out in a declaratively, solo way. Eoin travelled a few days in advance to the nearest town to the planned set-off point to,

> '..just to settle myself into the place, get a feel of it before the others arrived and prepare myself for the first morning'.

Mislav describes the gathering excitement of approaching his starting point.

> 'It was amazement. I vividly recall the moment when I took a train from Barcelona to Pamplona, and saw that first yellow arrow. I was enchanted. I was like, *'Wow, this is really it'*! You have read about all these locations in advance, but now it's, '*Wow, I'm actually really here, and this is the Camino*'. Then I took the bus to St. Jean and, met a few other pilgrims and I started talking to a couple of guys from Denmark and a guy from Germany. And you could sense the joint and growing excitement. "*Wow. We're finally, we're finally doing it*". The first night I couldn't sleep. You know, I was tossing and turning and telling myself, *'You fool! Tomorrow you're climbing the bloody Pyrenees - You should sleep*'. And I couldn't, I just couldn't.

For a number of repeating Lough Derg Pilgrims, the decision to go each new time requires much less advance planning and logistics and, by comparison with the Camino, significantly less travel time. Sean, for example, says:

> I would just simply pick the day and go.

The short trip out to the Island by boat, however, after the bus or car journey to the rural and secluded jetty, was remarked upon by eight of the Lough Derg pilgrims and recalled with a strong sense of a visceral kind of leave-taking, despite its brevity.

Like the attractiveness of holidays abroad or to places at least at some distance from home, pilgrimage-making involves a break with one's ordinary routine and a deliberate choice to step out into the unfamiliar. The contrast in pilgrimage-making however is that the decision involves an implicit assent to take on an anticipated level of discomfort and physical challenge. This implicit knowing is

evidenced by Shannon, Lough Derg pilgrim, who speaks of emboldening herself for the challenges by gathering in family support.

> 'I made my sister come with me! The night before I rang her up, and I begged her - '*Please*!' I said, because I was so afraid that it was going to be really, really difficult. And I thought if it was gonna' be this hard, then I need somebody with me. So if ever I feel bad or if I mess it up, at least she'd be there to hold my hand. She thought about it for a while. And she was like - *'I don't know. I don't know'*. But eventually she decided that she would go as well. So that was my big preparation!

5.3.3 Intense Physicality

In both pilgrimages researched for this study, as has been noted a number of times, the level of physical discomfort can be significant and for many this may increase in intensity over time. However, the nature and cause of this increase in physical intensity is so qualitatively different, as was described in the section on the contemporary rubric of each pilgrimage in Chapter 2, that an unfolding of the more intricate parts of this sub-theme warrants, I believe, separate illustration. Much of the physical activity on both pilgrimages can also be usefully explored via the lens of ritual performativity and I will turn to that exploration in my next finding, on the theme of ritualisation, but here I want to simply concentrate on the phenomenology of the sheer physicality of it.

5.3.3.1 Fasting, Doing Vigil & the Pattern Prayer of the Stations

The brevity of the Lough Derg Pilgrimage, and the intensity of physical exertion involved in the pattern of circling prayer around both small, almost awkward spaces and alternately slightly larger but unsheltered places, often in full exposure to the elements, combined with the deprivations of primary resources like food and sleep, all coalesce to lead pilgrims through an intensely physical experience. Pilgrim accounts suggest that it is both potent and unyielding to any bend of human will.

Before this potent mix is fully embraced, a preliminary physical gesture is required. Soon after arrival, intending pilgrims remove all footwear and remain barefoot until preparing for the return boat journey at the conclusion of the pilgrimage. For the more impoverished medieval pilgrim going barefoot may not

have been much of a contrast, but for the contemporary pilgrim, it becomes a deeply symbolic act. Teresa muses,

> I sometimes wonder if that thing of actually everybody taking off the shoes immediately helps everybody come to the same level... just because you're this or you're the other, it doesn't matter. It really strips you to the bare essentials, that literally all you have is, - is you; it doesn't matter about clothes or whatever, it's down to the bare you and how you deal with it and how strong you are or not strong or whatever...and if you're there to help someone or if somebody else there helps you. We come into the world naked and that's how we will go out of it too.

And by contrast to this sense of 'levelling' observed by Teresa, for Brigid it was the impact of diversity revealed by this symbolic act which struck here,

> Because of your closeness to people as you 'pray the beds', and you are very focused on careful steps, you see how different everyone's feet are and you are reminded of how unique each one of is, and you cannot help but find yourself wondering – *'What other journeys have these feet made?'* Walking around barefoot was a constant reminder of my own fragility and vulnerability.

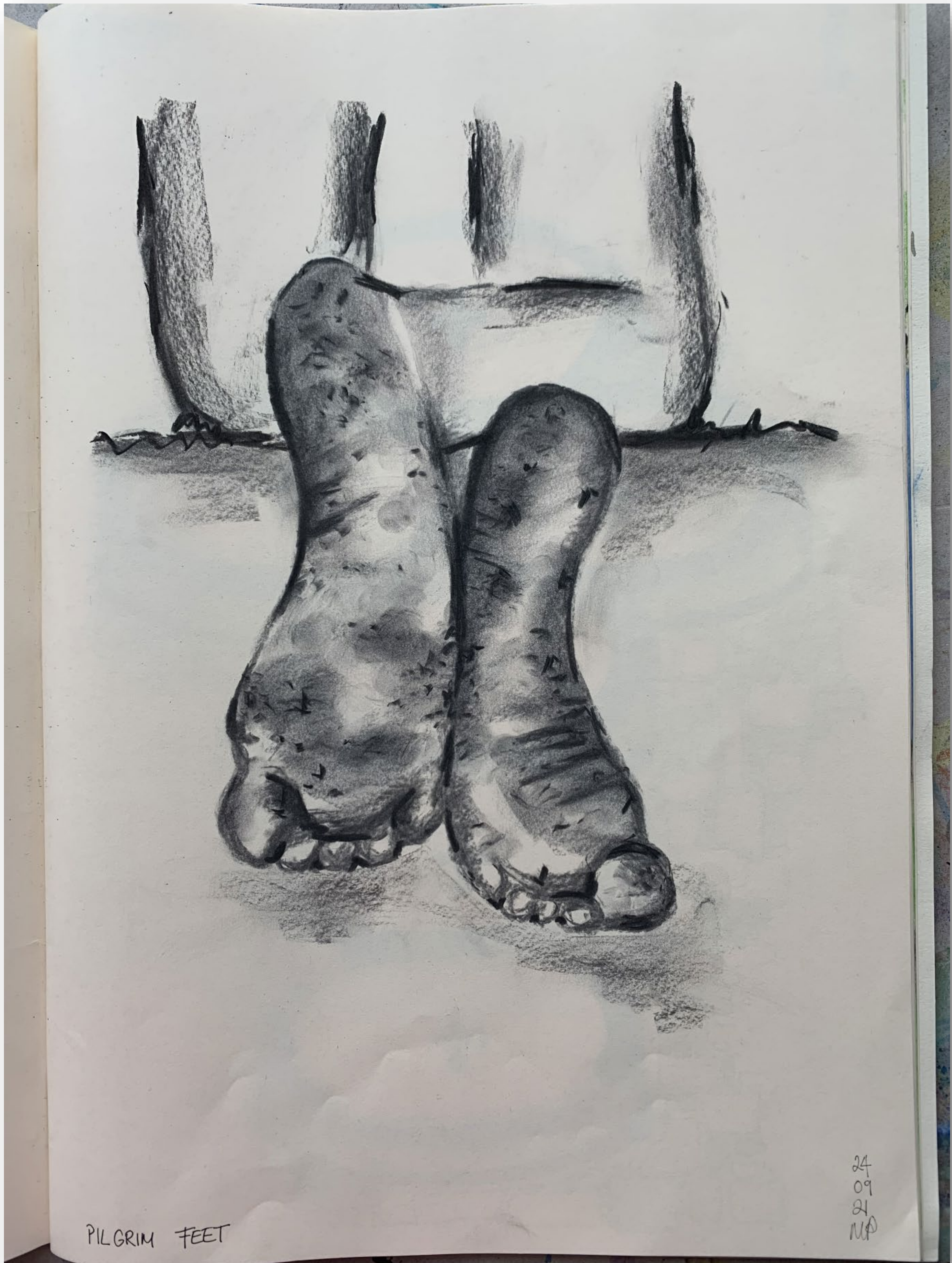

Illustration 13: Going Barefoot

The practice of fasting has re-entered the domain of health and well-being afresh in the last decade or more, after many years of consignment as an outmoded ascetic religious practice of pre-Vatican II Catholicism, in particular. Consequently, its physiological and cognitive benefits have recently been given scientific scrutiny leading to much new data. The long-standing fasting practice on Lough Derg asks intending pilgrims to begin their abstinence from food and all other drinks (including alcohol) and with the exception of water, at midnight on the eve of their first day and to conclude the fast at midnight on their final day, approximately twelve hours after departing the island. Five of the Lough Derg Pilgrims remarked on being touched by the Prior's departing words to them regarding these remaining hours of fasting when he encouraged them to think of them as a kind of final visceral connection between the pilgrim and the Island and its staff. As well as its resonances with Christianity's observance of the Holy Week Triduum, three days, according to the scientific research, is also within the range of time to obtain most for fasting's optimum benefits, for example how, it induces immune system regeneration and shifts stem cells from a dormant state to a state of self-renewal' (Wu, 2014). In addition Fond *et al* say that 'Clinicians have found that fasting, particularly between days two and seven, corresponds with an improvement in mood, an increase in alertness, and a sense of serenity (2013). Challenged, Arran found himself wondering,

> I began to seriously worry about the fasting thing like because when it came towards the end of the first evening, I was so hungry, I just didn't know if I could last…

The fasting was difficult for eight of the Lough Derg interviewees, whilst two of them said it did not 'bother them too much'. For six of those eight, the 'hunger-ghost' was kept at bay by the Lough Derg meal, a once-a-day ration of oat biscuits, dry toast and black tea or coffee. For Paul, however, an experience of extreme nausea on route to the dining area led him to decide to do full abstinence, with the exception of drinking water.

However, all Lough Derg pilgrims agreed that the most difficult part, from a physiological perspective, was the lack of sleep on the vigil night. On the first night of arrival, pilgrims gather close to the eleventh hour in the Island's basilica and begin together a full night of pattern prayer with intermittent breaks. The

vigil concludes with a dawn Mass. For the remainder of that day pilgrims are exhorted not to lie down or nap. Five recounted the memory of the subsequent night's sleep, in the dormitory-like facilities, exemplified by Arran's gleeful recall:

> I've never had a night's sleep like that. I remember being so happy. I was on the top bunk and one of the lads I did it with, was underneath me. I remember just kind of shaking his hand before we went to bed and saying, '*We've done the worst of it like*'. The two of us were in great form. You know I'd say I fell asleep as soon as my head touched the pillow, like. Oh yeah, I remember waking up buzzing like, I was in great form.

The prayer patterns referred to above form the third component of this potent ascetic challenge, and as previously mentioned they are called 'stations' and pilgrims are asked to complete nine of these over their three days. The series of prayers is accompanied by a range of ritual gestures and movements. The table below outlines the stages of one such station in more detail, and also by way of indicating the considerable effort required thereof. Apart from the stations undertaken in the Basilica on the vigil night, which are done in the collective, all the others take place out of doors and at a time and pace of the individual pilgrim's choosing. A challenging part of the station is a circling prayer pattern clockwise around what are called "beds", (four of which are, as was mentioned in the historical overview in Chapter 2, remnants of the monastic beehive huts), and they form a central component of the outdoor stations process. Each bed, dedicated to a different Saint, is a small grassy mound with a cross at centre, and they are in such close physical proximity to one another that they create proximity challenges too for the praying pilgrims as they circle and pray.

Shannon recounts,

> I find doing the beds very challenging. Now, I am a fit lady. I've run three marathons and I do a lot of running. So I consider myself to be pretty fit. But that constant pressure on your feet. I find that very hard. I was almost glad to get to the end of the second day knowing that you didn't have to get up on those beds again. You know the way you can choose to do the last one in the Basilica. I have had enough by the third day but I always admire people who do go back out to do that final one on the beds. But definitely I find them quite difficult on my feet.

Fiachra spoke of how humbled he was observing the devotion of elderly pilgrims willing to put themselves through this kind of intricate physical hardship, 'with their aging limbs and swollen joints'.

Below I include a detailed outline of what is required of a station on the Lough Derg Pilgrimage as it may be a helpful guide to understand the remainder of this section. (See Table 10 below.) [94]

[94] For an aesthetically curated visual of this ritual activity see A PDF guide to the 3 day pilgrimage from loughderg.org

	Ritual Activity
1	**Each station begins with a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, kneeling before the tabernacle in St Patrick's Basilica**
2	**Pilgrims return outdoors, go to St Patrick's Cross, adjacent to the Basilica, kneel down upon the earth, and say one Our Father, one Hail Mary and one Creed; and they finish by kissing the Cross**
3	**Pilgrims proceed to St. Brigid's Cross, which is on the outside wall of the Basilica, they again kneel down and this time say three Our Fathers, three Hail Marys and one Creed**
4	**Standing with their back to St. Brigid's Cross with arms outstretched, pilgrims say three times "I renounce the World, the Flesh and the Devil"**
5	**The Basilica is then circled four times, clockwise, during which seven decades of the Rosary and one Creed, at the end, are prayed silently**
6a	**There are six penitential beds – St Brigid's, St Brendan's, St Catherine's, St Columba's, St Patrick's and the 6th shared between Saints Davog and Molaise.**
6b	**At each bed the pilgrims: walk in circular pattern three times around the outside, clockwise, while saying three Our Fathers, three Hail Marys and one Creed; kneel at the entrance to the bed and repeat the prayers; then walk three times, in circular pattern around the inside and say the prayers again; and, finally, kneel at the Cross in the centre and say these prayers for the fourth time. A slight variation at the last bed – the double one, which is circled six times, while saying six Our Fathers, six Hail Marys and one Creed.**
7	**At the water's edge, pilgrims stand saying five Our Fathers, five Hail Marys and one Creed and then kneel repeating these prayers; after which they, make the Sign of the Cross with the lake water as a reminder of their Baptism.**
8	**Pilgrims return to St Patrick's Cross; kneel down and say one Our Father, one Hail Mary and one Creed.**
9	**Pilgrims return to the Basilica where they began and conclude the station by reciting Psalm 16 (or by saying five Our Fathers, five Hail Marys and One Creed for the Pope's intentions).**

Table 10: Detail of a Single Lough Derg Station

In terms of physical fitness, a striking finding from the data was that among the Lough Derg pilgrims five of them were regular marathon runners, another cycled eighty kilometres twice weekly and yet another hiked twice weekly and yet for each of them the level of challenge they experienced during their pilgrimage was reported as intense. This confirms what Jim said above about how in some ways

the mental challenge surpasses the physical, and he explained that further by adding:

> … You know, trying to maintain your concentration, trying to stay awake. Then the challenge of being hungry and what that does to you and the challenge of you know passing your time into the bargain, especially on the long second day.

And Sean made a direct connection between what he has learned from his marathon running and doing the pilgrimage,

> Yeah well again I see that that long-distance running and Lough Derg have a lot in common. There's the similarities, like because of that thing of getting through the (vigil) night. To me it's very hard to do that. You just have to pace yourself slowly, slowly getting there and eventually you get to the end. I'm not going to go fast, you just keep going. I'm just chip away, when I am running long-distance I can't think of it as 39 miles; it's this 6 and then this 6 and then the next 6. It's just chipping away at both. You just chip off the next rosary and the next station and you get there and all of a sudden, the daylight comes and you're there!

5.3.3.2 Walking

> *'Even the most sophisticated yield to the pilgrim's impulse and even without the superstructure of religion the ordeal of walking makes sense. (*Solnit, 2014, p. 61)

Walking is the key ritual practice of the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage, and although, the official pilgrim office consider cycling and horseback as valid also, as was indicated previously, walkers are by far the largest group of pilgrims. In his ethnographic research, Slavin noted that walking pilgrims did not consider cyclists as '*real*' pilgrims and he believed that their insistence on this social demarcation 'announces also their central reason for walking: to engage in a meditative practice' (Slavin, 2003 p.14). The data in this study by contrast did not find Camino pilgrims, express such a clarity of knowing, in advance, that they wanted to engage in a walking, meditative practice. However, there was much evidence that their experience of walking these long distances day after day had quite a profound impact on them, including a sense of a nourishing meditative

Illustration 14: Walking

impact. In his study of the physiological benefits of walking pilgrimage, Harris concludes that on Camino, the average pilgrim walks 8.3 km per day, which, he added represents a 2.7 fold increase in physical activity for the average person. This, he underscores with comparative evidence, is a considerable extra stress on the body (2019). Nine of the pilgrims in my study referred to walking approximately 20-22km per day. When shorter or longer distances were undertaken, pilgrims were able to articulate why they were necessary, either for logistical necessity or for personal reasons on a particular day. Rosemary is quite certain about the impact of walking for her,

> And personally speaking I would love if it could have been even a bit more challenging! I'd love to have walked more miles. You might only walk twelve miles or so (almost 20km) but I would have like to do longer. But then again you accept other people's limitations, no matter… It all ties in with the walking, like in a spiritual way. Like I know the walking has helped my whole spirit, Mass and my prayer, everything. Sometimes when I would be walking along and there would be this most beautiful, beautiful scenery in front of me. And I just wanted to praise God and thank God so

> much for all this and that he's brought me and my family through. Does that make sense?

Kay is not exactly sure why the walking benefits her so much but she senses that,

> …it has something to do with the rhythm of it and the discipline of the walking, there is just something about it and you don't have people hanging out of you and you just keep walking and seeing and something even happens your thinking, it just relaxes you or something.

And Gabrielle articulated how all-absorbing the walking becomes as the pilgrimage proceeds,

> Another surprise for me was the ease of my sleeping, you know, because it was simply a means to an end for me…because sleep was only to allow my body to rest a little in order to be able to walk even more. All of my emphasis was on the fact that I wanted to walk. I just longed, I longed for the daylight so I could be walking again.

5.3.4 Being outdoors

When Robert Mac Farlane, a keen pilgrim himself, sought to understand the contemporary revival in pilgrimage-making, he observed that most men and women he would meet on such journeys and trails, were people 'for whom landscape and walking were vital to life' (2012). The spectrum of immediate response to my interview question: '*How important or significant was it that this pilgrimage experience is largely an out-of-doors one*?' was broad and textured.

Paul, a thirty-one times repeat Lough Derg pilgrim stopped short at the question and replied: '*I never actually thought about that before'*. Once over his surprise at the question, he continued in a rich vein, realising that it was *so* integral was possibly why he hadn't seen it, *'like the Inuit and snow'*, he chimed. He added that he could not imagine the Lough Derg pilgrimage surviving if it were to become an indoor thing,

> 'I've been bitten by the midges and baked by the sun and soaked by the rain and blown over by the wind and it's all part of the experience, you adjust, dry off and carry on'.

Camino de Santiago Pilgrim, Gabrielle's response was much less uncertain and by contrast she immediately responded:

> 'It was the most important thing for me! Oh yeah, yeah. I loved that. I loved that they put a kind of formal structure around it and that the purpose of it, in order to achieve the objective of it, of the pilgrimage, like, was that requirement to be outdoors for days on end – I loved that. Because all I wanted to do was walk and I would happily have walked through the night, only for it was too dark.'

The quotidian of almost all research participants, in terms of life and work, with the exception of two farmer and two others who live rurally, is spent in urban environments and much of it indoors. The re-connection with the awe and wonder of the natural world was a deeply nourishing aspect of the pilgrimage for many.

Eileen recounts:

> '..it was beautiful, the forests, it was magical really, the smells, the whole earthy thing about it or something – there was just something about walking on the earth…I feel that you don't really see the world unless you do something like this, for when you are walking you really smell the smells, you really see stuff, you walk through vineyards, cornfields, you see the animals, you know…you walk through little villages you see the local women with their children, different trees, different flowers, you know walking into little churches, it's just…(*searches for a word*)…a unique experience'.

For Thomas, the impact of such awe and wonder was first experienced early on in his pilgrimage:

> '…for me it's one of the most beautiful parts of the Camino, it's my favourite part…that sense of just really enjoying the absolute beauty of it. It was a wonderful misty morning and the way the view unfolds: It's incredible, the Pyrenees are so magical … and it's also the beginning and anything can happen. So for me is a kind of combination of the landscape and the beauty of the place and also the people there and the attitude that they have come with and yes, I enjoyed all of that an awful lot.

For Rosemary the beauty also struck her and so too did the freedom of the openness, it all yielded a long lasting peace as she recounts:

> The freedom of looking at fields – big, wide, open spaces. (*voice elevated and invigorated*). I just love that freedom of the space in front of me. And you know the colours too, the sun and the breeze. And then you see the long Camino road ahead of you. And that would never ever really bother me, that sense of the long distance. I could simply go on forever...the colours and everything, it all revitalizes me or

> something. I come home refreshed and my mind is full of...probably peace and I'd be more tranquil for a long while.

The marked contrast between the rhythms and quiet of pilgrimage days, to the pace and stresses of their back-home lives was noted by many. The impact was akin to a changed relationship to and perspective on the nature of time, including what technology of all kinds has done to our experience of time, captured well by Lough Derg pilgrim Shannon, when she reflected,

> 'I love sitting down by the lake shore and listening to the waves crash. I just love listening to the silence. And even then the noise of people shuffling about murmuring their prayer on the beds. I just loved that, it's so peaceful, oh, so peaceful. The biggest challenge for me was putting away my phone. I am always on the phone. And I have two children, but I decided no, I am going to do this fully, and I left my phone in the car. I'm a journalist and I had been very stressed at work leading up to this pilgrimage. I loved my journalism work but it's very demanding. After the pilgrimage, I found myself longing for the peace and quality of life I experienced inside of myself while there and I wanted more of that so I got a new job and it has made such a difference'.

And Mislav was able to pinpoint a particular memory that led to a deep realisation for him, one that he admits, '*took him a while to articulate - that the way you live on the Camino is the way people were meant to live - mentally, chronically, spiritually and physically.*

He begins:

> I remember after walking for two weeks, the lady who ran the Albergue, offered to take us, in her car, to a nearby village chapel for Mass. And as the car took off, I thought 'Oh, my God, I'm in a rocket ship!' Because, you know, your speed in the walking is about 4 kilometres per hour or less. So now suddenly you're doing 80 kilometres, 20 times as fast! And I thought to myself, '*our lives essentially are 80 or 100 kilometres per hour. Like 20 or 30 times as fast as the way your natural tempo is'!* And that is something that is hurting us because you are not designed as a human being to work in that way. So we are continuously pushing and killing ourselves. And here, by contrast, simply by being mentally and physically in a way of life, which is natural, where you treat other people as your fellow brothers and sisters, where you take things as they come, where you live in the moment and don't worry about tomorrow or obsess about the past. This is essentially how people are meant to live, and we don't, you know, we don't live like that.'

In her studies on pilgrimage in South Africa, Shirley do Plooy notes that sometimes we have a unilinear view of landscape in relation to pilgrimage – the meanings the human imbues on the place. She cites Tom Ingold's many dimensional view of landscape, one of which is understanding that on pilgrimage we also meet landscape as 'the record of those who came before, who dwelt there and left something of themselves' (2018 p. 30). Eoin was very much in touch with this dimension when he added the following to a few initial comments about his joy of being out in a relaxed and reflective way in the countryside in contrast to his working day as a farmer when he describes himself as, '…always on a mission when I'm out on the land'. He added:

> Oh God, very much so, very much so, but I enjoyed other things as well like. Like I remember we walked over this bridge one time, one of those old roman bridges of stone with the underneath stones all worn down over hundreds and thousands of years like, and you'd a real sense that you were just a small part of the stream of life and there would be more people coming after us like, we're here and the thing is nearly 1,000 miles long like, and there are so many ahead and how many more behind like, isn't that just fascinating like?

5.3.5 Suffering & Vulnerability

As well as moments of awe and wonder in relation to the outdoors and the natural environment, insights about self and life, the physical challenges of the pilgrimage also brought contrasting experiences. These included moments (or in some cases times of longer durations), of intense suffering and experiences of being vulnerable. The interview conversations included myriad mentions to various forms of suffering from feet blisters through heartbreak to intense grief. For the sake of illustration, it may be helpful to offer an example, one from each of what I might call four types of suffering – emotional, physical, psychological/spiritual and contextual, acknowledging that most human suffering is always more layered and complex than this in reality, as each example also indicates.

5.3.5.1 Emotional

Thomas is the Camino Pilgrim who had almost died of cardiac arrest two years previously and attempting the pilgrimage was both a test of his level of recovery

and a way to reconcile some of the traumatic aftermath of being so close to death. One such aftermath was the termination of his intimate relationship of a number of years. He recalled vividly a poignant moment of catharsis. He begins by noting how the landscape of pilgrimage facilitated him. On this particular occasion, it was the uniquely expansive stretch on the *Camino Francés* route called, the *Meseta*,

> Walking by myself going through it and just like emotionally kind of allowing myself to cry -it's a wonderful liberty to have a whole stretch of countryside to yourself if you want to scream or sing or shout or just to do anything. I think that's was definitely part of it - it was emotionally painful but in a cathartic sense;
>
> And I think because the landscape there is so flat…it's a really spartan, empty kind of place. And so it was like a blank canvas in a sense and I thought a lot about the cardiac arrest, about the surgery and then there was my relationship break-up soon after that. That was all a huge deal. There was a huge amount of personal healing done on the break-up especially, do you know like? Maybe it was the first time that I had had that amount of space - in both a physical sense and in a mental sense to think about it or something. And there's a connection between those two, I think when you're presented with that sense of natural openness.

Then he describes the cathartic meeting between his emotional state and the *Meseta* as he recalls,

> There was a one particular moment where I remember walking out into a field slightly off the path that was just stretching through the middle of nowhere. I had been crying a lot that morning on the road and allowing myself just to be as free as I possibly could be with the pain. So I just kind of marked a spot on the ground with my foot and dug out a little hole with my heel and I was like - '*Whatever this is, that pain, that sadness like I don't need…yes, it's always going to be part of me but I don't need to carry it in such a painful way anymore'* - if that makes sense. In the end I didn't physically bury anything, and it wasn't a huge ritual or anything but I had a real sense of burying whatever kind of pain I had been carrying.

5.3.5.2 Physical

Colman, one of the duo-pilgrims, who had decided a few months out from the first Anniversary of his wife's death to do the Camino as a way of working through his 'immense grief' and 'to feel close to his wife's spirit'. She had been a regular Camino pilgrim and had valued it deeply. He took several weeks off work and set off but became injured after just four days. He still endeavoured to

follow the route and set out each day but sometimes had to be aided by taking a taxi or a local bus. He returned the following two years which also hugely affected his capacity to walk. He recalls each in turn,

> I damaged my shoulder very badly, within the first week and every step was, every step, every step of carrying the bag was physically painful. But I got through it. Then last year, I did the Portuguese Camino, and I injured myself, two thirds of the way through. I just couldn't walk, I had to stop walking, I couldn't. I couldn't walk anymore. And the struggle around how to integrate that, I was conscious of it even at that moment of it happening and trying to manage it in such a way that I didn't drop into failure.

5.3.5.3 Psychological & Spiritual

Although Lenora whom we met earlier as the intending Camino pilgrim who went to significant lengths to guard against incurring fresh physical injury after years of surgeries, she was pleasantly surprised at how well she was physically,

> …I was really actually fine, sure I was sore for the first couple of days, but after that I felt fine. It was a miracle. I mean, nothing hurt. My foot wasn't hurting and my back wasn't. Nothing was hurting. I was fine. In fact I found I could do much more than I at first thought. I was great except, I was sick. After the long transatlantic flight I got a bad cold and I became quite sick with it and I was miserable emotionally. I was mostly unhappy. I mean, I would say for a few days, I was crying the whole time. My husband was walking ahead although he is not that fast of a walker, in fact I'm usually faster than him. But in this case, he was faster than me. And then he'd turned around and he'd say *'Don't cry, People are going to think I'm abusing you'*. And I was like, '*I'm crying because I don't feel well. And it has nothing to do with you*. So, that's how I spent the first third or more of the Camino. It was really, really difficult. It was. And that's not what I was expecting. I thought it would be easier than that.

Mindful of her physical vulnerabilities, Lenora had made all kinds of contingencies and preparations. The last thing she expected was that she would become deeply emotional for a long stretch of time, as well as feeling quite sorry for herself, and not to mention, poor company. Like Colman above, Lenora was later able to work through this psychological suffering on account of a transformational spiritual moment she had later in her pilgrimage journey, which I will return to below when I describe a pattern of profound moments experienced by a number of the participating pilgrims.

5.3.5.4 Social context

For regular Lough Derg pilgrim, Jim, a stressful situation in his professional work had become so acute during the previous year that he had to take some leave of absence. During that leave he undertook another pilgrimage to Lough Derg.

> I suppose it gave me hope going forward and renewed belief and confidence that things would get sorted for me. And just a general lifting of a weight that I would have experienced before from going to Lough Derg. And I do get an awful lot of peace and hope there and I always feel in good form when I come back. Yes, a lot of inner peace. I have always joked that the best time to have a fatal accident is on your journey home from Lough Derg, when you are most at peace with God.

Whilst some pilgrimage researchers have observed a pattern among some pilgrims on the Camino De Santiago and on other pilgrimages, of a kind of competitive dialogue on who might have had the most 'spectacular austerities', this was not a detectable pattern among this cohort of research participants. Rather, the reflection on the suffering and vulnerability experienced amongst these pilgrims was more often on the unexpected and unwelcome surprise of it, as indicated by some of the quotes above; or on the huge disappointment with their own negative self-talk; or on a perception that their suffering was an obstacle to doing the pilgrimage 'better'. Such reflections are in these ways more commensurate with Bouldrey's observation that,

> 'Pilgrimage is an act that not only balances on a contradiction of hubris and humility, but on innocence and experience, and ideas of home and away' (2018).

The recollections of Mislav point to an important contradiction in the experience of the suffering and the physiological and psychological challenges that can be misunderstood, often, by our more contemporary, secularist mindset that works stringently often on the elimination of suffering and pain or at least insuring oneself well against the level of austerity to be experienced should it come unbidden.

> The second thing that amazed me and that I vividly remember from my first Camino was those days when my feet were aching, when I was hurting all over and the albergue for the day was still about 15 kilometres away. I couldn't stop because it hurt. And when I walked, it hurt. And when I sat down, I hurt. And there were days when I was hungry and tired and my body was shot to pieces. And I remember thinking at the very same time…*And, oh yeah, I'm definitely doing this again!*

> Because also the whole positive experience of it was so strong, so powerful that it simply washed away all the pain over...You know, I didn't mind pain. I didn't. I didn't consider it significant at all because I was I was so heavily experiencing this whole positive feeling that I could not fully articulate. Possibly I couldn't even do so now. But I think that in some sense, maybe, I would say that sense was of walking with God, in a way.

Seasoned pilgrim Brigid reflects further on the kind of mindset that is perhaps more conducive to the pilgrim journey and the trials and challenges that might be encountered along the way,

> All you have to do, I feel, is lift one foot and drop it and then lift the next foot and drop it and on you go. And on the Camino, if you're fit enough, it'll just happen and you know, you have to listen to your body. Some days are better than others. Some days you will be stronger. One time, I picked up a kidney infection and I had to rest for three days. And that was no problem. For somebody else, it would possibly have been a problem because they have a target, how many kilometres they want to do in a day and how they have to get to this place or that place. But for me, I start and I go and we'll see how things go today. There's no panic. It's much more about the path rather than your own agenda.

5.3.6 Shedding and Being Shriven

As well as walking long distances, a second deeply instructive task of Camino is carrying one's belongings, literally carrying all that you need for the duration of your pilgrimage, on your back. Although three of the pilgrims interviewed used or occasionally used one of the 'luggage carrying services' available on all the routes, those that carried their bag all made some reference to the life-lessons learned on its account. Liam had experience of doing the Camino both as a solitary walker and as a member of group pilgrimages.

> 'Generally I'd be fit anyway because I do a bit of running, So that part didn't ever bother me much but actually it was very different doing it on my own.. When I was doing with a group, it was never a bother to me physically. In fact, I'd often go for a jog in the evening, after doing the walking all day with one or two others in the group, who might also be into jogging. So that side of it was never an issue. But doing it, carrying a rucksack. It's a very different experience and pretty early on I blistered and blistered badly'.

Stories of Camino pilgrims shedding their loads down to as little as a bare 3 or 4kg weight by donating toiletries to others, (Mislav), posting clothes home,

(Breda), giving away books, including guide books, (Rosemary) and discarding all manner of item thought essential at setting out, are commonplace, (Kay). In addition to the myriad sufferings brought and experienced, and the penitential-like deprivations of food and sleep, and the paring back to only that which is essential, each contributing to an accumulation of challenge somewhat resonant of that archaic sense of being shriven; an idea often invoked by the poet David Whyte who considers 'the pilgrim' as one of the powerful archetypes which continues to have much contemporary resonance. He describes the pilgrim as 'the one shriven to a radical simplicity by the pilgrim trail' (See 'Pilgrim' 2019.)

5.3.7 Surrendering to the Pilgrimage Process

As the physical, emotional and psycho-spiritual challenges mount up, it is as if the pilgrim comes to a point of stark choice, surrender to what this pilgrimage process requires or continue to try and master it with fitness or determination or defiance. For the majority of pilgrims interviewed for this study, the level of intensity required in one's body meant that at some point, the decision was made *for* them by their body's experience and this was articulated well by duo-pilgrim John,

> 'And maybe there's part of me that enjoys that physical challenge, but it's not - the hardest thing for me was kneeling on those stones because my knees are getting a bit wonky, you know. But there is something about it ...the word I'd use about Lough Derg is cleansing, you know there's a cleansing. And I think yes, it's due to the fasting, but also maybe being out in the open and the wind and the rain and the wind blowing through you. And you're just walking around in your bare feet and you become very grounded as you go. So that's in a sense my image - you get into a very deep place. I suppose too it's the concentration of your focus. And I think the same is true for the Camino, you get to that deep place too from just the constant walking, the placing of one foot in front of the other.

5.3.8 Altered States

For almost one third of the twenty pilgrims selected for analysis in this study, references to such 'deep places', as articulated by John above, included mention also to what might be called, 'another dimension'. Altered or expanded states is how such experiences are described in psychological literature, and in particular in relation to therapeutic healing processes that seek to deliberately bypass

and/or alter normal, ego-consciousness. Such states share some of the elements observable in the change of consciousness caused by substances like alcohol and drugs but by contrast, in these healing processes a particular use of the breath and/or the imagination is what is used to achieve the altered state. (Holotropic Breathwork and Rebirthing processes are two such examples.)

In theological literature such states are called mystical states and in Christianity there is a long tradition of entering such states through physical trial (the monastic practices of the Desert Fathers and Mothers); through long periods of contemplative prayer and surrender (St Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross); or, finally, through visions/revelations of God, particularly those which describe God as infusing everything that moves and lives and has being (Meister Eckart and St Hildegard of Bingen). As Belden Lane says,

> These mystics all insisted that knowing God is a matter of "tasting," "savouring," and "relishing." It isn't an intellectual apprehension of something *outside* their experience, but a full-bodied encounter... The training of the body and the deepening of the soul are not, ultimately, separate realities (2015, p.28).

In the case of pilgrimage, it would seem that the distinctively intense physiological and often psycho-spiritual challenge of the process itself may have been, for six of the interviewees, a catalyst for an experience of such an altered state as the following examples will illustrate. For Paul he says it is 'very simple', in that the rubric of Lough Derg brings him 'to a place mentally that nowhere else and nothing else can'. Eileen's description of a peak moment on the Camino is remarkably close to the elements of what is referred to as 'a flow state' [95] (See also Rufi *et al*, 2016).

> One day stands out in particular , I think it was near O'Cebreiro – we were walking up a steep incline and it felt effortless – my backpack was comfortable and no weight

[95] The theory of flow states, as developed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes the biological and intellectual attributes which occur when a person is wholeheartedly performing an activity for intrinsic purposes. Some studies measure and explore the flow phenomenon present in some spiritual practice also; but not yet, it would seem, with regard to pilgrimage. If 'flow state' theory were applied to the spiritual practice of pilgrimage it may yield interesting findings. It might also be possible to research variables such as the comparative benefits of solo pilgrimage over group pilgrimage or long pilgrimage treks over shorter, more intense pilgrimages.

> at all, my legs were striding out so smoothly. I felt totally 'in' my body – I had arrived within myself… truly 'embodied'. It was an 'in-the-body-experience'... It was a beautiful feeling – a freedom and a joy so intense that I can re-experience it still in recall.

Shannon first and then Arran's descriptions of very special moments on Lough Derg had something of that mystical quality, described above:

> And I remembering thinking that I had all these problems that I needed to work out. And then the problems that I ended up thinking about, were not the ones that I took with me on the boat at all. A whole lot of other things began to occupy my mind when I was there so I kind of just accepted eventually that whatever happens on the island is going to happen. So I just kind of let it naturally fall into place…I sometimes think the island gives you a kind of superpower, because you know, I enter into it so strongly. And the biggest surprise for me was how hard it is when you get home. I remember even getting into the car and trying to drive. It was kind of alien to me. I was saying to myself, my legs feel funny, my feet feel funny. And when I get home, the house looked a bit different. Now it was wasn't different in any way whatsoever. But it was me, maybe, that was different.

And Arran,

> But the feeling I got like, (*searches for words*), I would find it very hard to say to anyone like, it's really, really hard to describe the feeling I got doing the last station…I was standing at the water's edge and looking out into the water and I've never been as still in my whole life. I'd say for about a minute I was just there so still, there were so many people around me but I couldn't hear a sound; I've never been so relaxed. I'd go back, I would go back and go through all that hardship just for that for that one moment…and I was so content, I wasn't worried about anything, because I'd be a worrier, like. But in that minute I was so calm. And combined with a sense of accomplishment like, it was unreal.

The above examples of altered states, whilst uncommon and non-enduring in the longer-term, could be said to be located at the more positive end of the type of feelings engendered in and by altered states . The remaining two examples, were borne more from experiences of significant suffering and are at what might be called the darker and more difficult end of the psycho-spiritual realm, more 'dark night of the soul'/St. John of the Cross like', as one pilgrim notes.

Colman, whose trilogy of Camino sufferings we learned of above, told of his signature moment at the Pilgrimage's primary destination, the Cathedral and its

famous square in the city of Santiago De Compostela. He begins his retelling a little further back as he began to anticipate this arrival into the pilgrimage's climactic destination,

> I certainly didn't have any kind of mystical moments of gods or other expressions… but I remember the last time on the French way, I walked every inch of it in quite some pain. And I thought: *I wonder what will it be like for me when I arrive? Will I have a vision? What consolation might be given to me? What grace might be gifted me for the few days before arriving? I wonder, I wonder*, I repeated these thoughts to myself as I walked. *I'm open to hearing*….I said to the air around…*I would love to know*. And when I arrived, the only, the only I thing I could receive was…And I remember fighting it and rejecting it, but the only thing that I could receive was: *'I. Can. Walk'*. I said to myself: *'Colman, surely there must be something richer and more profound in you than that*'. Whereas now, I don't know if there's anything more profound. And, you know it's true... I actually can walk. And then I saw people there in the square with white sticks, blind people; and I saw a number of others in wheelchairs. *I can walk*. That's was all that was to it. That was my mystical moment, although of a very earthy kind!

Gabrielle, who described herself as 'floating' on many of the days with the sheer joy of walking, also had a deeply, contrasting experience which she has spent much time and effort since then trying to integrate. As we noted on the table of research participants, Gabrielle is a psychotherapist and would therefore be familiar working on traumatic material in her client work. Her description of her altered state might best be described as a kind of dark visitation upon her, and from a therapeutic context, we might likely say, from our collective shadow:

> And then, I mean I became tormented… I was absolutely crippled with images of victims of child sexual abuse. For three days and three nights. I couldn't sleep and I could hardly eat. So I was making sure I drank water. Anytime I would close my eyes, my mind was tormented. I would have intrusive thoughts, intrusive images, I would meet the terror again inside myself. And I would ask myself: *Am I a danger? Was I /Am I a danger to children?*

Gabrielle then further explains that her specialist area of psychotherapeutic work is with child sexual abuse and she works with both victims and perpetrators and with organisations who require child safeguarding policies and procedures. She continued,

> All of it, all of what can get internalized in you out of the work I do. And I was deeply disturbed, like deeply, deeply disturbed…and every day I would keep walking and although I was still loving it, there was a heaviness in my heart, and on the fourth

> day without any kind of plan, I was just simply… I was pleading with the Lord, pleading with the Lord to help me. *Please, please help me*. And what happened was I started out - I was literally sitting waiting for the first glimmer of light. And as soon as I saw it, I headed out. So it was early, very early, maybe half four or five o'clock in the morning, and I suddenly noticed was that I was speaking names of children as I walked, children to whom I had listened of their experience of child sexual abuse, either as victims or, predominantly by their perpetrators. And I was speaking their names as though in prayer, and speaking them out loud. And I couldn't remember all of the names. So I just began to allow the images and the memories to come and to speak something out of that. And as I was doing this, I realized I would bow my head, every so often, as though in prayer and as I did this, it was literally - I could feel the energies of that darkness, you know, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, if you like, and the toxicity of it. But eventually I could literally feel a light, a lightness coming over me as the hours of that day went on. I walked for maybe six and a half to seven hours and I spent that entire day allowing every rotten, evil, vile memory, image, thought that had come towards me, out of my work with sex offenders, to have space; and then to speak their names in prayer. I could hear and feel the sacredness, the absolute sacred ground of step after step and prayer after prayer of each name. And it was allowing the breath, allowing the space for each one. And in the end, I found myself speaking the names of the perpetrators too. And by the end of that day, it had shifted. I couldn't tell you exactly at what point. It was always about the little ones and my own, my own little victim, you know, who experienced sexual abuse. So, I'm not sure if I prayed for her. I hope I did. I don't exactly have a clear memory of that. But I hope I did. But I am certain I prayed for all the others. This was a phenomenal experience for me.

The visitation of this *dark night of soul* for Gabrielle and over several days, was an exceptionally deep and challenging one from among my pilgrimage research participants. Gabrielle happens to be also in the duo-pilgrim sub-group and her descriptions above are in many ways more reminiscent of what might be a 'purgatorial cave account' associated with the earlier centuries of Lough Derg, and as was noted in the historical overview of the Island in Chapter 2. It may not be counted among the 'continuities' with former pilgrimages that Collins-Kreiner (2010) had in mind but Gabrielle's experience is remarkable nonetheless. It also raises questions about the phenomenon of individuals who may sometimes 'carry' and 'bear the burden' of social questions, ills or sins on behalf of the whole, and the possibility that pilgrimage provides a sturdy enough container for such processes to emerge and be held.

5.3.9 Becoming More Grounded - Becoming Pilgrim – A Pivotal Summary

'Becoming Pilgrim' is not a sub-theme like the others above, but rather a defining moment on the pilgrimage journey. Those who arrive on St. Patrick's Purgatory are welcomed as pilgrims. Within two minutes of disembarking the bus in a town or village, along the Camino route, a local may call out '*Buen Camino'* to the traveller who hasn't yet secured the straps of her backpack. Hence, at first, the identity of 'pilgrim' is conferred by others, and often with generosity and confidence. However, the moment of being able to accept, to take on, to wear and embody the pilgrim identity comes somewhat later for most. Listening to the pilgrims in this study, this identity was more easily assumed, or fitted more easily, when the pilgrim had become more grounded. Becoming more grounded, as we have documented from the data above, involves a movement from prior preparation, through setting out, experiencing the intense physicality, willingness to embrace both the expected and unexpected vulnerability, suffering and pain that may come our way, (physical, psychological and spiritual), doing without or doing with the bare essentials and being shriven of all the rest. Becoming more grounded finally requires a surrender to the rubric of the pilgrimage and for some, this may paradoxically mean entering temporary, altered states. Robert Sibley speaks of these as 'moments of epiphany' and adds 'even now, years later, they continue to reverberate in my mind, telling me that my pilgrimage is on-going and maybe even endless' (2010, p. 11).

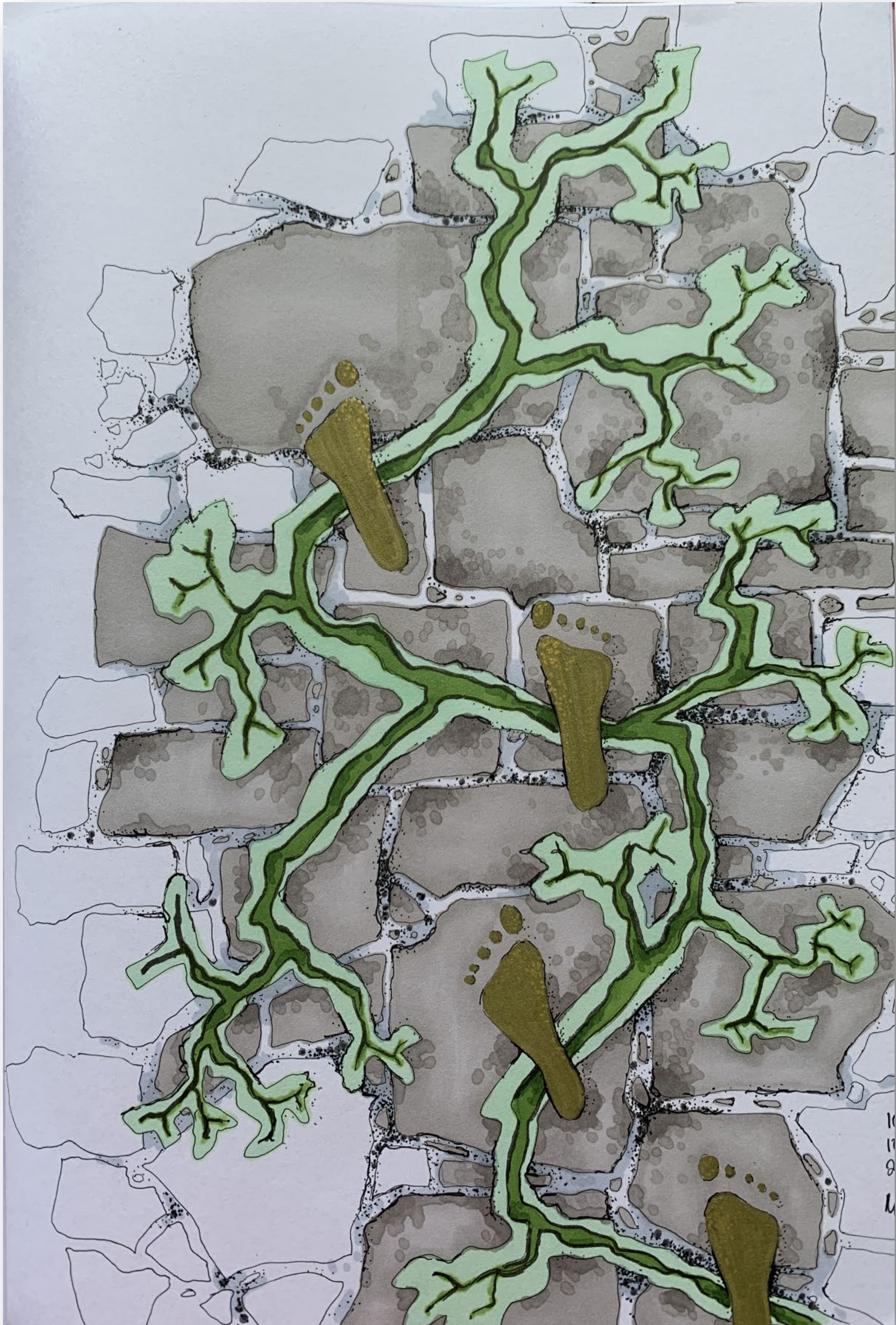

Illustration 15: Becoming more grounded

He then proceeds to recount one such moment, but what is more interesting to our summary here, is an aside he makes. As he recounted the tale of this moment of epiphany, he mentioned he had been feeling a bit disorientated that morning as he set out. In part, he thought some of the disorientation was because of food poisoning he suffered in the previous couple of days, but quickly added 'it had also something to do with finally settling into my role as pilgrim'. Notably, this was after 'nearly a month of walking' (ibid).

Not every pilgrim in the study pinpoints this moment exactly nor explicitly but there was a notable change of confidence in how almost all of them self-refer as pilgrim as they delved more deeply into their recollections. Mislav's moment is both a conferring from others and a shy self-acceptance combined:

> In Burgos, for example, I was to stay in a small albergue in a street leading to the cathedral. And that had been a 13 km day, because my ankle was pretty swollen and I didn't figure out the solution for that until very much later. So as I was approaching the Albergue and it on the second floor above the church and people were, you know, leaving the church at the time. So there was, you know, a lot of people at the entrance. So I stood aside, you know, waiting for them to leave. And suddenly somebody, you know, put his hand on my shoulder and started shouting in Spanish to the others like: 'Make way the Pilgrim is here. You know, 'El Pellegrino' is here up like You know, like I was medieval nobility. Make way for the Great Marquis of where-ever! 'Tired pilgrim here'. He repeated. 'Make way for him. You know he needs to rest'. And everybody was, you know, making way, like,...for me? And it was almost embarrassing...it was definitely embarrassing.

This movement from the conferring of the identity of pilgrim by others to self-acceptance of such an identity for oneself is captured well, again by the poet David Whyte in his poem, *Camino,* particularly in the lines:

> ....remember you were given that name every day,
> Along the way, remember you were greeted as such,
> And treated as such and you needed no other name,
> Other people seemed to know you even before
> You gave up being a shadow on the road
> And you came into the light, even before you sat down
> Broke bread and drank wine,
> Wiped the wind-tears from your eyes:

Pilgrim they called you,
Pilgrim they called you, again and again. Pilgrim (2019 p.11).

The data of this research indicates that the identity of pilgrim is more easily claimed once the pilgrimage has been fully taken on, particularly in terms of commitment to its core physical rituals. In the process, the pilgrim has become more grounded with all the benefits which that kind of presence-in-the-lived-body confers. Let us turn now to the ritual dimension of those gestures, actions and practices of pilgrimage.

5.4 Findings: Theme No. 3: Ritualising with intent and contentment

1. The Summoned Seeker
2. Becoming more grounded
3. Ritualising with intent and contentment
4. Meeting the other/otherness
5. Becoming more whole

In explicating the finding *Becoming more grounded* above, we heard in detail how pilgrims experienced the myriad physical movements and gestures of both pilgrimages and their consequent or concomitant emotional, psychological and spiritual dimensions. As promised above, in this next illustration of my findings, I include how those physical actions and what I have called, in my definition of pilgrimage in Chapter 4 'the non-ordinary gestures', may be explored also as expressions of ritual performativity, some of which are explicitly religious. The interview transcripts also bore testimony to incidents of self-generating rituals on the part of pilgrims, most of which had a spiritual or at least psycho-spiritual quality. A third and final area of exploration tracks evidence of pilgrims making direct links to the Sacred from their ritual activity on pilgrimage, as well as a couple of instances when the Sacred, in classic biblical or mystical tradition, might be encountered or at least 'rumoured about' (Sibley, 2010), in the unexpected.

In his exploration of pilgrimage as human quest Morinis describes journeying to the Sacred as a physical act but also a symbolic, literary and spiritual image. In

fact he goes on to stress that in his view 'pilgrimage as event and pilgrimage as metaphor cannot be clearly distinguished' (1981 p.282). Ritual, we might say, is the language of the symbolic and the metaphoric and pilgrims' commitment to both the prescribed and self-generating rituals alike, emerged as a key theme among the participants of this study and their experience of contemporary pilgrimage. Let us first contextualise this finding about ritual by noting a few points about ritual generally. This is especially pertinent given that pilgrimage as an overall phenomenon is frequently described as, 'ritual practice'.

The linguistic roots of ritual are considered to be very ancient and derive from the proto-Indo-European linguistic morpheme *rt,* (Bredin, 1994 p.161) an indicator, perhaps, of ritual's even older, pre-linguistic root in the activities of human societies. As with all concepts during this current period of post-modernity/post-post-modernity, ritual as a focus of academic or cultural comment has also been the subject of many differing and discordant views. Catherine Bell notes that although humans have engaged in ritualised activity since hunter-gatherer times, it was not until the nineteenth century that scholars began to group that range of diverse activity into what she calls 'the rubric of ritual' and to start theorising about 'the origins of religion and civilisations' (2009/1997 p.1). Because pilgrimage is considered one such ritual, many pilgrimage scholars elaborate extensively on ritual as part of their studies on pilgrimage. (Dubisch 1995, Dubisch & Winkelman 2005, Maddrell *et al*, 2016, Morinis 1981, Reader 2015, 2005, Scriven 2020, 2018, 2014, Taylor & Hickey 2015, Taylor 2012, Turner 1973, Turners 1978). As noted in the review of literature it was the Turners' primary interest in ritual in African religions that led them to study Christian pilgrimage in the first place. They had previously defined ritual as,

> '...a stereotyped sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors' goals and interests' (1973 pp.1100-1105).

Illustration 16: Prayer at St. Patrick's Cross

Bell contests such a universal definition of ritual and instead emphasises that ritual is always 'contingent, provisional and defined by difference' (2009, p. vii). Ritual, she stresses, is not a 'clear-cut object of scrutiny' but there are rather, 'a variety of definitions and constructed understandings which have emerged and shaped our world' (ibid, p. x). Rather than attempting a similarly universalising definition as the Turners, Bell developed a framework for ritual as 'a situational and strategic activity that can only be recognised and precisely *in relation to* other activities in much the same way as symbols can only be understood in relation to other symbols' (ibid p. viii). She preferred to speak of ritual as 'a privileged action that gives shape and meaning to society and culture' and elaborates by adding,

> 'that we think of ritual now as a complex sociocultural mechanism variously constructed of tradition, exigency and self-expression; it is understood to play a wide variety of roles and to communicate a rich density of overdetermined messages and attitudes (ibid, p. xi).

Bell refers to 'gesture' and 'word' as 'the vocabulary of ritual' and considers that 'the fundamental efficacy of ritual activity lies in its ability to have people embody assumptions about their place in a larger order of things' (ibid p. xi).

Margaret Mary Kelleher also notes the social efficacy of ritual and acknowledges the Turners' definitions as helpful, when she describes ritual as 'a social symbolic process which has the potential for communicating, creating, criticizing and even transforming meaning'. She also notes that the new interest in and understanding of ritual such as those above, was fundamental to post Vatican II reform of Catholic Rites and Liturgy (NDT, p.906). Indeed Post *et al* believe that 'liturgical studies' ought to be an important holding ground for pilgrimage studies, and stress the need to make connections from there with religious popular culture (1997, pp. 20-26).

Part of the new understanding of ritual, Kelleher acknowledges, emanated from the psychological, particularly the human development psychology of Erik Erikson. He illustrated 'the ontogeny of ritual' in the development of infants and children. He gives detailed attention to the embodied and physical interactions

between infant and parent, which he describes as deeply satisfying, emotionally and psychologically, for both, and, significantly, as the first experience of 'the numinous' for the infant. As the infant grows and develops, so more sophisticated rituals develop, in their relational field with many of the significant others in its familial and social environment. The degree to which Erikson stitches ritual into our psychological and social development, indicates the extraordinary level of intrinsic human need -and in part to express ultimate meaning - that embodied practice of ritual can evoke and effect in the lives of human beings (1977). The Gestalt School of Therapy was also keen to pay attention to the essential role of intersubjectivity in the development of the human being, noting that 'experiencing emerges out of interactions within the intersubjective field, and behaviour and experience can be understood only in the context of that field' (1992, Jacobs, p.2).

Building on such themes, the sociologist of religion, Robert Bellah, adds that, 'the total bodily relation to reality is never lost. Other modes – symbolic, conceptual – develop later, which for certain purposes take precedence over the enactive. But because human beings remain corporeal, the product of any form of representation is in part, a changed bodily state, a gesture (Bellah, 2011: 19–20). It is fair to argue that pilgrimage is one such highly developed, symbolic and conceptualised form of representation which centrally involves heightened bodily states and gestures.

When the cultural field experiences tumultuous undulations like those of the last thirty to fifty years, it is to be expected that all ritual will be held up for fresh scrutiny to test its capacity to assist human beings to make sense of their larger world, 'to understand their place in it', as Bell has said. More ancient rituals, including religious ritual, have come especially under the microscope of postmodernity and whilst some rituals have altered in meaning and content as new generations attempt to make their own of them, significant numbers of people have decided also to discard religious ritual as no longer meaningful to their lives. Catholic liturgical life in Northern and Western Europe has been experiencing such challenges in recent decades. Irish Researcher of Religion, Gladys Ganiel, who considers Ireland 'post-Catholic', cites the *Global Index of Religion and Atheism* and notes that 'religiosity is declining more rapidly in the

Republic of Ireland than anywhere else in the world'. The study records that '44% of the Irish population describe themselves as non-religious and 12% self-describe as 'convinced atheists', putting Ireland in the top ten nations with the largest percentage of convinced atheists' (2017 p.2). (See also an earlier analysis of the beginning stages of this trend of a seismic shift between faith and culture in Ireland in the nineteen eighties and nineties, Bredin, 1994 pp.150-176). Ganiel stresses that she is not saying that the Catholic Church is no longer important nor culturally relevant, quite the contrary, as she details in her earlier book (2016). However, she believes that the future of the Catholic Church in Ireland will depend on how well it relates to and interconnects with what she has begun to call 'extra-institutional religion' and indeed by how well and willingly those engaged in this type of religion, connect with the institution (2017 p.1). Ganiel does not include pilgrimage among her examples, but I believe it might well be included as an example of 'people of deep faith seeking spiritual nourishment' to "one side" of traditional, more institutionally-bound and based ritual and liturgical processes (ibid p.4).

One of Catholicism's 'outdoor liturgies', pilgrimage, as we have acknowledged in the previous chapter, and by contrast to the above socio-cultural developments in relation to institutional Sacramental Ritual, has been experiencing a significant resurgence. When Verbit describes ritual as 'a key component of religiosity', he adds that it may be broken down further into four dimensions; *content*, (the elements of the religious repertoire and the willingness to participate or not) *frequency*, (the amount of involvement in the ritual actions and behaviours), *intensity* (the degree of determination/consistency in relation to one's position towards religion and *centrality* (the importance one attributes to the tenets, rituals and sentiments of one's religion) (1970). Although the religious *content* is not as central nor to the fore on the Camino de Santiago as it is on Lough Derg, bearing such dimensions in mind might be still be helpful, by way of tuning in to pilgrims differing positions in relation to ritual on both pilgrimages and I will return to Verbit's dimensions later.

5.4.1 *Pilgrimage as performative ritual*

The discipline of paying close attention to the phenomenological experience of contemporary pilgrims, as a Merleau-Ponty lens requires, includes paying attention to the body's symbolic function and its sense-giving/meaning-making performativity, in my case, the performativity of pilgrims on pilgrimage. In the various comments on ritual above, the centrality of the body as both the site and actant of ritual was key. In describing pilgrimage as *performative ritual,* I am referring to the embodied, physical gestures and actions of pilgrimage that are demonstrably and publicly performed by the pilgrim, either in ancient and liturgical patterns like those on Lough Derg or in the long-distance walking of the Camino, carrying all you need on your back and described in detail in the prior finding. Bredin says 'ritual is what we do when words are not enough' (1994 p. 167). The pilgrim on pilgrimage, in both cases, is committed to performing the rituals of it, not explaining and certainly not using words like 'I am performing ritual and engaging my body in symbolic function!' However, I would argue that there is a kind of visceral 'knowing' about the power of these actions, which is implicitly there in the data and palpable to themselves and to by-standers alike. To distinguish between performativity and performance, (as in theatrical performance), I find theologian Tom Driver's illustration helpful (See Illustration 18 below, 2006/1991.) He cites the work of Richard Schechner on ritual, who was alert to the theatrical dimension, that performative element, which is always present in good ritual. Schechner sees performance as moving along a continuum from *efficacy* to *entertainment*. Driver then incorporated that continuum into a new schematic mode, a ritual circle, if you will, and he added two new and important dimensions, the *confessional* and the *ethical.* The confessional mode refers to the personal meaning of the ritual for the individual participant, which often has an existential dimension to it. The ethical mode pertains firstly to the political purpose of the ritual, (political with a small 'p', as Driver stresses), which he believes should always be liberating and about liberation. Secondly, the ethical mode underlines the public dimension of ritual (ibid p. xiv). These additional dimensions added by Driver are important here, because I believe they name something critical about the power of the pilgrimage as performative ritual, in that it can be both personally meaningful for the individual pilgrim but additionally those personally powerful gestures are

amplified by being publicly shared and witnessed by others, both pilgrim and non-pilgrim others.

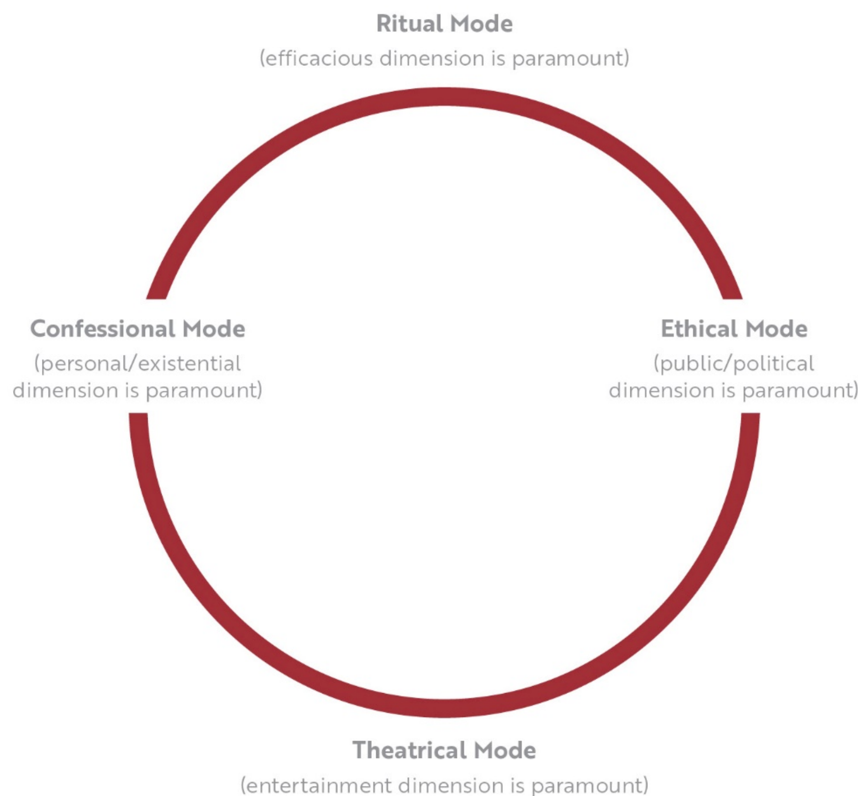

Illustration 17: Modes of Performance: Tom Driver's Ritual Circle

I described and distinguished between the rubrical tradition of both pilgrimages in this study in Chapter 2 (p.33) Given the level of detail and intricacy of what are often called, 'the penitential exercises' on the Lough Derg pilgrimage in particular, I had anticipated numerous references to these rituals as pilgrims recounted their experience. Using Verbit's four-dimensional schema above, it could be argued that these penitential and devotional exercises are "thick" in each case, particularly in terms of content, frequency and intensity. When it comes to *centrality*, (i.e., the importance of this pilgrimage ritual in respect of one's overall religion), it is perhaps slightly nuanced by the research of 2019, conducted by Lough Derg staff, which recorded that 21% of pilgrims of that year

described themselves as people of ‘limited religious practice’ (See Illustration of Bar Graph below).

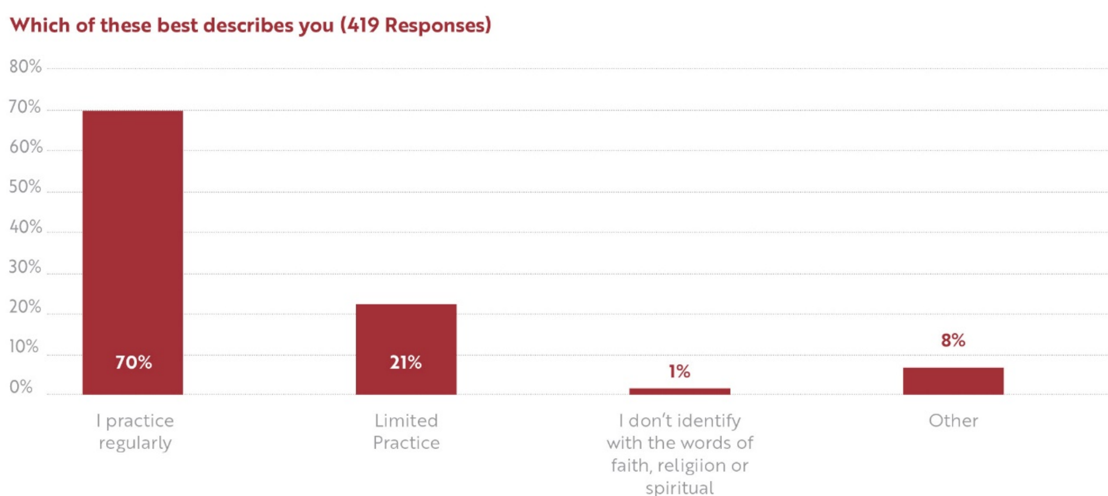

Illustration 18: Lough Derg Pilgrims Personal Description of Religious Practice 2019

Although, as I have acknowledged previously, the contemporary ritual performativity of the Camino de Santiago is much less densely prescribed in a ‘religiosity-sense’ than on Lough Derg, ritual also featured as a strong component in the experience of pilgrims there. In relation to pilgrims religiosity and regular practice, the Camino Office of the Cathedral of Santiago has a fairly arbitrary assessment of religious and/or spiritual motivation for doing the Camino. It asks an either/or question of pilgrims, upon completion, and hence there is no reliable data for assessing levels of other religious practice among contemporary pilgrims generally. However, Oviedo *et al's* study, referenced in the previous chapter, assessed the weekly religious practice rate among its cohort of 470 research participants at 23.4% (2014). There is a notable oppositional symmetry in these figures then concerning regular religious practice among the broader pilgrim group for the two pilgrimages in this study - 23.4% who ‘regularly engage’ in religious practice on the Camino as against 21% who have ‘limited engagement’ in religious practice among Lough Derg pilgrims. The much smaller sample pilgrim cohort in this study, as the Table of Participants above indicates, report an 80% regular practice rate. This is very high by

comparison with Oviedo *et al's* percentage for Camino pilgrims generally, but more in line with the figure for overall Lough Derg pilgrims as reported in the staff study of pilgrims of 2019 and as illustrated above. There are a number of possible variables which might illuminate the discrepancy in the former but they are beyond the scope of this study by way of reliable investigation.

However, despite this difference 'intent' and 'contentment' seemed apt ways to describe the kind of qualities that pilgrims seemed to bring to their ritual actions as I listened and coded the pilgrim interviews. All twenty pilgrims made various comments that communicated their *intent* to authentically complete the rubrical tradition intrinsic to their pilgrimage – the long days of walking towards the Shrine of St James in the case of the Camino de Santiago and the intense three days of stations and participation in the Sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation, in the case of Lough Derg.

In Chapter Four, as I reviewed pertinent literature, I noted that commentary on the dancing body would seem to have had more resonance with the movements intrinsic to pilgrimage than some other discourse on the pilgrim body. For example, Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, of prior mention, speaks of the 'sheer physicality' of dance in ways that bear a strong resemblance to the tone of pilgrims as they recount their experience, when she says,

> 'The essential quality of these experiences is *sheer* physicality. What is being lived here is wholly the physical, but not as a display of certain skills. Moreover what might in other circumstances be horizontal to the experience is being transformed in being lived directly. In a word movement is experienced for its own sake; its meaning is capsulized in its own wild splendour. There is in effect, nothing beyond the sheer physicality of the kinetically lived body; movement is all-consuming'. (2009 p.84)

Kay, a Camino pilgrim and Fiachra, a Lough Derg pilgrim bear testimony to the accuracy of such kinaesthetic aliveness as they reflect on performing the core ritual/s of the respective pilgrimages.

> That whole thing of just walking and thinking - the rhythm and things like that and just ...(pauses and searches) ...and the landscape is so varied and so beautiful; and you are walking through the vineyards and, you know, all of that kind of thing. I loved it. But I just loved the Pyrenees, particularly, they were just out of this world.

> It's just again.. I think it was the rhythm and the, the discipline of walking, there's something about it. Not having, I mean, not having people, dragging out of you -and it's probably not fair to say that about people because I allow that to happen to me, you know.. But it was just this whole other kind of awareness that comes with the walking.

And Fiachra,

> But it's something... (pauses) And the other thing is, like sure, one thing is that it's good for your faith like, but the other thing is, I think it's very good for your brain and the body. And there's no mobile phone and there's no one at ya. This is three days of time to relax, time to take in, and it definitely cleans the slate, but it cleans the mind as well. And the body too, the fasting like you know, it's the whole thing like, you know.

The *contentment* in most cases was strongly expressed in relation to the satisfaction of completing the pilgrimage, of having managed to do it and indeed some talked of an exhilaration in that. For some there was also a contentment noted in the day-to-day and this was especially so for almost all the Camino pilgrims, as Liam testifies:

> And I think part of that, part of that for me is the walking, because every day we're going out and we do the walk and you can to do in twos or threes or you can do it on your own. ...So we're not living in each other's ear. And that's it – we're doing the walk and then we come in in the evening and we might have a meal with other pilgrims... and that has been another surprising factor – there are lots of nice moments along the way. Like am, you know, moments that you really enjoy.

When it comes to ritual performativity in the more formal, liturgical sense, evidence of powerful outcomes was also referenced. For example, Shannon here describes her experience of participating in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, an important part of the rubric on the morning after the night vigil of the Lough Derg pilgrimage.

> And you're really kind of... you're kind of really vulnerable that morning when you go to Confession. Now, I hadn't been to Confession for over 20 years. And I was like, "How do I sneak out of this chapel without anybody seeing me and could I just skip this bit?' And then I thought, 'No, I'm just gonna go'. So I went to Confession. And after that Confession, something happened to me. I don't know what it was. I just felt different. I didn't go in and confess that I'd murdered anybody and I had no great big sin to unburden myself of. But I felt different after that confession when I walked out of the chapel. And after not being for 20 years, I mean, that was something else!

> I just I can't tell you what happened during that, but that was *the* turning point for me, going to confession. And I go to Confession, you know, three, four times a year now, after not being for 20 years - that's a pretty big thing for me.

The wearing or prominent display of Camino shells[96], the use of rosary beads on Lough Derg, (Purcell et al, 2019/1988) the ubiquitous uniform of shorts, rucksack and rain-poncho on Camino (See images of Camino pilgrims), the leveller of going barefoot on Lough Derg (as testified by interviews above), these are among the many emblems of ritual which powerfully add to both the performativity overall, and assist pilgrims to embody the public witness and group solidarity dimensions of pilgrimage in particular.

5.4.1.1 Contrasting views on the efficacy of the ritual performativity of both pilgrimages

Two pilgrims referred to the ritual performativity of the penitential exercises on Lough Derg somewhat more negatively. The first, Sean, was quoting a good friend who had accompanied him on his most recent pilgrimage. This friend was a regular Camino pilgrim but had talked for over twenty years about joining Sean on a Lough Derg pilgrimage. So in 2018, they made it happen. However, the friend was disappointed to report that it 'did not do anything' for him. He said that he was 'looking for space, to clear his head and to think and that he found none of that on Lough Derg'. Sean believes that the 'penitential aspect' of it 'overshadowed the whole thing' for his friend and quite negatively. His friend agreed and concluded that he finds the Camino much more spiritually rewarding and of much more benefit. For Sean himself however, the penitential part of Lough Derg works:

> To be honest. Yes I do, I enjoy that part of it. I think it's a little bit of punishment on the body and it does make me appreciate all the other days of the year. That's the one thing I like about Lough Derg, - it does make you appreciate, even putting your shoes on, and even eating, you are certainly much more mindful of what you eat and all sorts of other things. So yeah, yeah the penitential end of it, as I've got older I probably I see more of it and understand more of it and probably enjoy more of it as well.

[96] https://caminoways.com/the-scallop-shell-and-the-camino-de-santiago

Gabrielle, as we mentioned was a duo-pilgrim and her memories of Lough Derg are fairly negative. Firstly, she recounts, ‘it did nothing but rain’ and she recalls being very judgemental of the other pilgrims there. She quickly acknowledged that she was ‘very young’ at the time and ‘immature’ and had not ‘done any of her own work’.

> I did not find it a soulful place at all, not at all. And I hated, I really hated the religiosity. I was so cross with what I saw as this pious, hypocritical, praying and the confession and the religion. To me they were faithless, faithless. I just hated it all.

During our interview she assessed Lough Derg as the more challenging pilgrimage in many ways for her and that our conversation made her realise that she ‘needs to go back’, and maybe this time, as she put it, ‘do Lough Derg on its own terms’.

John was also in strong comparison mode when asked which pilgrimage suited his spiritual leaning most. He confessed that ‘in theory’ he should be saying the Camino because he likes being out in nature and loves to walk and so on but,

> Actually, maybe in my own experience. I can see that Lough Derg suited me best, you know that? Actually, like that whole thing of the cleansing and that sense of going away and that sense of connection with other Irish people and especially with my parents. I couldn't, I couldn't,...(searches for words) I mean to think of my mother, who was the mother of twelve children, was able to find time to go to Lough Derg. She might have gone two or three times and my father went more often, he might have gone six or seven times, but it was lovely to know that she had been there. The first time I ever stepped into the basilica there, it was so profound for me that somebody in my family had been there before me, as well as that all the other people that had been there to do their pilgrimage before me as well. ...Yeah..., and there's something just a little bit mysterious about that too, isn't there? Like, theoretically, if you saw a description of each pilgrimage, you'd say oh well I'm definitely more drawn to that one – the Camino, like. And yet there's something about the experience, about my experience that signals something quite different., that's my experience. Even this interview has helped to appreciate Lough Derg more. I am just realising its more important to me than the Camino.

Lenora remembers having a crisis of confidence about the efficacy of the ritual performativity for a long stretch of the Camino when she reflected thus:

> And so I thought, why am I doing this self-indulgent, stupid thing that costs money when there are people in the world suffering? Why am I being this privileged person and then on top of that I'm not even enjoying it. So the whole thing just didn't make sense. So, I was walking along but not having spiritual experiences, unfortunately. Now we did love the churches. The churches were very inspiring. Because they were older than any churches I'd ever been in. You know, I was very impressed with that. And I was like, 'Wow, Christianity has been around so long. And it's a very resilient religion'. And so I felt good about that. Yeah, I did feel good about that.

Finally, Colman, as a duo-pilgrim had insights about the comparative efficacy for him personally but because of a volunteer role he has assumed on Lough Derg in recent years he is also able to perceive contrasting experiences from the perspectives he was privy to among other pilgrims. Firstly, he muses personally,

> I think that I was in my 20s the first time, {I did Lough Derg},with my mother and then in later years with my sister. The spiritualities are utterly different for me. There's a spirituality that's very explicit in Lough Derg. It's very... it's very church and Catholic. ... But it's not my spirituality. And yet, I think that's my failing rather than the pilgrimage, because I think that there is a meditative presence that you can bring to that, that I didn't have at the time when I was there, {as Pilgrim}. I wasn't anywhere near a meditative practice. I was rolling off the rosary And I was hoping I'd not get too badly damaged on my knees, you know. So I didn't have that presence to it.
>
> But the wonderful thing about it is that some people do and the traditions there give them the necessary space. But the traditions for me would have been negative. I don't want to say that traditions *are* negative but it's just that the traditions for *me* would be negative. It's just that I got stuck in the literal kind of externals of the traditions.

In recent years, on account of his professional expertise as psychotherapist, he has offered voluntary hours on the Island's Counselling Service, during their pilgrimage season, a service which is open to all pilgrims,. This has given him an expanded insight into the efficacy of the Lough Derg pilgrimage for others that he noted above he could not access for himself.

> And somehow, for the people that I met recently as a volunteer therapist, they have found there the space that the ordinary Roman Catholic Church wouldn't have, hasn't offered them, but yet they came to Lough Derg and they found a space. The Counselling becomes like another 'station' for some. But they only found a space in the Counselling because they found a space on the Island. Some come very distressed and closed and the Island offers them space and they find an expanse in

themselves because of what they experience on Lough Derg. And I think the pilgrims there get through to another realm of God's welcoming for them.

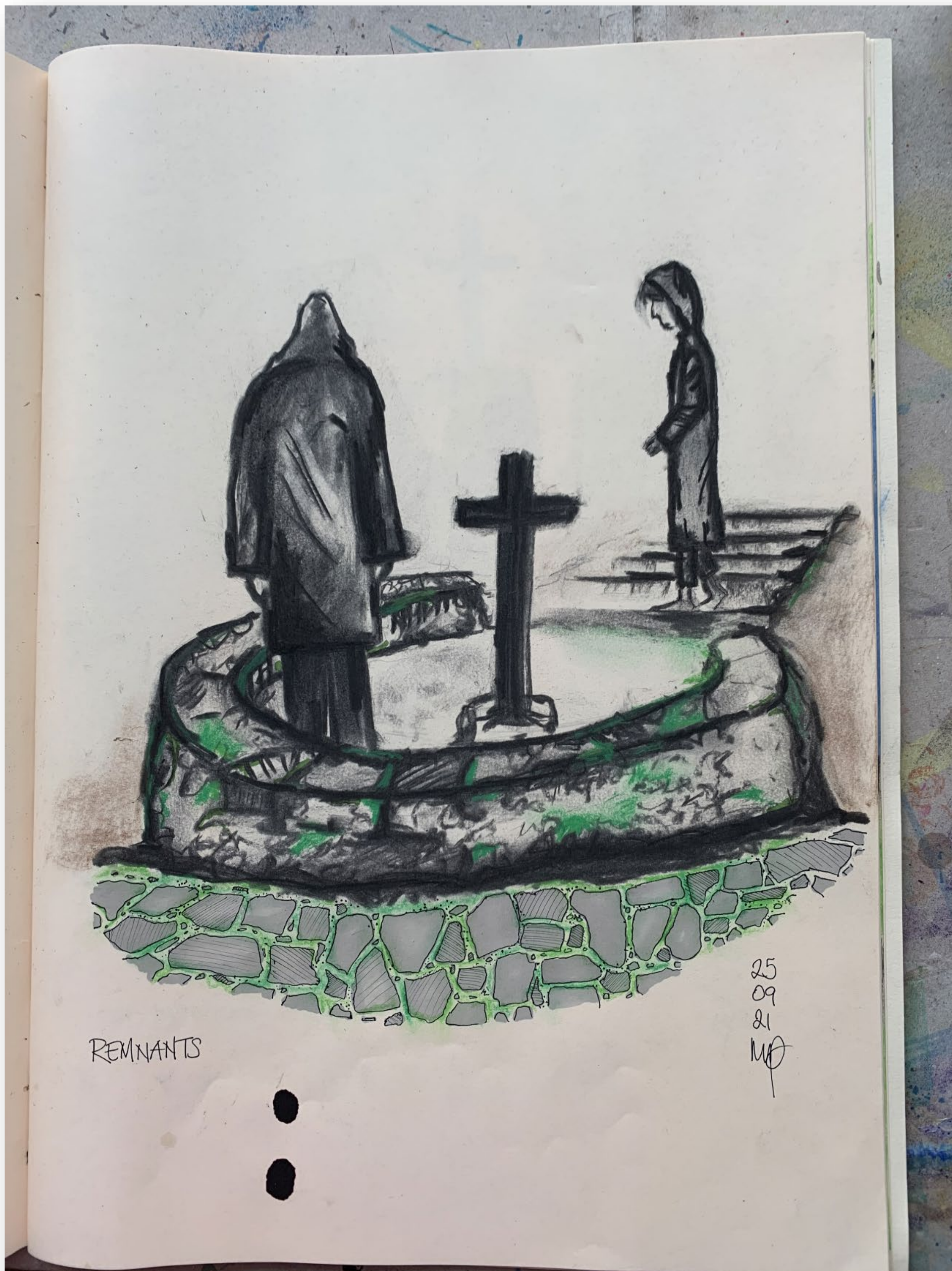

Illustration 19: Circular Patterns of Prayer

5.4.2 Creating Ritual

Another significant pattern in relation to ritual came in the form of pilgrims creating their own rituals, some as a supportive structure for the pilgrim's intrapersonal pilgrimage process and sometimes these rituals were in service of others.

Rosemary's rituals offer us examples of both. She makes a conscious effort to take leave of her back home dilemmas to really enter the daily ritual of long-distance walking, but when she gets the chance to slip in to churches and Cathedrals on route she takes a moment to re-connect:

> So it's also like going on the Camino I kind of leave all my troubles at home and I find walking is the best way to separate, to put all your worries behind you and when you go into the church or a Cathedral you can just lift them up again and say 'Look I'm trusting you God you look after this or that', you know....

She also prays for others in very intentional ways. A close friend was going through a very difficult patch in her life and Rosemary says:

> I always carry a shell especially for her, on the back of the rucksack. Yeah. So I'd have her intentions with me all the time.

And finally, with shyness and humility, she confesses to another long-practised ritual when passing a graveyard,

> I think I also have great devotion to the holy souls. I don't know if you'd be...(hesitates about saying more),... that's another thing when I'm walking, I'd see graveyards and I'd go in and pray for them, really old graveyards and old churches and I'd always pray for the souls and for anyone who had ever visited that church. That's very important for me. I feel in my life it's a kind of a calling for... It's a kind of a silent call, one that nobody would understand or see.

Liam spoke about the ritual of his journaling process,

> I also had a diary and on the front part of the diary, a kind of day-to-day record- the walking, the weather and literally whatever happened that day. But then on the back, I've more processing-type stuff - I'd be thinking back to the funeral, and to Mam and how that was in me that day and the day after that.... Chapter and hours

> and writing about the ordinary and writing about the other deeper stuff so there was this front and back thing. And by the time I finished the Camino, the two ends were meeting - the front was meeting the back. And that gave me a great sense of really getting there as I was walking into Salamanca, on the final day.

Shannon who had just completed her third Lough Derg pilgrimage, spoke of how she offers to bring the intentions of others with her.

> Every time I go to the Island, I always put it up on Facebook: "I'm going to the island...If anybody wants to come with me, they can come with me...or if you want send me your name. and I will I bring your intention". Only once has somebody said that they wanted to come with me, (which was my daughter's RE teacher), but I usually take about 50 or 60 intentions with me. The amount of people with intentions is unreal. And prayers as well. The very first time I put the call on Facebook I didn't get a wild lotta answers and then I added: "You don't have to tell me what your intention is. You just have to give me your name"!

Kay and her walking companion made a conscious attempt to bring people from home to mind on their daily walk on the Camino.

> And I remember people had said, 'say a prayer for us' when they heard we were going. And all of that kind of thing. So I remember that first day, we headed off and we were getting into rhythm and after about half hour, I said, 'Let's stop. And let's name all the people that, you know, that we have with us in some way and that have asked us to pray for them'. And we did that then every day for a few days. And so we covered most people or at least that's the way we felt. We were bringing them with us in some way and their prayer and things like that.

Kay also spoke of personal work that she had brought to the Camino.

> I suppose I also had a personal agenda and it was spiritual in a sense - I wanted to leave behind resentment that I had been carrying for a long time, for years, maybe five or six years. And I hadn't been able to leave it behind. And so this was my journey. It was part of my pilgrimage to try and deal with it. I wouldn't have been conscious of it every day, but I also had been using the *Courage to Change* - the Al-Anon book, very much a spiritual program as well. ...And so it must have been the first few days or so that I read the reflection for that day. And it said "Just cut the ties, cut them". And it was incredible. I hadn't ever remembered reading that particular page before, but it was like – 'Just get rid of it. Make a choice, cut it, just do it'. And I did. And I remember thinking. 'That's it, there is a reason for this...', that was, that was a significant thing for me, and it happened quite early in my pilgrimage.

Liam, Kay and Rosemary's references to their inner work finds resonance in some of Belden Lane's description in his *Backpacking with the Saints* (2015). If we were to substitute 'pilgrimage' for his 'backpacking' references (and both these pilgrimages, we could add, have a wilderness quality to them), what he observes would seem to hold true here also.

> What proves especially instructive to me in backpacking (pilgrimage) as a spiritual practice is how it surfaces the interior baggage I bring along on the trail. Entering the disarming silence of wilderness, neglected things rise to consciousness. Backpacking (Pilgrimage) has as much to do with what I carry inside as with what goes into the pack. It connects me with woundedness as well as with wonder (ibid p. 18).

For Colman, his personal process included completing a beautiful ritual that had begun during the final days of his wife's life and was very much stitched into the grief work for which he had hoped the Camino would provide a 'big-enough' landscape. He tells it like this:

> A week before {names his wife} died and when she -and we -knew was dying, she was in Blackrock hospital. And just across from the hospital there's a little beach and one of the days that I took a break and walked there, I lifted two shells from the beach. When I returned to her room, I gave her one of them and I said, 'Look, let's hold each other in the next week or so, you with your shell and me with mine'. So after she died, I took the two shells with me on pilgrimage and I put then in the little container that a priest uses to bring the Eucharist to the sick, called a pyx.
>
> After Santiago, I continued onward Finisterre. She and I used to often listen to the weather forecasts for Finisterre. So I had my shells and there is a lovely beach near the village. But further around the Atlantic just hammers in and it's extremely dangerous. You're not allowed to even swim there. And the sound of the waves is tremendous. So I made it to a safe spot from which I could drop the shells back into the sea in the wildest of oceans. So that was all my first pilgrimage and it was totally connected to my motivation and my kind of remembering.

Although not part of my primary research data, it is also worth noting that there is much evidence of religious houses and spiritual communities along the Camino routes creating new rituals for pilgrims, mindful of the fact that many may not have any familiarity with what might be considered more traditional ritual and liturgy. A small Religious Community in Rabanal for example offer night prayer in their beautiful old monastery to which everyone is welcome. They offer prayers and song in a different language every evening and have folders of up to eight

other languages also available so as many as possible present can participate as much as possible. Another religious community also leads an evening prayer service. They invite pilgrims who come to write their prayer or intention on a post-it note and then to literally post-it on a nearby wall. They are then invited to take a post-it from the wall of prayers and intentions from the *previous* night's wall, return to the prayer circle and pray aloud that prayer/intention of the pilgrim who will have been, by then, have twenty kilometres or more further along their pilgrimage route.

5.4.3 Ritual and the Sacred

Apart from these sacred rituals created by pilgrims, a number of the pilgrims interviewed made direct connections between their pilgrimage ritual-making and their sense of the Sacred, of God, or of a larger dimension. Mislav, for example, was aware of how difficult it was for him to articulate the nature of the deep well of positivity and possibility that remains buoyant even through the painful aspects of the Camino pilgrimage.

> ...because although the walking hurts so much at times, the whole positive experience was so strong, so powerful that it simply washed away all the pain over...You know, I didn't mind pain. I didn't. I didn't consider it significant at all because I was... I was so heavily experiencing this whole positive feeling that I cannot fully articulate. Possibly, I couldn't even now make good enough sense of it. Maybe... the only sense, maybe, I would say is that it was a sense of walking with God, in a way. I remember reading this American author who lives along the Camino. She wrote that after millions of people have walked a certain area all of them with a prayer in their hearts, then certainly that area is very special.... And the whole atmosphere is something that you cannot fully articulate, but it's there. You can, you do get to sense it.

Colman, who again is one of the duo-pilgrims, made a deep observation about the ritual performativity of the body on pilgrimage as prayer. He offered this reflection when he had been talking about the physicality of the Lough Derg pilgrimage and then he elaborated into a profound thought about both pilgrimages.

> Yes, it's the physicality of it ... I think that's part of the door of it. . You know, it's raw, physical, it's very physical. And in a way far more physical than the Camino.
> ...But I think both of them carry the possibility of, of the body-praying as distinct from the mouth or the mind...the body. I trusted that in myself, that my walking was

> ...it wasn't that I had to pray *while* I was walking. My walking itself is prayer. And I think, the body praying helped me. That's part also of the thing of- 'I can walk', you know, it's, it's...(searches)... it's prayer. I don't have *to* pray, if you know what I mean. You don't have to go and say prayers. Because I'm convinced that that's what people are doing, and at a very profound level. They're really in a very, deep prayer. It's very deep. And I know that it's part of my incarnational commitment, no not commitment, but I mean incarnational welcome. My welcome of that, all of that confirms that for me.

And back to Shannon on her re-connection with God through her experience of Lough Derg,

> I think what the Island gave me was time, time to listen, to listen to God. And I had stopped listening. But on the island, you have no choice but to listen because there's nothing else to do. You know, you have.... you know, even though my sister was there with me, there were times we drifted off from each other. And we had our own space. And, you know, that gave ye... You know, you don't have your mobile. You don't have the wains screaming at you, you don't have to go to work. You don't clean the house. So really, there's nothing else to it, you have to listen to God. And, you know, I was listening that, especially that first weekend that I went that was really special that first pilgrimage, I always say something very spiritual happened to me that morning. I can't put it into words...But to me, that's when my faith returned. It was like somebody waved a big wand, in a way.

5.4.4 Ritual and the Unexpected

The intent that all pilgrims set out with to complete and honour the rubrical tradition of the pilgrimage is sometimes thwarted by some bodily or situational development. The challenge of authenticity then for the pilgrim can be how to accept and incorporate that development into what the Pilgrimage was now asking of them.

When injury interrupted Colman's pilgrimage, one of his struggles was 'not to drop into a sense of failure' as might have been his default response. A vignette, recounted by him, indicates how a more mature and positive integration of such situations can be deeply influenced by meeting others. His story pivots on a prayer-ritual shared across religious traditions and is a profound example, I would suggest, of the surprise, the unexpected gifts that may be placed at the feet of pilgrims, (quite literally in this case), during their pilgrimage process.

> On that first Camino, when my legs were so painful that I had to stop walking for many days, I would sometimes hitch a lift from stage to stage. One day a Spanish couple stopped for me. After a short patch they came to a stop and explained that they wished to make a visit to a nearby Church, if that were alright with me. I said 'Of course' and explained that I was just so glad of their lift, given my knees were strapped and I was in trouble. And I told them that I was on the pilgrimage but that I couldn't continue to walk. She then said to me, 'I'm a Buddhist' followed by, 'Would you mind if I prayed on your knees?' Whoa! I presumed it was a metaphorical rather than physical offer, so I said, 'I'd love you to do that and I'd be very glad'. Then she said, 'Well, would you just come into the chapel with me?' And she took our her mobile phone. ...She put on a meditation timer for fifteen minutes. I sat down near her and she touched my knee. We were quiet. I prayed and she prayed. Whatever. And the bell went after the fifteen minutes. And I said, 'I really appreciate that, really. Thank you very much'. And we got back into the car. We travelled onwards for another 15 minutes or so and then they had to stop. And I got out. The next day was the first day in three weeks that I walked. Now, you make whatever you want to make of that. But I walked for the first time - whether it was my prayer or her prayer or the pair of us praying, or whatever.

In summary then, it is possible to conclude that while ritual performativity is not, understandably, a big discussion point among pilgrims on pilgrimage, nor in their interpretations and reflections, it is a large part of the experience of pilgrimage, as the data above indicates. Ritual performativity is one of the ways pilgrims place their embodied selves at the service of their quest for meaning. In this sense, I suggest, the ritualising pilgrim body is soul-intuitive. LeSueur notes that traditional Western Christian (ritual) experience has been 'largely passive' and believes that part of the attraction of contemporary pilgrimage is,

> ...that it offers a de-institutionalized spiritual practice without a need for authorized personnel to oversee or sanction...it is experiential and participatory, and invites you into a journey with a sacred history, ...a journey that is intuitive and symbolic. Pilgrimage is also ecologically grounded; a participant is exposed to the wilds of creation and the unpredictability of weather (2018 p.24).

Many scholars agree that ritual performativity is what fuels pilgrimage's power as an agent of transformation, a topic I will return to in my fifth finding that of becoming a more expanded, whole person. If I turn Bell's understanding of ritual into a question it helps me to address a recurring query which has intensified in me as the research deepened and developed. What shape and meaning are contemporary pilgrims, as a whole, giving to society and culture in the ritual of their pilgrimage-making? Some commentators on pilgrimage, and often quite

scathingly, dismiss contemporary pilgrimage-making as an individualistic, commodification of the ancient meaning and practice of pilgrimage ritual. In my discussion of my findings in the next Chapter I will argue that such an interpretation may be a mis-reading and may be the outcome of a pre-determined and possibly faulty hermeneutic. In the interim, I continue with my findings and turn fully now to one I anticipated earlier in my introduction to this chapter, that of, 'encountering otherness'.

5.5 Findings: Theme No. 4: Meeting the other/otherness/Other

1. The Summoned Seeker
2. Becoming more grounded
3. Ritualising with intent and contentment
4. Meeting the other/otherness
5. Becoming a more expanded, whole person

In many ways Colman's prayer-story above could have represented equally this next finding, that of 'meeting otherness'. In the introductory section to this chapter, I offered a detailed footnote as to why I had entitled this overall account of my findings, 'an encounter with the pilgrim other'. I referred to the Levinas' leitmotif of 'otherness' as fitting by way of describing the quality of respect that grew in me for the pilgrim participants whose reflections I had listened to again and again. It also seemed to capture well something of the way those same pilgrims in turn spoke of other pilgrims whom they had met during their pilgrimage experience. Sometimes 'the other' was not an actual pilgrim but their presence made an impact. Some pilgrims too reflected on what is sometimes called, the ultimate Other, God.

5.5.1 Other Pilgrims

Now seasoned Camino Pilgrim, Brigid, who began to do the pilgrimage alone only after a number of accompaniments of her brother following his stroke, was struck by the number of young men, (a significant demographic on the Camino, as we learned in the previous chapter), who confided in her along the route. She was

particularly struck by how difficult many of their lives were and recounts one story, whilst stressing she had many such encounters, which the data can verify!

> But it's just, it's a lovely experience to be trusted, by people you're walking with for only an hour or two, and what they might impart and maybe it's because you're not going to see them again. For example, I was walking with a Polish man, for about an hour or so. And he asked me, how did I come to the Camino. And then, of course, I asked him why was he here. And he told me that he was a medic and that his wife was a medic. And that they were due to have their third child, when they discovered that there was a problem. And they decided - which is very unusual for Polish people- that they would go for an abortion. But at the last minute, for some reason they decided not to. And later the baby was born and the baby was and is perfect. And he did the Camino in relief and thanksgiving and to help him deal with that whole experience. And at that moment, he imparted this very private information to me, a stranger. Just then, his phone rang and it was his wife. So I didn't look at him, I just waved, saluted, said, 'Buen Camino' and 'Bye-bye, see you' And I never met him again. And that's not the only time something like that has happened.

At one point Brigid ruminated on the give and take among pilgrims on Camino, sometimes a listening ear, sometimes much more practical assistance, sometimes a giving that really costs you, and she concluded:

> And to me that's very important because you can't go on the Camino and say it's all about my pilgrimage...Well, maybe you can, but I don't think you should. And it's all about me getting from A to B and everybody else is ..."will you just push over there now while I make my way"? You do see this sometimes. But if we don't look out for each other, it'll come back to you. Somebody will be kind to you in return one day. And you know I was very pleased that the young man I helped didn't give up. (referring to another of her stories!) But I said 'now you've learned you have to go slower and not race to the end'. And he just laughed.

Later when Brigid recounted one of those other stories, this time going back to one of the occasions when she was chaperoning her brother, she found herself on the receiving end of much needed assistance from a Portuguese man called Eduardo, who 'appeared' a number of times at critical moments. Interestingly, she called him Spirit-man, a couple of times as she retold her story.

Fiachra, and then Paul both pay significant tribute to other pilgrims as a significant part of their overall pilgrimage experience on Lough Derg.

> The biggest thing I'd say about Lough Derg, an awful lot of it is... sure, the penance is one thing... But the people you meet up there - I've yet to see anyone that goes there that... You know what I mean that you wouldn't be very impressed by. You know the most of them are the best of people and they were good old crack... but definitely the people you meet and you wouldn't know who you could meet, you could meet all sorts. And I do, but I am the type that I'd like the company. (laughs) You nearly always meet someone or... But I do like company. Yeah. I love a bit of chat in between the stations and a bit of banter. Yeah. Yes. The whole shoot.

And for Paul it is the variety, the diverse backgrounds and the conversations,

> I met some fantastic people. I met a Buddhist monk. I met a colonel who was a member of the *101st Airborne* in the Vietnam War. He'd deserted, living in Sweden and Ireland as they were the only places he could come to without an extradition warrant being slapped on him. And I met a lot of bachelor Leitrim farmers, you know. Wonderful people, whom I would never meet otherwise. I remember one guy who was in his 70s and he'd been doing Lough Derg since he was about 14 or 15, a really modest man, you know, he'd never married, lived on a farm, up a hill somewhere in the back end of Monaghan or somewhere like that. And he was part of all this talk about the Vietnam War with the Colonel. So next thing the farmer went out and did an extra station for the all the boys in Vietnam just because we were talking about it. So then we all did one together for them. And afterwards, he pulled me aside and said: 'Tell me this. Where is Vietnam? What is it?' He hadn't a clue. But he had prayed away anyway. Oh yeah, what an absolutely wonderful man. ....I would say I have had the most important conversations of my life on Lough Derg.

Another Lough Derg Pilgrim, Sean, acknowledges also how important other pilgrims are and some of that support does not even necessitate conversation:

> I think one of the best things about Lough Derg is meeting other people and again going back all over the years and it is interesting you meet the same sort of people, and you remember that face and you would have a chat. What has also kept me going over the years was during the night to see these older ladies: 'Okay she's still moving, so I am going to have to keep moving'. They would just keep me going.

Breda did a number of Camino stretches with organised groups of young people, some of whom she counts now among her close friends,

> It all happens so organically like you know you fall into step with someone and you discover you have so much in common with them and then a couple of weeks after coming back you send a text or receive a text about coming to a party or going for a walk or just meeting up. And then sometimes it's just great walking with somebody and the stories that are shared are really special and even though I might never see

> that person again like it gives me a chance to appreciate what I have, because there are so many people who have had very difficult experiences who walk the Camino. Yes there is one of my good friends now who I only met on one of the early Caminos, ...we just had some great conversations on the way and we stayed in contact. And her extended family have since become friends of mine through the Camino networks as well. And I have even travelled back with some of her extended family on one occasion.

Longer-term friendships were not just noted among younger people. Kay recalled the shock of seeing two Camino pilgrims at her local Church, one Sunday morning in a tiny rural community in the wilderness of County Mayo a few months after her Camino completed. She had connected well with them for a short enough time during her pilgrimage and in conversations with them had mentioned her involvement in her local community. They talked of hoping to visit Ireland at some point soon, they followed through and sought her out, remembering the scant details of her location. They spent a long and contented day together in this utterly new, non-Camino context.

There is a particularly strong theme of community/other-pilgrim mindedness amongst first person testimonies of the Camino, almost a kind of 'ethic' of looking out for the other and the 'requirement' almost, to do what you can for a distressed other should you come upon them. Emerging scholar, Cecilia Gossen, went so far as to describe this as, 'Camino identity' (2012). Drawing on what she referred to as self-categorisation theory, she argues that, 'daily engagement with fellow pilgrims, the physicality of participating in the pilgrimage as well as the influence of Camino traditions and the ever-changing placeness' are among key elements which conspire to 'invite a high level of behaviour and commitment to a Camino idealism'. Individual pilgrims she insists, seek to be 'exemplars of this group and its ideals', and develop 'strong bonds of solidarity' (ibid pp. 164-173). Mislav's earlier reference 'that we live on Camino as we are meant to live', is a fine example of this ethic as are Brigid's experiences over several Caminos.

A final point worthy of note about meeting other pilgrims is the permission the pilgrimage process seems to offer in both places for ease of movement between times of privacy and solitude and times of conversation, connection and community. In a number of the quotes already offered we have noted references

to this ease of movement. Repeat pilgrims also reflect that in different years and for different reasons they have needed variations – sometimes more solitude, sometimes more connection. Some, particularly Brigid, Gabrielle and Colman stressed a number of times in their interviews, how important it was for them overall however, to have set out as a 'solo-pilgrim'. Thomas captures perfectly something of the essential quality of both, as well as that critical movement between them in the efficacy of the overall pilgrimage experience.

> No I think that the main, the main thing for me was connection with other people, do you know, like, ...that was the main conduit of any kind of healing and any type of...yeah. Although there were the moments by myself and they really stood out because in a way they were contrasted against the times of connection. But without the moments of connection I don't think I would have been able to... yeah, I dunno, (pauses & wonders further),... I wonder would I have reached those moments of really being able to do the cathartic and really come back with a sense of healing?

5.5.2 Others

On occasion, an important encounter with another may not have been another pilgrim. It may even have been encounters with another creature.

Kay describes coming upon a man who had set up a kind of refreshments pit-stop.

> There was a little nook in the mountain and there was a man there with all these little bits and pieces of oranges laid out. And he had lovely bread. He had boiled eggs. And I don't know what it was about the boiled egg. But it was like he'd given me manna from heaven. It was just beautiful. And he had water and everything like that. And I suppose I hadn't prepared myself that well with water that day and I was so grateful for it all.

Later, on the Meseta, Kay says she will 'never forget the scene of an older couple working in a field'

> and there were furrows and they were planting something or other, it was so like that iconic picture of *The Gleaners* saying the Angelus. One of them was more upright and the woman was bent down...and they were working like this with their hands and the land was poor. It was arid and hard and yet there they were, trying to work it. And I was just saying to myself, 'like here we are, we are just walking past'

> and, like, it's easy to forget that there's other people for whom the Camino is home and sometimes life for them is not so plentiful.

For John it was the otherness of a butterfly that brought meaning and connection to a painful family story,

> A few things happened me, like one day I was walking on my own. And it was very powerful, a beautiful little butterfly flew beside me. And he accompanied me maybe for an hour. And it was, it was amazing. I had been thinking about and praying for Paddy. Because Paddy had told me that he'd be always have his intentions for every day like. Like one day he was dedicating it for his brother and another to his sister, you know. So like in my own family there, there's an interesting story. Something happened back in 1915 or maybe even 1912. My father's sister was born but she had been totally forgotten. Only my father remembered her and he had said it to me. But none of my own brothers or sisters ever heard of this. And it took me a long time to actually prove that she did exist. She lived for one day. And I had this sense now this great sense. Her name was Mary, according to my father. He told me once that when his own father was dying, he was still conscious but that he was calling out a name. And I just had this sense of duty to my own family to hold that child and that infant's name. I'd just had the most tremendous sense that maybe, she was the one who, who through the butterfly was accompanying me on my journey. You know, that was both the most profound experience I had on the journey to Compostela.

Liam self-describes as a strongly outdoors person and has been very nourished by the beauty of the Spanish landscape and flora on his various pilgrimages. He recalls how that nourishment dropped to a deeper level on one such Camino.

> Yes, certainly from Seville to Salamanca, I sort of my found myself communing with nature, if that doesn't sound too “piousous” or something. But that sense of connecting with the natural world and appreciating it and enjoying it and I recall the deep joy of seeing a cow or a dog or a horse over the fence in the field and you’d be so glad and I’d be stop and be saying, like ‘How’re ye Horse?’

5.5.3 Ultimate Other

‘No one has ever seen God except the Son who has revealed him’ the Prologue to John’s Gospel concludes (John 1:18). In Paul’s letter to the Corinthians he assures the neophyte Christian community that for now it is only possible to see, ‘through a glass, darkly or a mirror dimly’ (1Cor 13:12). In the Old Testament, Moses was told it was not possible to ‘see God’s face and live’ (Ex 33:20). The experience of pilgrims in this research, in respect of their talk of or thoughts

about God is very much in keeping with this long and reverent tradition of honouring the ineffability of God. ‘God does not come to us as an external object’, says theologian Tomáš Halík [97], ‘but rather as a possibility, as a challenge, as an offer, an invitation or an appeal. ‘God comes to us as a question’, Halík continues, ‘whether we are ready to accept the task to which he invites and challenges us’.

Some pilgrims in this group of research participants were more confident in their reflections on ultimacy, on God, on the ultimate meaning of the pilgrimage, on life overall, than others in the group. I do not mean a confidence of articulation but rather of a maturing faith and not faith as in certainty or set answers but again as Halik suggests, ‘faith as a question of mystery’. My first research question about both these pilgrimages asked how pilgrims embodied and interpreted their pilgrimage experience and the data has already revealed much. Given that both pilgrimages are physically challenging and demand much of pilgrims, an understandable theological question insinuates itself - Is this what God wants or requires of pilgrims? Is God asking or desiring that pilgrims be physically challenged or worse ‘punished’ sometimes to the point of significant suffering? There is certainly a traditional theology of pilgrimage that is quite transactional, ‘if I endure this, then maybe God will grant me that’. Or, ’If I endure this then maybe God will forgive me that’. Whilst the nature of the transactional may have changed somewhat in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, for many there may still be either a strong feature or at least a remnant of this element. For example, there are pilgrimages that are deliberately focused on healing, as in bio-physical curative healing, as both the central request the pilgrim might have in journeying to the place of pilgrimage and the overall purpose for making the pilgrimage. Pilgrimages to Lourdes, for example, would belong to this category of sacred journey. The magnetism of Lourdes as a healing centre, certainly pre Covid-19, had continued to grow and immersion in its baths has continued as one of the pilgrimage’s most enduring rituals. Much pilgrimage today, however, is more likely to be articulated along the lines of, *‘I am*

[97] On the occasion of winning the Templeton Prize in 2014, this short video gives an introductory sense of Halik’s theological approach. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C8DYJ6NTfe4

doing this for…'. As the data has pointed out above much of this intentionality about contemporary pilgrimage is altruistic and other-oriented in nature and there is almost no discourse concerning doing pilgrimage as a means of securing one's personal salvation or even as a personal penance. This is quite significant since both Pilgrimages in this study, as was acknowledged in the historical overview in Chapter 2, have a significant penitential history, legitimised by a theology that was by times, intensely punitive in corporeal and as well as in terms of acting as a corrective regarding reputation and social status for some pilgrims. 'Behind such journeys' as the Turners, described it, 'lies the paradigm of the *via crucis*, with the added purgatorial element appropriate to the fallen' (1978 p. 6). Thus, it has been most instructive to listen to some of the pilgrims theologize about contemporary pilgrimage in our research conversations. By way of illustration, I will offer the thoughts from a representative of each of my three sub-groups, as it were, a Camino pilgrim, a Lough Derg pilgrim and a duo-pilgrim. I will then conclude with some thoughts from a second duo-pilgrim, Colman, primarily because he ruminates on a theme that is close to the theological core of this thesis, that of the primacy of embodiment and incarnation in our time, as portal to the Sacred.

I begin with Lenora, who first reminds me in this part of her reflection that she is an ordained presbyterian minister and teaches theology at a seminary and that she was formerly Catholic. She was eager to distinguish between medieval and contemporary theology.

> So I certainly, you know, I work on developing my spiritual life. And, I have faith but my big concern was, my big thought was that God doesn't want you, doesn't require you to suffer in order to reach you. God will reach you however, God wants to reach you, but you don't have to do this Middle Ages thing where they were like paining themselves and starving themselves and stuff. I was always against that. Always. But no. God doesn't want you to go through that. I mean, if you do, of course suffer because sometimes terrible stuff happens, yes, and God knows that - bad things can happen to you. But I don't think God is like looking for bad things to happen to you. So I didn't think that is a good motivation – "you must suffer". I always hated that. But I was a Catholic and I never liked that part of Catholicism. And so I became a Protestant because it made a lot more sense to me.

Lenora has also done much research of her own as part of her work and she notices some trends there,

> But I think some people from my own researches do chase after intense experiences and something that's very experiential and physical...And I think people think you need high stimulation to be, to feel alive. Personally, I don't think you do. And I don't think God wants that either. And I don't think we need it to be spiritual. But I think we live in a world where we're very either over-cosseted or just too busy and so many people don't think they're really alive unless they've had an extreme experience.

Interestingly, Farias *et al* in 2019 published the fruits of research on *Atheists on the Santiago Way* and concluded that 'In the first place, atheists were as motivated as Christian pilgrims by a "spiritual search." …{this motivation} also contains elements potentially associated with self-transcendence, including a search for meaning, a yearning for peace and living a simpler life" (ibid p. 29). Lenora however, really struggled to understand the atheist's motivation although she was also able to let their participation raise questions for herself about her own motivation,

> On the Camino they weren't all young and healthy and wanting to have an extreme experience. But I think they were doing it to challenge themselves and yes some were showing off. A number of them! So I didn't like that. But others were genuinely finding it difficult. And I wondered, why would you do this if you don't believe in God? And if you don't think this is religious and you don't think that God sends suffering or reaches you that way, why would you put yourself through that? That was my big question. I never had an answer and I still don't know. And within a very short time I was asking 'Why am *I* doing this?' And I didn't have an answer.

Teresa's reflection begins in a similar territory to that of Lenora's but she takes it in quite a different direction.

> No, I don't. I don't really think it's God's expectation. It's not I don't, I don't think so. I'd say God's expectation of us is more just to live as best as we can in his love and to love everybody else as he would have loved us which is virtually impossible for us. But I think it's not his expectation that we do this kind of thing, but I think if it brings us to a place for ourselves it's good yeah, ...And it is good for some people and it's not for others. Other people will find their place, sitting in an armchair or reading a book or going through other ways or whatever. ..but as I said I don't think it's what God expects of us or I don't think God expects us to punish ourselves. He probably expects us to challenge ourselves maybe mentally and live better lives and be better to other people and ourselves physically, and respecting other people and other ways of life. Even St. Patrick and all those hermits that went off to those lonely places, like I don't think I would find that the way for me.

Teresa is perceptive about the kind of 'emptying' that Lough Derg can effect for her which permits an openness, a receptivity, she believes, to what God wishes to bestow upon her:

> ...But coming here, here brings me a little way back to the place where I can actually focus on my faith and ...I wouldn't have expressed this very much before, but it makes me realize how important my faith is and where maybe I'm lacking in it. And if the physical challenge makes me empty to open myself , to open myself to other things, well that's fine, its maybe not what God expects of us, but as I said everyone is different and maybe... I mean, I'm sure God knows that I'm not that person but he's given me this and I have to believe that he has and knows about it because otherwise I might never have gone to Lough Derg...Now I could get teary quite easily but it's out of appreciation I think or realization of something strong. It's kind of an emotional thing that this is who made me and loves me and accepts me as I am, even though sometimes I don't accept myself as I am. And my challenge, I suppose, the challenge for me out of Lough Derg is to allow myself to know and believe that he does accept me, as I am, warts and all, and I have to accept other people in the same way. It doesn't always work this way and that's the challenge of faith, isn't it really? But yes, it kind of makes me teary.

Liam also teaches theology, has led a number of groups on pilgrimage and was consequently interested in the premise, purpose and background to my research study. He addressed my research questions directly and insightfully, out of his own experience of both pilgrimages:

> Again, I think with all of this, the difficulty for you is that you're trying to put language on something, trying to explain something that in many ways is pre-thematic experience; it's almost beyond interpretation or putting an explanation on it and yet and yet, it works. The pilgrimage works. And I think you're on to something. I think there is something very important around the physical, because if we go hungry, deny ourselves food, which is so physically important to us....we deny ourselves sleep, which is so physically important to us and we're cold and we're in our bare feet...these, these physical comforts and pleasures are gone from us and we become suddenly very physically aware. And I think that is somehow connected to putting us into a deeper place or connecting us with something primal, deeper and more connected with the divine. I don't know... I don't know.

Finally, Colman does not teach theology but has studied it in the past and his theological interpretation nudges into the 'fundamental hermeneutic of embodiment and incarnation' that I have introduced and referenced a number of times:

> Can I can just say about the bodily experience? Because it fits for me to say... *'And the Word was made flesh'* - this has been always been the most profound piece of Scripture for me. I would say I am profoundly incarnational in my faith and in my humanity, I have a great affection towards that...towards that dignity of the Incarnation. So the physicality of pilgrimage would fit within that for me. And now that's... that's maybe sounding a bit too intellectual ...But it does matter to me - the physicality of the whole experience, yes, it matters very much.

His thoughts echo those of Godzieba, as he proposes that we understand '…the essential role that embodiment plays in our attempt to discern, God's ultimate purpose in creating, and how that purpose is active today'. He goes on to stress how 'the incarnational imagination's ability to value embodiment and particularity for their own sakes allows theology to join a conversation about human destiny..., {making} it clear that God's intent is human flourishing…{and} God's intent is incarnated in each particular life, each particular situation, and in the ensemble of lives, situations, and relationships' (2006, p. 794). I will return to an expansion of this theological discussion on pilgrimage in the next Chapter. For now, I will conclude my presentation of findings with an illustration of my final theme.

5.6 Findings: Theme No. 5: Becoming a more expanded, more whole person

1. The Summoned Seeker
2. Becoming more grounded
3. Ritualising with intent and contentment
4. Meeting the other/otherness
5. Becoming a more expanded, whole person

A number of pilgrimage scholars regularly describe pilgrimage as a practice with transformational intent, although not all offer examples of such transformations nor do they detail how the pilgrimage process facilitates them. This has been surprising to me. 'Pilgrimage is, among other things, a journey of intentional transformation' (Terreault & Anderson, 2012); 'transformation is a key motivation/experience for both religious and secular pilgrims' (Maddrell, 2013); 'Pilgrimage is a transformative event' (Scriven, 2014), to give three examples. Transformation, I would suggest, is a bold claim to make about any process or practice. Change is ordinarily difficult. Total change, which is how I might

translate 'transformation' - one's prior 'form' now changed irrevocably - is, I believe, profoundly difficult to achieve. So I am hesitant to use such a term here. Equally, paying attention to my data, none of the research participants would have personally described the impact of their pilgrimage as, 'transformational'. However, even a scan back over the pages of quotations above, indicates that this group of pilgrims experienced a number of significant impacts, some deeply altering, others liberating, affirming or galvanising. Physical rejuvenation, a sense of humanity restored, nourished by the inspiration of others, deepened gratitude for the gifts of life, appreciation for pilgrimage history, catharsis and assuagement of grief, empathy for the suffering of others, willingness to embrace one's own vulnerability and recognise in that embrace the roots of resilience, these are among the dividend already testified above. Instead of perhaps the metamorphosis of the caterpillar-chrysalis, the paradigmatic transformation of the natural world, the changes pilgrims describe here have been more akin to a kind of 'stretching' of body, mind, spirit and heart. Socially, a new identity has been conferred, then earned and embodied and the 'time-out' from the other back-home social identities allows for new or at least fresh perspective. We also noted that some found and accepted a new or at least renewed spiritual identity, bestowed by the God whom some discover, had first sought them out. Hence, I have termed this finding, 'a becoming', and more specifically, 'becoming a more expanded, more whole person'. It is undeniably psychological and reminiscent of Humanistic Psychotherapy founder, Carl Rogers' description of the purpose and process of life *and* indeed the psychotherapeutic process, '*on becoming a person'* (1961). Irish photographer, Maeve Hickey recounts in word and photographs her experience of doing Lough Derg. In one image she captured two women shortly before their departure and the joy emanating from their faces is quite remarkable (Taylor & Hickey, 2015). Sure, relief of completion may in there but there's more and it brings powerfully to mind the words of St Irenaeus, 'The Glory of God is the human being fully alive'.

5.6.1 The 'Healing Dynamics'

Jill Dubisch and Michael Winkelman edit a volume containing an extensive exploration of pilgrimage and healing in which they describe such sacred

journeys as 'whole-ing'. (2005) In their *Introduction* they enumerate the 'healing dynamics embodied in pilgrimage' as:

- a physical journey with social, symbolic, and physical effects;
- an act of personal empowerment;
- an assertion of the individual's identity in relation to sacred 'others' that integrates self within collective models;
- the particularizing of individual suffering within broader frameworks that provide meaning;
- a sense of social solidarity from an active connection with a community of fellow pilgrims;
- and, finally, an alteration of consciousness, eliciting psychophysiological dynamics conducive to supporting a range of bodily healing responses" (ibid p. x).

Mindful that a number of pilgrimage shrines around the world and in several religious traditions, are places people journey towards in search for or hope of "the cure", they wonder if we are now at a point in pilgrimage history where "healing" (their quotation marks in this instance) might be 'construed to include spiritual, and psychological wellness as well as, but not necessarily reserved to biophysical curing'? They therefore expand their view of healing to include just such a wider range, extending from the more traditional cures for specific physical ailments but also to healing wounds of the past, and to creating a better world' (ibid, p. xi).

I was struck by how many from their list of 'healing dynamics' above could be matched to my earlier list, where I summarised the dividends emanating from the pilgrims in my research study. Ellen Badone, long-established pilgrimage scholar, believes, 'the conclusion is clear: pilgrimage continues to move people, both literally and spiritually and to provide a symbolic venue for the construction, transformation and negotiation of identities on multiple levels' (2016 p.159).

So let us scan the data one last time and note some of the moments when my pilgrim interviewees touched on areas of experience that hint of 'transaction', 'expansion', 'more wholeness' and 'transformation'.

5.6.2 *The Pilgrims Final Words*

Rosemary has an adult son who was injured in a serious accident a few years back and in an instant he moved from being a successful, sports-enthusiast and a young, fit man to becoming wheelchair-bound. His emotional, psychological and spiritual healing has become Rosemary's deepest prayer. The first few years of his recovery were painful for everyone. From her long engagement in sport herself and running marathons in major capitals like, Dublin, London and New York, Rosemary had observed regularly the presence and efficacy of participation in marathons for people with wheelchair-bound disabilities. (She and three close friends did marathons as fundraisers for a number of years before they started doing the Camino.) So, after a year or two, Rosemary tentatively suggested to her son that he might consider training for a marathon. He was enraged and declared emphatically, 'I will never take up sport again'. To her great distress for seven years, he 'drank himself silly' as a way of dealing with his massively changed life-situation. She remembers many a Sunday morning 'ringing pubs and clubs looking for his lost jacket, shirt, phone or other belongings'. In the seventh year of this destructive pattern of her son's behaviour, it happened that Rosemary did the Camino and Medjugorje. When she returned her younger son said, '*Ma, he's not here yet but let me show you something*'. He led her down to the bedroom of her son with the disability and there was a racer wheelchair. Her wheelchair-bound son has not been drinking since, trains regularly and has completed a number of marathons. Rosemary concludes her reflection with this:

> 'That's why I know I am here. That's how God has steered him and that's how I know God loves me because he answered my deepest prayer and changed my son's life so much for the better'.

Shannon has already spoken of significant positive impacts of the Lough Derg pilgrimage for her, but towards the end of our interview she made another disclosure about a very significant life-change.

> Yeah, one big thing that has happened for me is that I stopped drinking completely. Now, I wasn't an alcoholic or anything, but I would have been, maybe kinda' drinking a bit too much. And I know a few times when I had been to Lough Derg, I had prayed

> about it and two years ago, I just decided after I came back. So I had talked... I mean, me "and the boss" had talked it over - when on the island. And I says, *'I've got to stop drinking'*. So I stopped drinking that September and I haven't had a drink since. Now, as I said, I wasn't an alcoholic, but I was one of those people who was getting a bit too fond of opening a bottle of wine on a Wednesday night, and I had a sense that I was maybe heading down a road I shouldna' been heading down, if I didn't stop. I never thought I would ever say that I would be the person not to be having another glass of wine or opening a bottle when people called round.

With considerable 'psychological savvy' she takes this decision in stages and engages 'structures' to assist her in the critical early days:

> So, aye, I just decided, you know, I mean, while I was there. Now it took me a while when I got back to actually make all the moves, well it took me like maybe six, seven weeks. First, I just personally made a four-week pledge, and then I took a pioneer-pin[98] for four weeks and then that was it. I have never, never had a drink since. And it's hard. You know, cause I'm in a running club and they're all big drinkers, it's really hard sometimes.

These are two quite strong outcomes of pilgrimage, Rosemary's, perhaps includes elements of the traditional 'transactional' paradigm and Shannon's edges more obviously towards the transformational. In terms of that spectrum, I mentioned earlier, of pilgrimage effecting change on a scale from the incremental to the monumental', these examples could certainly be placed towards the upper-end. Most other pilgrims in the study might pitch themselves somewhere along the "in-between", given that they experienced more of what I referred to above as 'a kind of stretching', an expansion of self, a becoming more whole. This is evident in a number of phrases or adjectives already used by the research participants in many of the quotes referenced throughout the account of the above findings. Some of them are worth repeating here along with some additional ones from the interviews but not yet referenced which together, I would suggest, are evidence of this incremental expansion and increased wholeness. Let us note these examples,

- ...an amazing experience (Thomas)

[98] Pioneer pins are emblems of an Irish born Temperance movement, called the Pioneer Total Abstinence Movement founded in 1898 by Fr James Cullen SJ, although the movement has since travelled across the Catholic world. A small metal image worn on the lapel or equivalent indicates a decision by the wearer to abstain from alcohol. The pin bears the image of the cross and the Sacred Heart, the Patron of the Association.

- ...that was phenomenal for me (Gabrielle)
- ... that pain, that sadness-yes, it's always going to be part of me - but I don't need to carry it in such a painful way anymore (Thomas)
- ...six, seven years holding a particular resentment...I cut the ties and let it go (Kay)
- ...my faith was restored, it was like someone waved a wand (Shannon)
- ...for the rest of the year, it helps me to appreciate everything so much more, more mindful eating, even putting my shoes back on and what that means for the everyday (Sean)
- ...it (the Camino) is something fabulous to be involved in, the unexpected, it is like a great seed (Brigid)
- I finished with a new relief and confidence that things will work out for me (Jim)
- Yeah, I had been having a really difficult time with a huge sense of failure and a lot of negative self-talk and I would definitely say that this call to come on Camino was an invitation to a healing process, which started immediately as I started walking (Mislav)
- I suffer with manic depression and sometimes the form is low when I go for my regular pilgrimage to Lough Derg but it always lifts my spirits, ...and even the sleep deprivation there helps me with the sleep issues I have at home -a way of life with my condition (Fiachra)

5.6.3 *'Can Pilgrimage Fail?'*

Hillary Kaell asks an important question in her article of the same name, *Can Pilgrimage Fail?* (2016). She builds her points from pre- and post- interviews with two women who make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land as part of two different evangelical Christian groups. She frames her study of pilgrimage with a view of Christian ritual as 'incremental, partial and in flux'. Kaell acknowledges that the theology of pilgrimage is complex (ibid pp. 400-405) and 'especially risky' for evangelical Christians since the 'reformed theology rejected pilgrimage' (ibid p. 405). One of the women considered her pilgrimage "a success" (her husband had finally agreed to be baptised in the Jordan, ibid, p. 396) the other believed her pilgrimage 'failed' (her cousin Steve died although she had so devotedly prayed for his recovery while on pilgrimage, and worse still she suffered an

onslaught of religious doubt and disbelief while on pilgrimage). At the time of her post-pilgrimage interview this was still unresolved for the pilgrim and it threatened to undermine the religious identity she had spent twenty five years creating, partly in defiance of her Catholic family of origin. The article is well researched and argued but also raises the necessity of a robust, life-affirming 'particularity-affirming' theology to assist pilgrims in framing or at least re-sourcing their meaning-making during and post pilgrimage. From the perspective of my personal theological bias, I would reverse the success/failure self-assessments portrayed by the pilgrims in the article. I would be inclined to consider the kind of religious certitude expressed by Kaell's first pilgrim as a contraction and rigidity of being, often a mere disguise for a means of controlling others; and I would perceive the experiences of doubt and questioning of her second pilgrim as potentially expansive in ways both life and faith-enhancing. However, what is more striking from Kaell's work is that it raises again the paucity of a greater variety of theological perspective on pilgrimage in and amongst the discourse of contemporary pilgrimage scholarship, and particularly, I would argue from the more established Christian Churches. By contrast, as noted in the review of literature, there is a multiplicity of anthropological and sociological research, which I stress again, is welcome and essential also for the necessary inter-disciplinary lens we must take on this multi-level human enterprise of pilgrimage. This is a subject I will return to in my next chapter.

In the group of pilgrims researched for this study, 'failure' was certainly not an absent theme nor possibility (Gabrielle's first impressions of Lough Derg/Lenora's on Camino and the experience of Sean's friend who joined him for his 2018 pilgrimage). In fact Thomas spoke of 'preparedness to fail' (i.e. not being physically able to continue), as a vital part of his psychological preparation for doing the Camino following his near-death experience. However, these were not of the kind of crushing, self-disintegrating failure that Kaell refers to by way of the felt outcome expressed by one of her research participants.

5.6.4 I Am Pilgrim

Continuing with this discussion on the efficacy of contemporary pilgrimage, Colman's wise, reflective and theological assessment of his Camino experiences

is both a kind of corrective to such black and white, success/failure assessments of pilgrimage documented in Kaell's piece, as well as being worthy of counting among the examples of the kind of incremental expansion and wholeness, which I have been suggesting the pilgrimage experience seems to initiate or accelerate for many.   Colman is ordinarily fit on account of being a daily walker and a weekly hiker, but on all three of his Caminos, as we heard in the section on physical suffering, he experienced unexpected injuries at some stage early in the pilgrimage process. We recall that on one of these Caminos he was marking the first anniversary of his wife's death, so hence was carrying an additional burden of emotional and psychological pain and grief as his earlier quotes will have recounted.   He first reflects,

> When you ask about what is the most profound and the most memorable part of my pilgrimage?... I would say, pain. And I remember asking different pilgrims on my last Camino, people I knew were from different traditions, 'Can you tell me what your wisdom is about bearing pain?' I almost wanted somebody to tell me something very straightforward and then I'd say 'Ah, so that's how it's done'. But it never, it never happened. Never. I never found any answer... other than just... I don't know, ...(pauses to find words) ...only just, meeting my own limitation, meeting, meeting my own limitation each time.

By way of conclusion to this evidence of what I have themed 'expansion' and 'wholeness' from among this group of pilgrims, I offer the final word also to Colman who shares a thought-process sparked by a book he had brought along on his *Kindle*.

> And I got a wonderful story. It was a total James-Bond-type story, you know, guns and wonderful action. But the title was 'I Am Pilgrim'. (*Laugh*s). The title? I identify. I have. I do. I am. I know. I am pilgrim in all sorts of senses. But in a religious sense, too, I am pilgrim. So I will continue pilgriming. I think I've done my, well let's say I'm not planning another kind of Camino, but the pilgrim will still stay. My love of {names his deceased wife} will stay. . Yeah, it was great that you would read such a book and then the incongruousness of the subject matter of the book.... yeah, absolutely. I am pilgrim. I can wear that. Its comfortable, very comfortable.

5.6.5 Conclusion to the Presentation of My Findings

Jackie Feldman and Ellen Badone, mentioned earlier, bookend a section on Holy Land Pilgrimage in a 2014 special issue of the Journal of Religion and Society,

with an *Introduction* and *Afterword,* respectively. Badone in her piece offers a helpful summary of many of Feldman's more detailed opening thoughts in which she describes the space of pilgrimage as 'a renowned place, a storied place … a distant space beyond a horizon that becomes a focus of vision and imagination … a place that creates desire and, perhaps, transformation' (ibid, p.203). It seems to me there are echoes of such soundings all through the testimonies of the pilgrims in my research study as well and that there is concurrence with her more tentative talk of transformation. Badone pairs Feldman's description with Eade and Sallnow's somewhat alternate view of pilgrimage, which they characterize as 'a religious void, a ritual space capable of accommodating diverse meanings and practices' (1991 p.15). Post et al have a similar perspective although they use the word *ritual-vessel* rather than void and they say that pilgrimage becomes a kind of *vessel-ritual* that may be filled according to individual necessities, and that the vessel is attractive because it is traditional (1998, See also Post, 1994 p. 85). Post, in his own research and with the others in the larger research project, reflects deeply on this trend of 'vessel-filling' among contemporary pilgrims and they contextualise this trend in a concept they name as 'the musealisation of culture'. Their assessment, in part, seems to be something like this: that contemporary pilgrims are 'appropriating traditional pilgrimage culture'; they {contemporary pilgrims} are putting it through a process of *aestheticization* - which transforms everything into the pretty, the beautiful, and in the end reduces it all to the mere appearance of beauty; they are actors **in** a performed reality; making a piece of religious theatre of {their} journey (Post, 1994 pp. 92-93). Post wonders if a new pilgrim is emerging or if contemporary pilgrimages, especially the Camino, which he singles out, should be differentiated from the past completely. He then wonders if perhaps it is pilgrims who should be differentiated (ibid, p. 94). Although Post et al acknowledge that pilgrimage will always experience continuity and discontinuity since the tension between the two is how traditions remains alive in the present, it seems to me, that on the whole they are quite critical of many of the accounts, perspectives, motives and processes of many of the contemporary pilgrims who make up the current global surge in the practice. I anticipate that by contrast I may be accused of being "too positive" in my read of pilgrims experiences and in my thematisation of their accounts. Human culture and behaviour are not always benevolent nor benign

and I understand that they must always be critically assessed. However, my desire in initiating this research project was to understand better what was behind, underneath and within the contemporary urge to make pilgrimage. I was particularly focused on understanding the role of 'the body' and much has been illuminated. Both these pilgrimages in their physical intensity draw the pilgrim into an experience of embodiment – a multi-sensorial, multi-valent access to all dimensions of consciousness from the pre-cognitive through to the highly symbolic. As I conclude my findings I can say that my desire has been more than fulfilled. I now understand the motivations, the embodied process and outcomes of some contemporary pilgrimage better. Rather than use my findings to further scrutinise the legitimacy of individual contemporary pilgrims and decide whether or not they are 'elite' or 'authentic', I would prefer to place my findings at the service of a wider question – are contemporary pilgrims embodying something about human behaviour and contemporary culture, including religious experience and religious culture, that we need to see more clearly, understand more deeply and take more serious account of? It is to questions such as these I will turn in the discussion on my findings in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6: THE ESSENCE OF CONTEMPORARY PILGRIMAGE: DISCUSSION ON FINDINGS AND RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

6.0 Introduction

This thesis has recounted a research and analysis process on the experience of contemporary pilgrims of two long revered and still cherished pilgrimages at St. Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg and along the Camino de Santiago de Compostela.

In Chapter 1, I clarified what I sought to pursue by articulating the first of my two research questions:

- *How do contemporary pilgrims embody and interpret their pilgrimage experience?*

The embodied experience and pilgrims narration of that experience therefore framed the privileged zone of the study, and required that I provide an immediate clarification of what I meant by embodiment. My second research question focused on:

- *How that experience is interpreted from a psychological and theological perspective*

and signalled my intent to proceed in an interdisciplinary way.

In Chapter 2, I introduced the two pilgrimage sites which are central to the study and offered an historical overview of each, as well as illustrating what is expected of the contemporary pilgrim. In Chapter 3, given the pivotal nature of both 'experience' and 'interpretation' to my research questions, I clarified how they were to be understood in this work, as well as naming the forces and factors germane to the context of the contemporary era for both scholar and pilgrim. I subsequently dedicated a section each to the three domains in conversation in

this research – pilgrimage studies, theological anthropology and psychology of the body. I explored in particular how each interpret and adjudge one or both subjects core to this study, firstly, what pilgrimage is and what it involves; and secondly I peered through their particular lens on the multivalent human body, examining in turn, the pilgrim body, the incarnated body and the psychological body. In Chapter 4, I described my research methodology, including how I approached the data analysis given my interdisciplinary lenses and I explained how I attended to limitations and challenges therein. The findings distilled from this research methodology were then presented as five arch-themes in Chapter 5 and the evidence for each finding was supported by the voice, experience and witness of the twenty pilgrims, who agreed to share their pilgrimage story. The outstanding tasks are to interrogate these findings a little more, in continuing conversation with the three partners, and to ask what insights can I now offer from this vantage point, given the aims of the research. In effect, how do I now discuss and distil the essence of contemporary pilgrimage that is emerging from this particular confluence of people, place and study.

From among the plurality of voices to which I have listened and from which my data can be read diversely, I begin the discussion by addressing some of what I found to be the core outcomes to my research question, concerning how contemporary pilgrims embody their pilgrimage. In the second movement of the discursive process, I offer interpretations of those core outcomes from the vantage point of one or other or occasionally all three of my conversation partners – pilgrimage studies, body psychology and theological anthropology.

In the Introductory Chapter, I spoke about my thesis title, noting its durability from an embryonic stage of the study. I mentioned the ongoing cogency and potency of the words and phrases for me, and the continuing usefulness of the title as a whole, in terms of a frame for my research questions. It offered me solid boundaries within this vast field of study and yet was a phrase also maintained the necessary openness and fluidity demanded by the complexities of our time. As I come towards completion of the work, I return to this titular frame and under the umbrella of its three sub-phrases, I will discuss the following core outcomes which have emerged from my research:

- *Walking Back to Earth* – Contemporary Pilgrimage, in both places under review in this study, has evidentially been found to be a deeply somatic event that I argue is also of psychological and theological significance.

- *The Enduring Appeal of Ancient Pilgrimage* – The robust ritual container of the pilgrimages in this study provides an opportunity for the contemporary pilgrim to respond to a summons inspired, we learned, from within and without; and to embody a temporarily new identity that in the resulting stretch of self-expansion effects for some a lasting formative influence.

- *Pilgrimage as Portal to the Sacred for the Contemporary Seeker* – The embodied experience of the contemporary seeker on pilgrimage has been found to be the shape and substance of a portal to the Sacred; a way into mystery; an opening towards a transcendental horizon, despite the 'cross-pressures of the multiple spiritual disenchantments, so characteristic of our secular age' (after Taylor, 2007).

6.1 Walking Back to Earth

It was experience, particularly embodied experience of contemporary pilgrimage, that I sought to privilege in this research. Hence, the discovery of the phenomenological and its discipline of staying close to the lived-experience in the body, firmly but fluidly placed in relationship to its dynamic world, was a most important one. As I described in the illustration of my research methodology in Chapter 4, the discipline of phenomenology shaped the questions for and approach to interviews, as well as a number of steps in my analysis. Phenomenologists who "do" their philosophy, psychology, social and cultural theory, human geography and theology through such a discipline, became important interlocutors as I trawled the literature but also now as I distil the essence of my findings. This approach was fundamental to my attempts to work with and understand what one of my interviewees (an experienced researcher in theology), called, (and quoting Rahner), the 'pre-thematic experience' articulated by the pilgrims interviewed for this study.

My focus on researching the embodied experience of pilgrims yielded a host of findings, permeating in some way or other all five of my arch-themes and outlined in particular detail in the finding entitled - ‘becoming more grounded’ (See Chapter 5 pp.191-192.) The distinctive combination of physical challenges in both pilgrimages - to Lough Derg and along the Camino de Santiago- whilst qualitatively different in terms of content and duration, as I outlined in Chapters 2 and 5, has been found to share a most influential characteristic. In the experience of engaging in the pilgrimages, in what I began to call ‘the givenness’ of their intense physical requirements, the pilgrims in both cases studied, are drawn strongly into a deeply, holistic sense of their own embodiment-in-the-world. It is as if the pilgrims on both Lough Derg and along the Camino de Santiago, have little option in response to the rigours of the process, but to drop more fully into their body. Soon enough, as the interviewed pilgrims in this study recounted, they began to experience certain benefits from this more concentrative turn towards their embodied being *in* and indeed *of* the world. There was something immediately satisfying about the winnowing effect that this more concentrative and unitive effort on the part of their body on pilgrimage had, on the plethora of other demands that might have been more pre-occupying of their thoughts, energy and attention before they set out. Pilgrims in my research attested to becoming more present to themselves in this bodily way and that in turn they became more present to the moment, to their environment, to others they met and, quite literally, to the ground beneath their feet. Pilgrimage then, particularly in the two places which are the focus of this study, has been found emphatically to be a deeply somatic experience.

6.1.1 A Psychological Interpretation

Body Psychologists would understand the reference to ‘dropping into one’s body’, as a more conscious awareness of what already is. Gestalt psychology, as we learned in Chapter 3, and arguably the most phenomenologically rooted of all the body psychologies, pays considerable attention to somatic experience describing it as ‘firstly, an experience of *movement-with’.* They consider the body to be in constant, integrative motion of lived contact with its environment (Spagnuola Lobb 2015, p.21). What they call the ‘contact boundary’ between the embodied being and their environment is of primary significance for their psychological frame and is the stuff of therapeutic work. This is a most useful frame, I would

argue, to discuss the embodied experience of contemporary pilgrims. The contact boundary between the pilgrims in this study and the pilgrimage landscape of Lough Derg and the Camino routes is certainly one of constant motion and strong moment-to-moment contact with the 'lived environment of the pilgrimage place or route'. For those of a Gestalt view there are not just five human senses, but more than twenty, when we include our interoceptive, exteroceptive, proprioceptive and kinaesthetic.[99] The contact boundary then is densely alive with all manner of sensory perception. For pilgrims in this research therefore, this sensorial intricacy became somewhat heightened by the requirement to 'drop into their body', more mindfully. Gestalt psychologists however, add an important next level to this somatic experience. For them, the bodily movement in and of itself is integrating, in the sense that is it is giving form and meaning to what is happening on the contact boundary between the embodied person and their 'environmental field'. Giving form and meaning in this deeply somatic way, is 'the very purpose of the self', they conclude (Spagnuola Lobb, 2015 p. 22). Therefore, not only is this movement of the body in dynamic-relation to its environment, physiologically dense, it is also psychologically formative. To transpose to the contact boundary between the pilgrim and the pilgrim landscape, we can conclude then, that the interactive dynamic of the pilgrim body-in-its-pilgrim-world, is simultaneously a highway of physiological and psychological perception and meaning-making, as well as freeing the body to function holistically as an agent of integration.

Trauma therapy is the other psychological domain we noted in Chapter 3, which has grown exponentially in terms of its knowledge about the intricacies of the human body during the twenty-first century. To all the sensorial delineations of the Gestalt therapists they would add the manifold neuro-physiological pathways discovered to be constantly operative and, crucially, open to change. Hence, when the pilgrims in this research repeatedly acclaimed the benefits of long

[99] interoceptive, – multiple internal organ and muscle sensors, (hunger, thirst, desire etc); exteroceptive – multiple minute skin-sensors (highly tuned to environmental stimuli, cold, heat, air quality); proprioceptive – locational sensors whereby we always know where each part of our body is and in relation to other parts, without requiring cognitive apprehension of these locations; and finally, kinaesthetic – the bodily movement always in play on account of the summation of all these sophisticated sensory systems and capacities (Brownell, 2015 p. 5).

hours or walking for example on the Camino, trauma therapists would understand that as evidence of 'body healing', given that they understand healing as the restoration of the innate movement-for-life which the human body orientates towards constantly. The much more sedentary nature of contemporary living is in vast contrast to more than ninety percent of human evolution, when walking was the only way to find food, work and simply survive. When pilgrims walk for long hours on consecutive days, they are reconnecting also to this rich heritage of physiological and psychological healing norms bequeathed to us by our ancestors, as well as to the more usual meaning of heritage that contemporary pilgrims reconnect with by way of particular places with long, historical stories. Indeed such places, the research has found, are themselves 'active participants' in the healing dividend.

The temporary 'emplacement' of pilgrims in these new pilgrimage landscapes (to use one of the valences from Bryan Turner's model of human embodiment that we learned about in Chapter 3 (p.115), has offered the pilgrims in this study, a new horizon of unfamiliarity and strangeness. As well as piquing their sensorial and psychological highways, it also challenged "the fixities" of the self who began the pilgrimage. For many pilgrims this rich and dense experience on the contact boundary with the pilgrimage environment yields an experience of aliveness, certainly not pain-free nor loss-free, and yet, in summation, an experience of embodied-being-in-place that the pilgrim does not easily forget. Pilgrims in this study made all kinds of decisions and choices during this temporary emplacement in the 'elsewhere' of the pilgrimage landscape, and their subsequent reflections suggest that this experience offered them new resilience for being anywhere, upon completion of their pilgrimage. Such a phenomenological research of the body-in-its-world has assisted greatly in understanding how an amplified experience of embodiment becomes an early benefit for the pilgrim body in the world of pilgrimage.

6.1.2 The view from Pilgrimage Scholarship

We remember how pilgrimage scholar, Sara Terreault, as noted in Chapter 3, in a clever bypass of the *journey versus place* argument amongst some scholars, declared *the body* as the place where pilgrimage happens (2019). Her compatriot

and Tahltan Nation artist, Peter Morin, describes the body in a way that may help us to summarise an important pattern of discourse in pilgrimage literature about embodiment, that I argue is echoed in my own research. He speaks of the human body as, 'a resonant chamber, a place for the articulation and amplification of many experiences'.[100] Maddrell has described the pilgrimage landscape as the 'corporeally experienced ante-chamber to the pilgrimage destination' (2015 p. 2). Both the pilgrim body *and* the pilgrimage landscape then, are 'resonant chambers'. When the pilgrims in this research study speak in terms of the innately satisfying nature of their pilgrimage-making, it is plausible to suggest that something of this heightened resonance that occurs in the meeting between their own embodied selves and the 'thin place' that pilgrimage centres are often described as, is occurring. At the very least it offers us another perspective on the mix of sensorial phenomenological experience, highlighted above.

As a practising psychotherapist some may wonder why I have not developed an even fuller discussion on these therapeutic benefits of pilgrimage. I would argue that it has already been well documented by others. (See, for example, Jørgensen et al, 2020, Warfield, 2013 and Dubisch & Winkelman, 2005.) However the possibility of a type of mirroring between the therapeutic benefit for the resonant pilgrim body from the resonant pilgrimage landscape, and the benefits that a client in psychotherapy may expect to receive from the more traditional therapeutic environment, is worth noting. Two key benefits for clients in therapy in particular are what are called 'holding' and 'recognition'. The therapist holds the client, witnesses her retelling of her experiences and also recognises the client's capacity to move through and beyond these experiences. Therapists insist that 'the unitary experience of feeling recognised and contained, generates self-awareness and an orientation of going-towards, as well as the innate strength to explore the world' (Spagnuola Lobb, 2015 p. 23). The experience of an increasingly more aware and more unified sense of self, energising the pilgrim ever onwards along the pilgrimage path on Camino, or more deeply into the ritual process on Lough Derg, has been significantly evident in my findings on this

[100] See: http://rmooc.ca/hubs/dispatches/drumming-reconciliation-by-peter-morin/

research. Therefore, again to transpose between the psychological therapeutic benefits of therapy and the pilgrim on pilgrimage, we could say the pilgrimage landscape "holds" the pilgrim not just literally but metaphorically and the ritual process witnesses whatever it is that the pilgrim has brought by way of intent and intention. Gradually a recognition arises, of being pilgrim among pilgrims and most pilgrims testified in one way or another to gaining new strength and having more energy to explore their world. But have these quite significant physiological and psychological benefits and therapeutic effects of becoming more grounded, becoming more embodied on pilgrimage any deeper significance?   This particular wondering, I found, was better served by a theological hermeneutic of my data.

6.1.3 A Theological Hermeneutic

What additional insights, to put it differently, about the embodied experience of the contemporary pilgrim, might be perceived from a theological lens? My first contestation is that everything found above, as amplified by the research is as theologically relevant, as it is significant to psychology and pilgrimage scholarship. If theology is an attempt to articulate better our evolving understanding of God and the relationship between God and creation-in-the-world, then surely all of the above is important. Brown and Strawn speak about the necessity, in theological anthropology in particular, of an adequate understanding of the multiple dimensions of the human person and argue strongly that 'we cannot make theories of human nature without this sort of explicit recognition of the depth and richness of what it means to be a human being and become a person' (2016 p. 101). In my description of the findings from my research in Chapter 5, I went to considerable lengths to illustrate such depth and richness, evidently present in the pilgrims I interviewed and in the descriptions of their journeys of being and becoming. That they are beings of multiple dimensions with physical, psychological, relational, and spiritual experiences and a host of on-going needs at all levels of these dimensions, was clearly manifest in the data.

Secondly, I take up Boeve and Godzieba's challenge (as articulated in Chapter 3, p. 64), of recontextualising the theology of Incarnation in particular, as having

something else plausible and maybe even profound to say to and about the contemporary pilgrim. As well as being inherently satisfying, although challenging, in the ways underlined above, I believe that a plausible interpretation of my findings in relation to embodiment is, that contemporary pilgrimage also satiates what I would call a deep incarnational longing in the pilgrim. The pilgrims in my study referred to elements such as - the 'elsewhere' of the pilgrimage place or route; the significant rigours of its core rituals; the interests and indeed the challenges of their pilgrim company; their own self-questioning and sometimes their private commitment to a re-calibration of priorities when back home; and experienced together these elements became a potent and challenging dynamical interaction into which the pilgrim was immersed on their pilgrimage. Part of its potency was its difference from the back-home 'habitus'[101]. It was clear from the pilgrim stories and recollections in this research that their pilgrimage experience offered a substantive antidote to the excarnational exhaustion that is symptomatic of our technological dependency, the busyness of our quotidian and the potentially catastrophic disconnections in our 'contact boundary' with the earth. Pilgrimage offers relief from these 'body-dulling' facets of much contemporary living. On their pilgrimage, the pilgrims in this study took firm hold of the opportunity to re-connect with the essentiality of our human nature - we are humus not silicon.

We remember Sheets-Johnstone's critique of neuroscience as, at times veering towards a 'brain on a stick' model of the human being. An adequate theology of Incarnation serves as a corrective to such tendencies, as well as offering a welcome alternative, to the temptations of botox, plastic and expensive tickets to other planets, which characterise many of our vain attempts to circumvent, ageing, frailty and the work of restoration of the planet. As meaning-making, embodied creatures, all levels of our living need adequate food and nourishment. Going on pilgrimage, the findings have revealed, reminds us of the joy of being out in the world and subject to its elements, as well as reminding us of our physiological vulnerabilities, as insight not failing nor nuisance, and, finally, that there is more than "junk food" (or "fuzzy, eclectic spiritualities" as Oviedo *et al* (2014) described them), available for the yearnings of our transcending spirit and

[101] See again Footnote No. 50 on the habitus idea of Bourdieu.

the hungers of our restless souls. Thus, I argue that contemporary pilgrimage satiates a deep incarnational longing in the contemporary seeker. My next pondering was to consider if there might be other aspects of incarnational theology being illuminated afresh by reflection upon and interpretation of the experience of the contemporary pilgrims in my study.

Incarnational theology has traditionally drawn on two important hinges, the *Imago Dei* of Genesis and the New Testament revelation that Jesus, son of Mary and Joseph, *is* the Incarnated Word of God. In being born as body, as a particular human being, of a particular woman, into a particular family, in a particular place and time in history, God therefore enters the uniqueness and finiteness, vulnerability, despair and delight of earthy embodiment. This is the definitive article of faith of the Christian religious tradition. *The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us* (Jn 1:14). The particularity of every human being, born and becoming in their own time and place, is made universally whole and holy in this remarkable unfolding in the birth, life and death of Jesus of Nazareth, who, through the revelation of resurrection became, the Christ.

Given this definitive taproot of Incarnational truth, I interpret that incarnational theology would rejoice with contemporary pilgrims in their being reminded that their particular being and the story of their becoming is unique, whole and holy; that their embodiment is a wondrous and miraculous gift; that it is indeed good to experience, again and again, the fullness of aliveness; and it would remind them also that they are just as precious in God's eyes (maybe more especially so), when they are in pain, injured and vulnerable; a theology of incarnation would interpret the many interactions of pilgrims with other pilgrims as graced opportunities in which they might come to know again that we are made for relationship and that our becoming is always tied up with others and come to understand more clearly how this interconnectedness is our embodiment as body of Christ. We too are flesh and we live among. In the understanding of a theology of Incarnation, we would be reminded, that we are at once particular and we are collective. This dynamical movement, inherent to the theology of Incarnation, between the particularity of the 'I' and the body of Christ of the 'we', is amplified in other aspects of the pilgrim's experience alongside this satiation of incarnational longing, offered by the pilgrimage process. I will return to some

of these shortly. But first I wish to elaborate a little more on the dynamical process.
In my earlier definitions of embodiment and pilgrimage and in my description of pilgrimage-place as a living and changing whole of many interrelated parts, the dominant image I used for each one was that of process – a living, interconnecting happening of many moving elements firmly and fluidly placed in a dynamic environment. Conception is an interactive process; gestation is an interactive process, equally birth and certainly development and becoming. Human beings are creatures dependent on interactive processes for life, and for the continuation of life, to such an extreme extent, that we cannot but pause in disbelief at how a narrative of individualism and separateness could have taken such an influential hold in Western cultures of thought, policy and theology and for such a duration. Thus, a more plausible and life-affirming theology of incarnation offers us a corrective to such a vain pursuit of glorious, individual heroism (which, of course pilgrimage scholars will point out, can still be an attractive narrative among some contemporary pilgrims). Such an incarnational narrative not only honours but rejoices in the particularity of each unique and diverse human being *and* our particular stories of being and becoming, whilst simultaneously and humbly coming to know ourselves as belonging, living, moving and having our being and participation in, a Greater Process of Being and Becoming which we name, God.

Theologian Heather Walton speaks of her attraction to such process-rich descriptions of the nature of the relationship between God and creation (citing Catherine Keller and Alfred Whitehead). She summarises them thus:

> 'a pluriverse of divinely active becoming, a making to be experienced in the pulsing chaosmos bursting with relational intensity, {and} powerfully generative and mysterious' (2019, p. 8).

She urges caution however against thinking that 'God can be caught', even in a relational web of such wondrous cosmic entanglement and stakes her preference for what she calls the "messier worldlings of God..., which affirm God's discharging into the haecceity of matter" (ibid, p. 10). She lists a number of such "worldlings", all biblically resonant – walking along a dusty road at dusk

endeavouring to understand all that happened and other stories of ointment, stones and bandages; the taste of salt at the seashore and the soft calling of your name by the beloved in the garden (ibid, pp. 10-11). "No, no' she protests emphatically 'I {would} miss that beloved voice" (ibid p. 11).

Pilgrimage experience, as narrated by the pilgrims in this research, whilst I have been stressing has been found to be deeply 'process-immersed', it is simultaneously utterly particular. Walton would be reassured, I would think, to note that in its many somatic and earthy concentrations of feet, blisters, hunger, tiredness, walking and circular prayer; as well as rituals with shells and stones; talk of butterflies, mountains, fields, bread, wine and water, pilgrims experience in this study has been found to be replete with reference to such haecceity. Assigning to these earthly entities a significance not immediately visible in the immanent material alone, was an equally strong pattern in the pilgrim's retelling during this research. Godzieba would gladly call these patterned stories, acts of *sacramental imagination*, which he summarises as 'a conviction that the finite can mediate the infinite' (2014 p. 207). As we remember from Chapter 3 in the literature review, he borrowed Kearney's phrase, of 'thinking otherwise'. (p.) Thinking otherwise about the body honours its role as the fundamental hermeneutic of incarnation, the locus of revelation (p.). Thinking otherwise, he adds here, is not 'fantastic' in some 'Disneyfied, trivial' sense, but rather 'a practice of *poiêsis'* (2014, p. 206, p.208).

> Religion's crucial role in contemporary society is to recognize and actively disclose the "otherwise" that is the sacred, thereby revealing both the intrinsic limitations and inevitable lack of fulfilment of the profane, but also its dependence on the sacred for its own intentional thrust beyond its limitations for the fulfilment of its inherent desires. The religions, then, are prime examples of the poetic imagination (2014 p. 210).

When the pilgrim in this research drops into their own earthy embodiment at the behest of their pilgrimage journey, and in my 'thinking otherwise' about it, I interpret that many re-connect with this fundamental truth of being human, their re-discovery, if you will, that there is something holy and wholesome about their very being as body. Roszak wonders in particular about the theological import of the 'tiredness' felt by the pilgrim body. Pilgrimage becomes a chance, he is convinced, 'to discover what is valuable because it requires struggle to achieve

it'. He believes also that the fatigue of reaching Santiago, for example, regains something of the significance of sacrifice, particularly in its meaning of offering to God what is most important in our lives, in this case time and energy and he adds:

> Fatigue reveals the transcendental dimension of life, to which an individual does not arrive in a purely intuitive way. Pilgrimage is created, relying on the 'theology of sweat on your face'. (2019 p.36)

As these messy and exhilarating incarnational experiences mount up, pilgrims begin to see their fellow pilgrims with the reverence that living such truths begets. Particularity and uniqueness manifested in each being are at once the tangible *and* the mysterious stuff of the great unfolding of Being in which we are each and all held, and in which we move and are sustained.

6.1.4 Walking back to Earth: The Surprise

In the Introductory Chapter I noted an expectation of exploring the role of being outdoors for a very significant proportion of each of the two pilgrimages in this study. From personal experience and from pilgrimage literature generally, I intuited that its significance would be quite central to my findings. I anticipated matching such findings with rich hermeneutics from both eco-psychotherapy and eco-spirituality. I could not share the surprise of Farias *et al,* however, in their *Atheists on the Camino* Study, concerning the equality of interest in being close to nature that they discovered among the believer and the non-believer alike (2019, p.39). I have had years of experience of working with groups who represent "both camps" and the interest in, concern for and commitment to nature and earth is profoundly strong in both and hence I would have expected as much.

What did surprise me however was that the pilgrims in my own study were more likely than not, to 'integrate' this aspect of connection-to-earth on pilgrimage, as a dimension of their embodied experience. To become more embodied was in itself, a 'walking back to earth'. If I were to interpret their thoughts and reflections with a theological tinge they might be summarised something like this:

> 'We are humus. We are earth. We are not separate from nature. We are nature. Nature is not separate from grace. Nature is grace. To be human, to be incarnated into this dynamic existence, which is to be graced'.

In Walton's perspective on the theology of contemporary Christian pilgrimage she writes:

> 'Pilgrimage has been translated into a robust symbol which continues to have important currency in twenty-first century 'secular' culture. It has been used by contemporary theorists such as Michel de Cetreau and Zygmunt Baumun to reflect critically upon the postmodern condition. It has also proved useful within ecological theory and literature to describe an approach to life which treads lightly upon the earth, valuing the sacrality of nature encountered along the way (2015 p. 38).

I could not help but wonder if pilgrimage might also, at a meta-level, particularly given the surge of interest and numbers involved in the twenty-first century, and cited previously, be one of the ways in which humanity is endeavouring to recalibrate itself as an integrating/integrative element of the whole, rather than the devouring destroyer of the very matrices of life. In such light, might contemporary pilgrims also be considered planetary pilgrims?[102]

6.2 The Enduring Appeal of Pilgrimage

A significant proportion of the enduring appeal of contemporary pilgrimage, as indicated by this study, includes experiencing all those aspects of amplified embodiment referred to in the prior section- becoming more grounded; the experience of aliveness; that corporeal resonance with the pilgrimage landscape; appreciation and gratitude; satiation of what I called a deep incarnational longing as well as experiencing oneself as an integral part of earth, of creation. In this section, I want to further the discussion about the enduring appeal of pilgrimage during this current renaissance, (as some have described it, Maddrell, 2015, p. 2)

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[102] I think this is a worthy cause for reflection even though there had been legitimate concerns raised in the decade prior to the pandemic that the exponential rise of footfall on the Camino pilgrim path may be environmentally deleterious. The reduction to one sixth of that footfall in 2020 and 2021 because of pandemic restrictions will have proven somewhat relieving for the landscape and its biodiversity. Interestingly, some studies suggest the pilgrims presence in the holistic round not only contribute to environmental sustainability but are a critical part of the solution to it in the longer term. (See https://www.interregeurope.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/tx_tevprojects/library/file_1526904189.pdf)

by returning to the finding which I had named in the previous chapter as '*ritualising with intent and contentment'* (See Chapter 5 p.221.)

Certain that there was something important and signature in this finding, I took the unusual step of anchoring it first in quite a detailed outline of the origins and descriptions of ritual, before exploring what ritual performativity on the two pilgrimages in this study looked like. It was only then that I elaborated on the detail of my findings in relation to how the pilgrims in this study ritualised, and, as their stories revealed, they did so largely with intent and contentment. My rationale for this approach stems from the wisdom of scholarship on ritual as well as millennial human experience of it – in the main ritual is much more something we do than talk or theorise about. We remember Bredin's assessment that 'ritual is something we do when words are not enough' (1994, p.167). Almost all scholars of pilgrimage, regardless of academic lens, understand pilgrimage as a ritual practice. The findings from this study revealed that pilgrims made virtually full commitment to the core rituals required of their particular pilgrimage (whether it was the devotional rituals of Lough Derg or the long days of walking towards a far-off shrine to St James on the Camino de Santiago); they also generated their own rituals; and, when unexpected situations arose, it was sometimes a ritual (occasionally inspired and led by another), which helped pilgrims understand the meaning of or simply the possibility of accepting this unexpected turn. Finally, I noted that some pilgrims in the study, made direct connections between their practice of one or other of the rituals of pilgrimage, and a resulting experience which they received as gift of the Sacred, of Mystery, of God (See Chapter 5 p. 247.) My conclusion then was that ritual performativity is one of the main ways pilgrims in this study placed their embodied selves at the service of their quest for meaning. I further perceived that the ritualising pilgrim body, as exemplified by the experience recounted by the pilgrims here, was, what I named, 'soul-intuitive'. Hence, I would argue that the robustness of the ritual container of pilgrimage is a central element of its enduring appeal in the contemporary era. In line with my commitment to inter-disciplinary conversation, let me further discuss such a position and offer some hermeneutical context.

6.2.1 A Tale of two Taylors – A moral philosopher and a geographer carrying a moral compass

Much of the research on pilgrimage, and particularly in the midst of a notable global surge of interest, like we have experienced in the twenty-first century, (pre the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic), has focused on motivations. Few scholarly assessments of pilgrimage omit informed comment on this particular element. As I recounted in Chapter 5, the most appropriate term I could offer to describe the pilgrim who had made the decision to go on pilgrimage, as I listened to the variety of motivations expressed by the pilgrims in this study was, 'the summoned seeker'. The detail from the data revealed that this summoning was rarely of singular source but rather often grew out of an interweave of factors, some arising from the internal world of the pilgrim, and other factors inspired by their familial and social context. Six such factors were identified and elaborated upon. (See Chapter 5 pp.180-190.) The pilgrimages in this study were found to be robust enough ritual containers in which this group of pilgrims could satisfactorily resolve the variety of "seeking-urges" which gave rise to their particular summons to make the pilgrimage. Individual pilgrims spoke of needing to do things like grief work, negotiate major life transitions, discharge vicarious traumatisation from difficult work situations, integrate a family tragedy, honour and connect with family ancestors, offer thanks and/or utter new prayers of petition, test themselves in a physical and psychological way after a near-death experience, or simply enjoy a time of relief after a very busy or difficult period of life. The critical additional factor that the ritual performativity of pilgrimage offers is that the pilgrims can do this private personal work in the resonant public space that is the antechamber of the ancient pilgrimage landscape. It is an alchemy of sorts between pilgrim, place and process.

Charles Taylor, our wise guide on secularity and excarnation from Chapter 3, would include pilgrimage as one of what he calls 'limit experiences', when 'ordinary life is abolished and something terrifyingly *other* shines through'. Such experiences, he continues 'help us to situate a place of fullness to which we orientate ourselves morally or spiritually'. He notes that on occasion we 'struggle to articulate what we've been through in such experiences', but he adds that 'if we succeed in formulating it, we feel a release, as if the power of the experience

was increased by having been focussed, articulated, and hence let fully be' (2007, pg. 6). Indeed, he later includes pilgrimages in particular, in a short list of ''highly resonating events', which he describes 'on one hand as unquestionably religious', and which he clarifies to mean 'oriented to something putatively transcendent'. Taylor quickly acknowledges however, that the relationship between such events and religion is complex (2007, p. 517). There are few others who have the same grasp as Taylor of the depth and breadth of that complexity.

I have a particular responsibility to address something of this complexity however, since I am arguing also, as I stated in my Introductory Chapter (p.2), that having inserted my findings into spirals of psychological and theological hermeneutics, this research indicates that contemporary pilgrimage, as a whole experience, for this group of pilgrims at least, represents an essentially religious quest. I also want to make good my promise of Chapter 3, to return to Peter Margry's challenge of identifying and interpreting something of the religious factor that seems to present in contemporary pilgrimage (See p.98). Few argue that contemporary pilgrimage is indeed a quest. Many argue as to whether or not, contemporaneously, it is a religious quest. There are implications to my including this additional argument that my research indicates also that contemporary pilgrimage *is* essentially a religious quest. I have already been contending that contemporary pilgrimage offers a robust ritual container in which pilgrims can do all manner of soul searching, as well as a variety of what I might call 'personal, (sometimes social), psychological and spiritual work'. (I offer this phrase by way of a summary of the list of motivating tasks that the pilgrims in this study named as galvanising them into pilgrimage and which were listed again on the previous page of this chapter.) To say also, that contemporary pilgrimage is essentially a religious quest, requires that I add a second qualifier. Not only am I arguing then that contemporary pilgrimage offers a robust ritual container, I am also saying that it offers a *fitting* one, given its orientation towards the transcendent. Therefore, when I make a claim that my findings indicate that the pilgrims in this study, in their desire to embrace this ritual performativity of pilgrimage were 'soul-intuitive', this is what I mean. I mean that pilgrims "intuitively know" that pilgrimage ritual has something of the mysterious woven into it and that it remains somehow oriented to the transcendent. Calling

it 'intuitive knowing' is a way of emphasising that this is a knowing beneath cognitive awareness and less amenable to verbal discourse, particularly in the act of it. 'Soul' is a complex concept with a history almost as vexed as body[103]. Here, I refer to it as that mysterious dimension of the human being, which is a kind of 'homing device' for the transcendent. In the next section, when I explore more centrally contemporary pilgrimage as portal to the Sacred, I will return to and expand upon this dimension of transcendence. For now, I wish to return to my discussion points about pilgrimage and ritual performativity, mindful that they are now nuanced by this inclusion of an argument considering contemporary pilgrimage as an essentially religious quest.

In the elaboration of my findings in Chapter 5, we noted a number of critical moments in the pilgrimage process, all of which require participation in the ritual performativity of it. The first embodied movement of the ritual of pilgrimage, I called 'the summoned seeker setting out', the moment the pilgrims answered their call, if you will. (p.195) They crossed the 'limen', (to re-connect with Taylor's core image in 'limit experiences'), the threshold of their back-home world and they set off. Critically, they did not just set off for 'anywhere'. They set off to two places of ancient pilgrimage, each with over one thousand years of history and pilgrim footfall, as was described in detail in Chapter 2. I have mentioned a number of times the repeated reference to the importance of this proven historicity of both sites, for the pilgrims involved in this study. Many other pilgrimage scholars, like George Greenia for example, as mentioned in Chapter 3, have noted likewise. Charles Taylor would likely consider this need for 'proven historicity', as further evidence for what he calls, 'an ethic of authenticity' which, he believes, strongly forms and informs contemporary spiritual seeking (2007, p. 507). Hervieu-Léger would call it a manifestation of 'collective memory', in which 'the personal narrative is bridged to the grand narrative for it answers the human need for coherence between the history of mankind and the destiny of the individual' (Hervieu-Léger, 1993 p.146).

[103] 'Valley beliefs and theories concerning the soul were of a most amazing complexity, and imperturbably self-contradictory. One might as well try to pin Valley people down to one creation myth as to get a coherent description of soul out of them. The multiplicity of course, was in no sense of the word accidental. It was of the essence.' Ursula Le Guin in *Always Coming Home*, Grafton Books, p. 89.

A second critical moment in the ritual performativity I named as, 'surrendering to the pilgrimage process' (p.213). A psychological interpretation might describe it as the moment when the ego gives up being in charge of the process and the pilgrim hands themselves over fully to the rigours of the pilgrimage as a powerful process in and of itself. As was frequently pointed out by the pilgrims in this study, such a moment often came out of considerable physical or psychological difficulty and sometimes, particularly in the case of those who became injured, a combination of both. The findings also noted the dividend for pilgrims when they managed to surrender, not only that of becoming more grounded, but also more able to fully take on the mantle of this temporary identity of 'being pilgrim'. In medieval times, on the Camino De Santiago pilgrimage, the pilgrims wore an earthen-coloured cape to clearly signal that identity. At the Conference I attended on the *Camino Polaco* in Torun, Poland, November 2019, some of the local fraternity wore versions of such capes to the opening Eucharistic celebration of the conference. I was struck by the large, spacious nature of the vestment as well as how unpractically heavy it seemed. However, metaphorically, I could see that the garment also communicated something like dignity, distinctiveness and room for personal expansion. These qualities of dignity, distinctiveness and personal expansion have remained living elements of the pilgrimage and discovered anew by the contemporary pilgrims in this study. However beyond such metaphorical connections, I am in agreement with pilgrimage scholar, Keith Egan, that my findings do not indicate that contemporary pilgrimage is otherwise, any kind of 'revival of medieval pilgrimage-making', but is rather a 'reinvention' for the contemporary era, but with this critical 'aura of authenticity' (2011, p. 4). Although referring to the Camino in particular, Egan's subsequent comments are relevant to our discussion here when he considers, 'the call to pilgrimage on the Camino, a product of contemporary concerns grounded in the immediacy of existential crises and aspirations for a bodily or worldly transcendence' (ibid). He says the contemporary pilgrim 'rejects a facile retrieval of an old route and prefers instead to invent their own rituals through the pilgrimage'. Although I would argue that the interconnectedness between the route and the pilgrimage-making is much less tenuous than his comments here suggest, let us continue in the direction of his main point. Egan notes that the majority of Camino walkers 'skirt the

contours of a dimly remembered faith', and without much analysis (ibid). This observation is borne out in the data I cited in Chapter 5 concerning the figures regarding religious practice among Camino pilgrims (p.229). I also noted there the contrast of that figure for with the pilgrim group interviewed for this study who had done Lough Derg.

What I appreciate about Egan's observations is his awareness that 'religious motivation cannot be discounted' (ibid), for he understands that 'existential crises and those aspirations for a bodily and worldly transcendence', are indeed elements of a religious quest. The findings I recounted are full of explicit and implicit references to such a quest. These aspirations are about meaning and ultimacy and that enduring hunger for the feel of the transcendent, in the midst of a dominating immanent frame, to invoke again another of Charles Taylor's core hypotheses, regarding contemporary belief (2007 pp.540-593). The central image in the etymology of religious is ligament (from 'ligare')– the sinewy tissue that binds and connects, muscle to bone. The 're' is do it again, the core task of religion then is to re-connect, again and again, to rebind humanity to its true source. My contention with much commentary on contemporary pilgrimage is the confusion between that which is or may be 'religious', and that which is representative of a particular 'religiosity'. Some even sloppily infer that they mean the same thing. Such confusions, it seems to me, confirm people's need to declare themselves spiritual rather than religious, so as to, 'designate a spiritual life which retains some distance from the disciplines and authority of religious confessions', as Taylor so lucidly describes (ibid, p. 535).

The loss, I would argue here, in much of this distancing and in the repeated confusions of religiosity with religious quest is that people generally, (rather than on pilgrimage specifically), are left to their own devices, left to 'discover their own route to wholeness and spiritual depth' (Taylor, 2007 p. 507). All the while, many are separated from the granaries of wisdom that religious traditions have offered humanity for millennia, in terms of how to navigate the complexities of life, including death. The ritual performativity of pilgrimage, I argue, in its fidelity to some (Camino de Santiago) or many (Lough Derg) of its ancient practices, offers contemporary pilgrims an experiential glimpse of possibility. It gives the contemporary seeker access to 'fragments of the ideal…which remain powerful"

(ibid p. 478). Might such experiential access permit contemporary pilgrims to whisper to themselves, hypothetically at least: "Perhaps, I do not have to do all of this alone! Perhaps, doing this *with* others is profoundly important, not just for my own well-being but maybe even for all of humanity and the restoration of the planet". Although this may seem like quite the hypothetical stretch, pilgrimage scholar, Eduardo Chemin, who researched the religious landscape of pilgrimage in an age of secularity, in his early work (2011), speaks of meeting pilgrims whose 'narratives become a symbolic appraisal of the world as a whole' and he cites examples (2016, p. 135). Ritual performativity then, of a sacred kind, which pilgrimage undoubtedly is, is patterned but not repetitive; it is rather, consistently created and co-created. Equally so, the quest for meaning. As theologian James Alison puts it:

> The search for meaning is a co-constructing act, not something created on a heroic journey in splendid isolation. 'I seek to become more of who I am in relationship with you', ...meaning is something that is grown in the 'in-between'. [104]

My findings reveal that the 'you' for the pilgrims in this study can include other pilgrims, the pilgrimage landscape, as well as the potency of the ritual performativity of the pilgrimage as a whole.

In her definition of ritual, quoted in the previous chapter's summary on the subject, Bell said that ritual was constructed of 'tradition, exigency and self-expression'. (p.224) Lawrence Taylor (the second Taylor), affirms that pilgrimage has 'a plasticity and malleability that leaves space for individual and collective agency'. We remember in Chapter 3, how he also described pilgrimage on Lough Derg as 'an exercise of moral geography defining sacred self, passage, and site'. Furthermore, he identified the Island as 'a pilgrimage site at the dangerous but powerful edge of Ireland and Europe' (2015, p. 5). Here, he repeats this similar assertion of pilgrimage, broadens it to other European pilgrimages, including the Camino 'as a uniquely powerful way of maintaining or asserting a moral geography that reconfigures the world for personal and

[104] James Alison, in one of his talk presentations during the virtual Lenten Retreat, Holy Week, 2020 Bonnevaux Centre of Peace, International Retreat & Meditation Centre, WCCM, France. For background to the Centre see https://bonnevauxwccm.org/about/ The talks were part of retreat contract and so not accessible.

collective purposes' (2016, p. 209). My interest in Taylor's assertions is a theological one, because his elaboration on the moral geography of pilgrimage in Europe, is, I believe, pertinent to a theology of pilgrimage. His views are deeply resonant with those of William Cavanaugh in Chapter 3 also, who claimed that 'pilgrim' was the only potent identity for a contemporary Christian to take up in the contemporary world, if we wished to take a counter-cultural stand to xenophobia, mass displacement of peoples and the lack of accountability of multinational conglomerates (p. 86).

Taylor does not share my concerns about those who blur the category of religion when it comes to contemporary pilgrimage. Rather he views such blurring as simply mirroring the many slippages pilgrims themselves make in relation to their intentions for and experiences of the religious nature of their pilgrimages (ibid, p. 218). Conversely, he believes this ambiguity is powerful (ibid), that it confers on pilgrimage particular "moral clout" (ibid, p. 219), and is the very heart of its contemporary strength and appeal (ibid, p.218).

Taylor also distinguishes between pilgrimages to centres (like the Holy Land, the Vatican, the local parish church) and pilgrimages to edges, 'wild places, far away'. Both pilgrimages in this study are in the latter category and he suggests that this "wild, far away-ness" permits pilgrims an experience of, 'a bursting through of unmediated contact with divinity that may imply a failing of the church structure to do the job' (ibid, p.214). It is fair to say that there is something extraordinarily significant in our ecclesial-cultural context when the churches of Europe are relatively empty on a Sunday morning and yet many of its ancient, pilgrim pathways are teeming with seekers. More locally, this brings us back to Ganiel's belief, as learned in the previous chapter, that the future of the Catholic Church in Ireland will depend on how well it relates to and interconnects with 'extra-institutional religion'. As I mentioned there she had not included pilgrimage among her examples, but I had suggested it ought to be included, for, it seems to me, that the interest in contemporary pilgrimage is a clear example of 'people of deep faith seeking spiritual nourishment' to "one side" of traditional, more institutionally-bound and based ritual and liturgical processes (See Chapter 5, pp.225-226.)

For just a moment, let me take this prompt from Ganiel and move the discussion onto a broader canvas. The Catholic tradition is profoundly sacramental and has an unbroken fidelity to the necessity and power of embodied sacred ritual for the health and wellbeing of the human spirit and soul, and collectively for the whole body of Christ. However, it is painfully obvious that there is something seriously askew and a disconnect has taken root in the body of the faithful. In very significant proportions, "parts" of that body have been absenting themselves from these rich sacramental and formative rituals. I understand the reasons are incredibly complex, systemic and consonant also with extraordinarily deep global change from which Catholicism, like all the great religious traditions, cannot remain hermetically sealed. In fact, Pope Francis is one of a handful of global leaders, in any field, who speaks, acts and leads as one with a clarity about the peculiarities which are characteristic of this time. Theologian Tom Halik says, 'an all-pervasive global sickness is the pre-eminent sign of our times' and he was not talking only about the Covid-19 pandemic which he sees as just one further confirmatory symptom.[105] He wonders if the more complete emptying of our Churches, on account of the restrictions during the pandemic, might have been 'a cautionary vision of what might happen in the very near future'. He adds that there is no longer a clear dividing line between believers and non-believers, that there are seekers in both camps who 'reject the religious notions put forward to them by those around them but nevertheless have a yearning for something to satisfy their thirst for meaning'. He is convinced, he tells us, that the 'Galilee of today, where we must go and seek the living God, who has survived death, is the world of seekers'.

> 'We need to take new and old things from the treasure house of tradition that we have been entrusted with, and make them part of a dialogue with seekers, a dialogue in which we can and should learn from each other'.

I would suggest that the findings from my research indicate that the seekers have already begun the process. They have gone ahead and taken 'an old

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[105] All excerpts are from this recent journal article by Tomáš Halík - See https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2020/04/03/christianity-time-sickness

tradition from the treasure house' - the pilgrimages to Lough Derg and the Camino de Santiago de Compostela - and they are ready for a whole new dialogue. If this could be said to be so, the implications are significant and I will address them shortly in some recommendations in the conclusion to my thesis.

In summary then, the enduring appeal of pilgrimage, for the group of pilgrims in this study, is rooted in the multiple dividend of heightened embodied experience, which is further sourced in the experience of immersion in and surrender to the individual and collective power and agency of its ritual performativity. Returning to Charles Taylor, who believes that we are only 'at the beginning of a new age of religious searching, whose outcome no one can foresee' (2007, p. 535), I argue that my findings indicate that pilgrimage to ancient Christian and Catholic sites is already and will continue to be a powerful element of the 'new age of religious searching'.

6.3 Contemporary pilgrimage as portal to the Sacred for the contemporary seeker

> Grey, grey is Abbey Assaroe, by Ballyshannon town;
> It has neither door nor window, the walls are broken down;
> The carven stones lie scattered in brier and nettle bed;
> The only feet are those that come at burial of the dead.
> A little rocky rivulet runs murmuring to the tide,
> Singing a song of ancient days, in sorrow, not in pride;
> The boor-tree and the lightsome ash across the portal grow,
> And heaven itself is now the roof of Abbey Assaroe[106].

This first verse of Allingham's *Abbey Assaroe* not only includes a poetic reference to 'portal', (a key word requiring explanation in this section), but its illustration of an ancient sacred place becoming something new, in spite of its apparent demise, sounds also, even in the melancholy, a note of hope and possibility. Pilgrimages, with their ancient rubric and traditions, in an age of secularity, or de-traditionalisation, as others have called it, might easily have gone the way of the 'carven stones, scattered in brier and nettle bed', but the research in this study indicates conversely, that something new and 'lightsome' and very much alive has begun to grow across the portal and 'heaven itself is now the roof'. In

[106] Abbey Assaroe (Verse 1) by William Allingham in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, ed. Poems of Places: An Anthology in 31 Volumes. Ireland: Vol. V. 1876–79.

this final cluster of points for discussion, I return to pilgrimage as a 'limit experience' (an experience with an orientation towards the transcendent), and argue that my research indicates that pilgrimage can be a portal to the Sacred for the contemporary seeker. I begin this component of the discussion by clarifying my use of these terms. I immediately contextualise those choices, which involves naming the pressures, cross-pressures and ambivalence of being believer, seeker and indeed non-believer in the contemporary era. I then proceed to the core work of the section and explore two separate but utterly intertwined theological doctrines that my research and its hermeneutical analysis, in collaborative discussion with others, has surfaced. The first is an exploration of the relationship between Incarnation and transcendence and the second is the nature of the salvific in the experience of that relationship.

6.3.1 Clarifying my terms and contextualising my choices

A dictionary definition of 'portal' describes a door or gateway, particularly of an imposing kind. Most definitions now include a second and newer meaning for 'portal', developed in this age of technology, as an 'access channel' to other information, or links on websites. Even this functional technological meaning hints that 'portal' is not just any ordinary opening. Portal is often deployed to indicate an unusual doorway, in that it opens to the various and the mysterious and is therefore a metaphor beloved of the fantasy and science-fiction writers and filmmakers. It is this sense of an opening into mystery, into the unknown (maybe even the unknowable); the idea of numerous possibilities and leading to something beyond all that has already experienced - this is the nuance I would wish to communicate in my use of 'portal'.

And now to the Sacred. I have endeavoured to be careful with my God-talk. I refrained from using God in the title, even though by my capitalisation of 'Sacred', I am making it known that this is exactly the territory I intend. I do so both to honour the Mystery who is this entity with the name above all names, and also to acknowledge that God is no longer so easily invoked (for some not even a desired invocation), by possibly millions of contemporary humans. I am equally aware that even expressing this dilemma in such terms, I am exemplifying exactly what Charles Taylor calls 'the schizophrenia of the secular age' (2007, p.727). For the

non-believer this is articulated by, as he puts it, by 'keeping a safe distance from religion and yet {being} very moved to know there are dedicated believers like Mother Teresa (ibid). As a believer, living in and deeply influenced by post-modern secularity, I am as James K.A.Smith (and Taylor's 'reader') puts it 'porous to the all-pervasive doubt'. Smith continues,

> 'The believer in secularity...is going to feel the impact of the pressure of this cross-pressure of naturalistic immanence and disenchantment with the world. ... but if the believer is tempted by doubt, the unbeliever is tempted by faith! No one is sequestered from this cross-pressure – the unbeliever is pressured by the pull of eternity and the call of transcendence (2014)[107].

I have been exploring why pilgrimage, in all its ancient resonances, has not only endured but has been rising in its appeal, even in this era of secularity/de-traditionalisation which has been all-pervasive in many parts of the world and very much so in the socio-political context of both these pilgrimages. I have argued that the findings from my research indicate strongly that the intense and potent dividend of aliveness is one dimension of this appeal and that the 'emplacement' of the embodied self into the fullness of the ritual performativity of it, forms a second and linked dimension. My third and final contention is that pilgrimage may be a portal to the Sacred. The tentativeness of my 'may be' is, no doubt, in part a continuation of the ambivalences about the cross-pressures of belief in this age, as mentioned above. It is also a respectful deference to the unknowable here. The domain of knowledge perhaps most familiar with and competent to respond to this territory of the sacred, the unknowable, is that of theology. I am not saying that psychology or pilgrimage scholarship have no voice in this regard. On the contrary, as my review of literature indicated they have plenty to offer and say. Still, a theological hermeneutic, has also assisted me to interrogate the findings from my research, a little differently. Theology, as is often taught, is faith seeking understanding. Faith, by its very nature and definition, is not amenable to empirical certainties. As mysticism scholar Carl McCollum notes 'there is no such thing as an instrument to measure or prove

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[107] As articulated during Smith's videorecorded presentation of March 2017 to students of The Wheatley Institution based on his 2014 book *How (Not) to be secular – Reading Charles Taylor*. See References for full book detail.
Video Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-QPY6VLuEPQ

transcendental yearnings'.[108] However, what theology does bring is a living tradition of searching and teaching, particularly about the nature of the relationship between God and creation. Each new generation of learners, in their engagement with that theological tradition, are required to bring 'creativity, imagination and critical openness… and to honour and engage diverse voices in vigorous and passionate conversation about the meaning and purpose of its common life' (Mannion, 2007 p. 20). Lonergan and Lane, we learned in the literature review, also underscored the importance of a collaborative approach to the task of theological hermeneutics and the essential community referent that is required in the task of integrating experiences that may be of the Sacred. (See again p.55 and p.58 respectively.) I have been fortunate to have participated in many passionate and vigorous conversations as I have worked with the theological 'hints and guesses half understood' (after Eliot, 1941), that my research has surfaced, the fruits of which I bring to this discussion. I have argued that the embodied experience of pilgrims satiates a deep incarnational longing and I have already made connections above between that experience and elements of Incarnational theology. Next, I wish to explore the relationship between that very earthy embodied, incarnated experience and this portal to the transcendent, the Sacred.

6.4 An Exploration of the relationship between Incarnation and transcendence

The pilgrims in this research study, the findings indicated, became more grounded, assumed more easily the identity of pilgrim, surrendered to the ritual rigours of their pilgrimage, appreciated deeply their encounters with others, and, finally, returned home a more expanded, whole person. I explored the transformational element of pilgrimage, much cited by many pilgrimage scholars, and suggested that it might be a rather bold claim to make. The description that I alternatively found, that I believed was most fitting to the experience narrated by the pilgrims in this study, was what I called 'a kind of stretching, an expansion, that had a significantly beneficial healing or 'whole-ing effect' (to borrow Dubisch and Winkelman's term and cited on p.254). I did not shy away from naming

[108] See here https://anamchara.com/unknowing/mysticism-faith/?utm_source=mailpoet&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=new-from-carl-mccolman-www-anamchara-com_6

some hints of the transformational and in fact listed a number of experiences also cited by pilgrims in the interviews (p.257).

I want to pay some theological attention, if you will, to these findings, but first from the ground up. Becoming more grounded, being in relationship, becoming stretched by the multi-dimensions of the pilgrimage experience and thus experiencing oneself as a more expansive person – these represent an intrinsic movement from the soles of the feet to the upper body and head. The image of 'a kind of stretching' that I used for my final finding, conveys within it a sense of the chest expanding, the heart opening, the shoulders rolled back and the gaze at least towards the horizon, if not the heavens. If I were to transpose theological language upon this intrinsic movement I might say: In moments when we experience the full aliveness of our embodied, gifted incarnated selves, the intensity of it orientates us, almost instinctively, towards the transcendent, towards absolute purpose, towards God.

6.4.1 A Rahnerian Perspective

Karl Rahner, originator of the theological anthropology method (Carr, 1973 p. 359), based his theology on the conviction that 'the primal orientation of the human being was to God in creation' and that this primal orientation fuels 'the human subject in a seemingly endless search for meaning' (Kelly, 1992 p. 35). Rahner thus believed that his work as a theologian was 'to alert people, whether they accept or repress it, to the fact that they do have an experience of grace, (the self-communication of God) from within' (ibid, p.34). He was insistent that the 'meaning of any explicit knowledge of God…can really be understood only when all the words we use there point to the unthematic experience of our orientation toward the ineffable mystery' (Rahner 1978, p. 53). Hence the wisdom of one of my interviewees suggesting that the 'unthematic experience of pilgrims' on pilgrimage is the core ingredient of its theological grace.

If Rahner were to review the findings of this research, I believe he would conclude that they are dense with evidence of 'our nature as spirit to continually open ourselves to the unlimited horizons of the human quest for meaning…catalysing the drive for and promise of absolute fulfilment' (Kelly ibid p.35). I was touched by Kelly's inclusion of 'stretching' when he emphasised:

> 'such stretching of the boundaries of being human is the ground of Rahner's assertion that, by virtue of creation itself, people are transcendent beings in this world' (ibid).

In other words, to be incarnated as a fleshy human in-the-world includes that we are also transcendent humans. Pilgrims on pilgrimage, in these two pilgrimages at least, I would posit, experience the fullness of this dense layering that is being human – the fullness of incarnation and the satisfying pull of transcendence. The impact of experiencing the fullness of this interpenetrating layering, often in the company of others who are experiencing similar, is, I would argue, a core element of the enduring appeal of pilgrimage. Such thought brings to mind, my first theology tutor, Eamonn Bredin (see Introductory Chapter), who in class frequently recited, from memory, one of Rahner's other pithy summaries:

> 'The *a priori* horizon that we are conscious of in being conscious of ourselves forms the ground of all our knowing and perceiving of *a posteriori* subjects.

Rahner's inclusion of both ground and horizon resonates well, I believe, with my arguments about the impact of contemporary pilgrimage, particularly in the interrelationship between them and the necessity of both. The ground of human experience in body, place and time is the ground of knowing. We recall Johnston's emphatic assertion that the embodied experience itself is the meaning-making source of all subsequent 'perceiving of a posteriori subjects' (2007). For Rahner the implicit foundation upon which human embodied experience rests is the 'ultimate ground' of 'God alone, the prime but gentle mover behind our urge to know truth, to love goodness and to live free' (Kelly, p. 36). The 'transcendental horizon' for Rahner is not some 'distant possibility, ever receding', but rather an immediate offer of God's self in absolute nearness (ibid p. 46), in 'hidden closeness' (Rahner, 1978 p.131). Rahner's idea of the 'transcendent' being in, near and implicit offered a most important frame for interpreting the experience of contemporary pilgrims. I will develop these thoughts more in what follows but first I want to acknowledge how some framings of transcendence are more problematic because of their apparent neglect of embodied experience.

6.4.2 *The Feminist Perspective*

If some of the feminist theologians I have referenced were to read my findings they would agree, I believe, that the raw, and at times fierce, embodied experience of the pilgrims, is the only reliable source of theological reflection upon it. Gonzalez, O'Donnell-Gandalfo and Copeland, would be in full agreement that a theological anthropology of pilgrimage must be rooted in bodies, lives and practice. Some feminist theologians however, would have serious difficulties with my inclusion of theological ideas of 'the transcendent'. Plaskow, for example, eschews transcendence completely and unapologetically, believing it to be, if I might paraphrase, a mere patriarchal tryst to denigrate embodied experience and elevate disembodied, spiritualised experience. This tryst, she and others contest, denigrates vast proportions of female embodied experience in particular, given the patterns and earthiness of its cycles of menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding and child-rearing. Such experiences consequently go un-included, they contest, in all that belongs to or is deemed, 'sacred'. Invoking ideas of transcendence, they suspect, is just a way of trying to escape the messiness of life and living, and justify attempts to dwell intellectually in some body-freed, creation-freed virtual zone. We have chapter and verse evidence of much of the truth of this perspective in the experience of women and in some teachings of the Christian tradition (as cited also on p.126).

I believe returning to some thoughts from Charles Taylor, might offer us a third view on this difference of theological interpretation of transcendence and in particular to his thought-provoking concept of 'excarnation'. For Taylor, excarnation is 'the steady disembodying of the spiritual life' (which he believes is traceable in Christianity over many centuries), 'so that less and less is carried in deeply meaningful bodily forms and lies more and more "in the head" (2007 p. 771). He further states that 'Christianity as the faith of the Incarnate God has been denying something essential to itself as long it remained wedded to forms which excarnate' (ibid). He sees excarnation also represented in Christianity's fear of and repression of sexuality (ibid) and sometimes even 'a hatred of the human body' (and quoting philosopher Martha Nussbaum), which he stresses he too condemns and describes as 'a terrible deviation' (ibid, p. 631). I think Taylor's ideas of excarnation relate directly to many of the fears of Plaskow and

others concerning transcendence. In relation to transcendence directly, a very dominant structure in Taylor's thesis about contemporary belief, he describes as having three dimensions.[109]

For some feminist theologians, Taylor's inclusion of the phrase 'the beyond' in all three of his dimensions, makes his an equally problematic version of transcendence. It seems to me that Rahner's perspective on transcendence never loses its human dimension, never loses its primal roots in human experience and that is what makes it so relevant to this research.

> God communicates God's self to human beings in their own reality. That is the mystery and fullness of grace (1964, p. 119).

In relation to pilgrimage experience particularly, I found Anne Carr's paraphrasing of Rahner's thought most pertinent. (I want to acknowledge the contextually understandable but nonetheless dominance of her use of the male pronoun.)

> If God communicates with man (us) he has to use a word, a human symbol, a spatiotemporal event. If revelation is to occur, it must be an historical event, commensurate with man's (our) way of knowing and being in the world. (Carr 1973 p.363, and brackets my own with revised pronouns)

The spatiotemporal event of pilgrimage in the places at the centre of this study are a once-off or, for some, a recurring historical event for the pilgrims who make them. The pilgrims involved offered a narrated account of their, by now historical event of pilgrimage to Lough Derg or along the Camino de Santiago, and their reflections were a rich communication of word, symbol and experience, as we discovered in Chapter 5. Some of the pilgrims would have used the term 'grace' to describe aspects of their experiences and, even for those, who did not, using Rahner's measure of grace, we can also humbly suggest that there was much communication from God in these experiences.

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[109] Taylor's three dimensions of transcendence: (a) The sense that there is some good higher than, beyond human flourishing, beyond human perfection; (b) From a Christian perspective, through the agape love of God, there is a possibility of transformation offered to us, which takes us beyond merely human perfection: (c) Life goes beyond the bounds of birth and death and extends into life beyond this life, (what we call eternity) (2007, p.20, and my own bracket)

6.4.3 A New Perspective

A final thought in relation to my exploration of the relationship between incarnation and transcendence is in relation to the assumed movement and direction of it. Let me explain. A strictly vertical view of transcendence tends to support a hierarchical view of heaven above and earth below; 'God in his heavens/All's right with the world';[110] there's a single line of communication and it is largely mediated by the Church. A horizontal view of transcendence tends to support a strict adherence to the immanent - all that which is real, worthy, reliable is only that which can be seen, touched, felt or held, humanly created or scientifically explained; and while there might be a spaghetti junction of communication, a vertical one to the beyond is considered fanciful at best and utterly unreliable at worst.

Might there be a third view? Might transcendence be orbital? Space-time is curved Einstein theorised, and astronomical instrument has since proven. Universal life moves in orbits and expands. This is the nature of life, we have discovered. If transcendence is orbital, we can spiral, from the immanent and earthy to the mysterious beyond and return again and again, without losing anything of the awe and wonder and essentiality of both. Is this the kind of transcendence that the pilgrims in this study exemplify? The pilgrims set out on foot-sometimes barefoot -and upon the earth of these resonant landscapes, they did very embodied things in ritual ways like walking, fasting/ or eating-in-communion and praying in patterned, circular (orbital?) rounds and they pondered and discussed and revered life, love, nature and God; and they prayed and petitioned and praised some more and next day, they did it all over again. Their sore feet were as important as their altered states, for it was all part of the process. 'Orbiscendence' then (if I might coin a new word), might be a way to communicate something of being embodied and thereby made of earth and stardust both,[111] and with a multi-perspectival gaze and orientation that includes the downward, the sideways and the upward and out into the great beyond. As

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[110] From Robert Browning's 'Pippa's Song' in The Oxford Book of English Verse 1200-1900 ed. Arthur Quiller-Couch, 1919.

[111] See Elizabeth Johnson's article, For God so Loved the Cosmos in US Catholic, April 2010 https://uscatholic.org/articles/201603/for-god-so-loved-the-cosmos/

Ursula King puts it, paraphrasing some of Teilhard de Chardin's theology 'the human being is rooted in nature, and {also} part of the cosmic flux'. And could we speculate that pilgrimage gives the pilgrim a visceral sense of the 'the whole universe on an evolutionary journey into the mystery of God, while at the same time God humbly seeking to become increasingly incarnate in the universe' (2016/1997 p.62 & 64). The movement towards mystery and the movement towards increased incarnation are certainly strongly indicated by the findings. As Rahner again puts it 'they experience rather this holy mystery is also a hidden closeness, a forgiving intimacy, their real home, a love which shares itself, something familiar which they can approach' (1978, p. 131).

The 'immanent frame', as Taylor defines it, is not so much a set of beliefs as the context in which we must all now develop or mature our beliefs, or be initiated into belief for a first time. The individual and collective challenge as Taylor sees it, (and if I am reading him correctly), is the extent to which we remain creative and pro-active and inhabiting the immanent frame towards *openness*, (the possibility of belief; the possibility that there is more to life than the rational and the proven; the actuality of belief, the pursuit of a religious life); or make do with the *closure* (empty, flat, disenchanted universe, devoid of higher purpose, the downplay of the collective (2007, p.506, p.517). Easy certainties of either an immanent or transcendent kind are equally easily undermined, he stresses, in what he calls 'the present, fractured, expressivist culture' (ibid p. 727). It seems to me that contemporary pilgrims, as a collective are determinedly maintaining an openness in that immanent frame. From a theological perspective that movement outwards onto the ancient paths might well be interpreted as the place where large swathes of the 'pilgrim church' may be found and it is definitively on the move.

> Thus says the Lord: Find the ancient roads, ask the ancient paths where the good way is and walk it and you will find rest for your souls. Jeremiah 6:16

6.5 The nature of the salvific in the relationship between Incarnation and transcendence

A certain privilege at an early stage of my research journey into pilgrimage was the invitation to co-author and co-present a paper with my Supervisor, Professor

Eamonn Conway. I worked on an early analysis of my findings and Conway offered some initial theological considerations. 'By theological consideration', he clarified, 'we mean consideration of how the research findings inform our understanding of Christian faith today and its transmission in contemporary culture' (2021, p.65). One of the considerations Conway argued was that this early presentation of findings could also be read as yet further evidence of God's will for the salvation of all people (ibid, p. 69). At the time and until quite recently, I was resistant to and certainly sceptical about developing further such a theological consideration with any authenticity or integrity when completing my own thesis. In the interim, in yet another of our 'vibrant and passionate conversations', Conway has argued even more strongly, that what I have been 'mapping during the presentation of these findings are extraordinary accounts of salvation history' and in his opinion it would 'be a great loss not to name it as such'. We have been arguing the toss and it has been quite revealing.

I consider it a grace and good fortune both to have had exposure to 'more plausible theologies' as I journeyed through adulthood. Almost all my contemporaries and good friends, (with a few exceptional exceptions, I might add), have long since abandoned the practice and perhaps most sadly, the liberating message and Gospel of their cradle Catholic faith. Again, I repeat, most of the reasons are complex and systemic and are not for discussion here. However, one of the experiences I would share with my long-lapsed contemporaries, is a kind of 'allergic reaction' to some of the theological vocabulary of Catholicism, and one of the words is 'salvation'. These recent conversations have given me the collegial opportunity to work on the causes of this reaction and potentially re-consider my position. I am prepared again to acknowledge that my hesitancy and resistance may be partially influenced by our living within the dominance of the immanent frame. However, there are other factors. My associations with salvation include presuppositions like: salvation requires 'being saved *from* life; it requires a necessary restraint from too much enjoyment of life, for the true focus of our time and energy ought to be elsewhere, on heavenly things, if we are sincere in our response to salvation. Although the errant teaching that salvation could only be found within the Catholic Church, has been corrected by the teachings of Vatican II, and a deeply respectful, ecumenical movement, led by Church leaders and the faithful both,

has had extraordinary impact, in many parts of the world, at a socio-cultural level, the whiff of superiority of that kind of understanding of salvation has taken a long time to dissipate. When salvation is coupled with history, I experience in myself even more resistance and so it has been most illuminating to re-consider my position and to wonder if this what I would have called ‘old theological paradigm’ has anything redemptive to offer by way of insight on my findings and for contemporary pilgrimage generally.

Conway paraphrases Rahner’s understanding of salvation history as:

> the *record* of a relationship, a record of real decisions and free acts both on God’s part and on ours. This record has a history. In fact it *is* a history which itself testifies to and underpins the human-divine relationship that the psalms among other books of the Bible bear witness to’ (2013, p.128).

I hear this very differently to my prior assumptions about *salvation history* and a sense of possibility pushes ajar the door of my resistance, and helps me consider its relevance to my findings. ‘What else is salvation but a journey into the wholeness of God?’ asks Conway and I acknowledge how strongly the themes of ‘whole/”whole-ing” and wholeness’ have been in my findings. ‘A sense of salvation history leads people to the recognition that they cannot save themselves’, says Conway, and I am mindful of the number of times pilgrims came up against their limitations and vulnerabilities and were grateful for a breakthrough to another way of integrating these limitations and vulnerabilities and perceiving them not as failures but as apertures upon the love and acceptance of God. I am reminded too of Godzieba in earlier chapters emphasising that we are saved, not in spite of our lives but because of our lives. Talk of the psalms and the books of the Bible, which tell the story of a whole people who understand themselves as directly involved and contributing to ‘the dramatic dialogue between God and creation’ (ibid p. 127), brings me back to that strong theme of the “I” and the “We” that I used above to summarise much of the reflection by pilgrims on their relationship with other pilgrims. Salvation history then reminds us of the collective dimension of our relationship with God, which is indelibly intrinsic to the Judeo-Christian understanding of who God is and how God acts. Whilst there is the call to personal engagement and personal free will to respond and engage or not with the self-communications of God, the

Gospels remind us again and again that Christ was as invested in saving us as a whole, as he was in particular individuals. Our salvation is bound up with the salvation of others or it is not Christian salvation. This brings to mind pilgrim Gabrielle's extraordinary narrative of her dark nights of the soul on Camino, towards the end of which she found herself, as she walked along, whispering in prayer with each step, the names of the abused children *and* their abusers alike (p.217). Such testimony reminds us God often asks hard things of some people in service of the larger whole. It also reminds us that the God of our salvation is one familiar with suffering and through the death and resurrection of Christ, who having descended into the depths of hell and utter darkness, reveals that nothing of our depravities remains unknown nor beyond the offering of God's tender mercy. Such a narrative of salvation and mercy is quite counter-cultural to the 'cancellation culture' and 'shame and dismiss' strategies so operative on many of our social media platforms, which are, in many respects, the powerful public agora, the public spaces of our time.

6.5.1 Theological Reflection

In Chapter 5, I noted that a small number of the interviewees in this cohort had experience of or specialist training in theological reflection. Theological reflection is the discipline of exploring our personal and collective experience in conversation with the wisdom of the religious tradition. It attempts to be a genuine dialogue and is founded on deep respect for both and the process intends to expand, confirm, challenge and maybe even at times, confound. The sought for outcome is new truth and meaning. (O'Connell-Killen & de Beer, 1994, p. 85). In listening to the reflections of these particular research participants, I could not help but wonder if this meant they might have a distinct advantage, not only in terms of being able to mine more deeply for meaning but might the resulting nourishment of the experience be longer-lasting. I am mindful again of Rahner's insistence that everyone is already graced by God's own self-expression as God the Creator freely enters into dialogue with all creatures (Kelly, 1992 p. 40.) This unthematized gift of God's grace may then, yes, be preferably worked into further 'subjectivity luminosity' and finally into more thematised word (ibid, p. 41), reflection and movement so that the person might savour and live the truth of being gifted so. It is clear from my findings that some of the pilgrims,

without this formal skill of theological reflection have also been articulate and passionate about their moments of revelation. However, I am still left with a wondering. This may well be an area of possible further research and therefore for another day but my questions about it may represent an area that warrants attention from those who would have the skills and resources to support such.

6.6 Chapter Conclusions

I opened this chapter with a potted summary of the journey taken through all five of the previous chapters. I restated my research questions and I returned to my research title and indicated how I was going to use the three sub-clauses of the title as a means of gathering my discussion in relation to the key areas of embodiment, ritual performativity and how contemporary pilgrimage might be a portal to the Sacred, to God. In each case I sought to deepen the conversation between and among the three conversation partners and I interconnected aspects of my findings with the perspectives and views of many scholars from these disciplines, most previously highlighted in Chapter 3. In the upcoming and concluding section of my thesis I will summarise again the key outcomes from my research, acknowledge its limitations and name a small number of areas that may warrant further research.

By way of conclusion to the hermeneutical discussion however, I want to return to the core thread throughout the thesis, that of embodiment/incarnation as my fundamental hermeneutic.

6.6.1 Essence, Experience and Embodiment

In the Introductory Chapter I declared my particular interest in exploring how pilgrims embodied their pilgrimage experience. I soon learned that theological anthropology would be the area of theology most relevant to such an exploration of embodiment, given its commitment to the primacy of human experience, and in my case experience in and of the body. I welcomed Schillebeeckx's commitment to human experience not only as the basis of all theological reflection, but the foundation of the human construction of identity. His strong assertion that the human project is God's project is the cornerstone of his hermeneutical approach. Lieven Boeve, we remember, converted Schillebeeckx's thoughts on the

hermeneutics of human experience into a schematic presentation and his diagram remained a most helpful visual shorthand for me as I continued the dialectical movement between the pilgrims accounts of their experience and the theological anthropological tradition and back again (See p.63).

The dictionary defines 'essence' as 'the intrinsic nature or indispensable quality of something, which determines its character'. The findings and discussion from this research study have certainly indicated that the essence of contemporary pilgrimage lies in the 'saturated' benefits of the embodied experience - physiological, psychological, therapeutic, healing, integrating, a satiation of deep incarnational longing, grace-filled and salvific. Pilgrimage on these two sites, we could say, has offered 'a good measure, pressed down, **shaken** together, running **over**…and pouring into the lap of pilgrims' (Luke 6:38).

Anthony Godzieba's clarity about the body as *the* locus of revelation, our physicality as a central theological axiom of human existence, has been most helpful throughout and I wish to conclude these remaining thoughts about embodiment as the fundamental hermeneutic of the thesis, by quoting in full his assessment of the role of a post-post-modern theological anthropology. It is my I hope I have at least attempted as much in these theological reflections on the contemporary pilgrimage experience on Lough Derg and along the Camino de Santiago.

> A post-postmodern theological anthropology emphasises the essential role that embodiment plays in our attempt to discern "God's ultimate purpose in creating" and how that purpose is active today; … the incarnational imagination's ability to value embodiment and particularity for their own sakes, allows theology to join a conversation about human destiny that is already taking place…God's intent is incarnated in each particular life, each particular situation, each particular relationship, and then how the ensemble of lives, situations, and relationships works together to actualize the values of the kingdom of God in a way that truly mediates God's salvific power and manifests God's consoling love to the world. To show that God's love is present, active, comforting, transforming, enabling *and* that there is more of God's inexhaustible goodness - that exceeds any presence that we have experienced- that indeed is theology's sweet predicament, one that theology should embrace without reserve, for the life of the world (2006, p. 795).

This concludes my spiralling into the 'sweet -and earthy- predicament of theology' and makes way for a closing summary of the overall conclusions from

this research into the enduring appeal of contemporary pilgrimage as portal to the Sacred.

6.7 Thesis Conclusions: Pilgrim Scholar to Pilgrim

I began this journey as a pilgrim who had such a profound personal experience of pilgrimage that I made the decision to become a pilgrim scholar. I was hungry to understand the meaning and clear significance of contemporary pilgrimage for myself and for so many, particularly given how supposedly irrelevant the religious and the traditional had become. I am sated to the brim. As I complete the research journey, I will contentedly lay down the laptop, and lay aside all the scholarly books, put back on the walking shoes and return to 'the ancient paths' and become again, pilgrim. In fact I anticipated that return a little when on Sunday 3rd October last, I joined the final Pilgrim Walk of the 2021 season along the shores of Lough Derg. This was the only pilgrimage experience the Lough Derg Prior and staff have been able to offer during two summers of closure of St Patrick's Purgatory, owing to pandemic restrictions. The sun beamed brightly between rain showers so thunderous that they drowned out the Prior's voice as he attempted to narrate his fascinating historical stories at points of reflection along the way. Pilgrims at the mercy of the elements. And so it goes. In the final thirty minutes or so I fell into step and conversation with a fellow pilgrim, perhaps in his middle seventies. Up until the pandemic he had made the Lough Derg pilgrimage annually since he was 16. He added with utter matter-of-factness, …'But I walk'! Incredulous, I repeated, 'You walk?" 'Yes, from Derry City' he replied. It is a walk of 90-95km approximately. He had also made the Camino twice and had been ready to begin the *Via Francigena* on 30 March 2020 when all pilgrim paths became unexpectedly closed. It was extraordinary in the final days before completion of my study that I would meet one person who embodied so much of the depth and breadth of what I have been privileged to discover and ponder regarding pilgrimages to Lough Derg and along the Camino de Santiago. The quintessential pilgrim in all his ordinary hiddenness and humanness astride me on the road, a stranger bearing gifts of being. Quintessence and essence. Before finally returning to the pilgrim road, let me summarise the work of the thesis.

6.8 A Summary of Conclusions

I opened Chapter 6 with a summary of the journey of search, research, analysis and findings that I had made through the previous five chapters. I then immersed those findings in the hermeneutical spirals of discussion above and I wish bring the work to a close with a final summary of my conclusions about contemporary pilgrimage based on the experience of pilgrims to Lough Derg and along the Camino de Santiago.

- The givenness of the rigorous pilgrimage process in the lived-world of both pilgrimages yields a whole-body feeling of aliveness that has deep and lasting impact at multiple levels of the pilgrim's being.

- The resonance in 'the contact boundary' between the pilgrim and the pilgrimage landscape and between the pilgrim and other pilgrims is therapeutic and the reciprocity of the contact, healing.

- Pilgrimage satiates a deep incarnational longing in the pilgrim, and becomes a blessed relief from the excarnational exhaustion of technologically-driven lives back home as well as the excarnation of disembodied spirituality and ritual.

- Pilgrimage becomes an opportunity to rejoice in the particularity of being an incarnated being - a fleshy, vulnerable, resilient, full-blooded being with a sovereign and dignifying share in God's incarnational and fleshy intent for all creation.

- The robustness of the ritual performativity of pilgrimage facilitates a processing and an integration of private, inner work but in a publicly, witnessed way; equally it offers a collective theatre of the sacred in which the pilgrim can express and honour their transcendent dimension. This movement between the 'I' and the 'We' both in the ritual of the whole corpus and in the small practical acts which express the 'communitas' ethic of care for the pilgrim other, are as visceral embodiments of the Body of Christ.

- As portal to the Sacred, pilgrimage offers a glimpse of a traceable salvific pattern of engagement by the Unknowable Other of God, knowingly showing up in the ordinariness, brokenness and mystery of pilgrim lives, a hidden wholeness journeying beside, beneath, above and within us.

It was possible to come to such firm conclusions because the recounted experience of the pilgrims in this study was so evidently rooted in the seriousness of their seeking and the authenticity of their quest during their pilgrimages. They have been trailing ancient pathways and making them new. The searching of contemporary seekers would thus seem to bear out Smith's conviction that,

> Religious communities which have roots and traditions, legacies and practices that are pre-modern and have an ancientness about them and who have modes of worship and gatherings that are very materially embodied and tactile are going to be more attractive as actual embodiments of the transcendent. Such practices come with such a smell of enchantment about them and are so strange and so weird ... they will come with such a whiff of transcendence in them that people will know they are not in Starbucks. [112]

The processes of pilgrimage in Lough Derg and along the Camion de Santiago invite pilgrims into all these facets of tactile embodied enactments of the transcendent and in their strange and unfamiliar way have become a robust contemporary alternative to the 'thin gruel of self-styled spiritualities'. (ibid)

6.9 Limitations become Opportunities

This research focused on two pilgrimages and on the experience of twenty pilgrims. Although the pilgrim population sample was modest, the analysis and hermeneutical process was reliable and facilitated an ever-deepening drilling down into their narrated experiences to arrive at these robust conclusions. In addition, the study offered a new definition and description each of pilgrimage as well as a new definition of embodiment, each of which emerged from a

[112] James K.A. Smith in a live presentation based on his book *How (Not) to be secular Reading Charles Taylor (2014).* See Video here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-QPY6VLuEPQ

congruency with the research findings. Such is contemporary academic interest in pilgrimage it is reassuring to know that both the limitations and the conclusions of my research may soon become catalysts for further research and no doubt contesting argument in the near future. Further research on the theological dimension, as was mentioned in Chapter 3 would be a welcome and necessary development.

The final limitation I would wish to name is that of arriving at the end-point of this particular research project. The knowing and not knowing of such a moment is so well captured by Rilke in his poem, 'Turning Point', part of which is here translated by Stephen Mitchell.[113]

Turning Point

Looking, how long?
For how long now...

For there is a limit to looking.
And the world that is looked at so deeply
wants to flourish in love.
Work of the eyes is done, now
go and do heart-work
on all the images imprisoned within you; for you
overpowered them: but even now you don't know them...

As pilgrimage researcher I have looked for some time and I have looked deeply and I am now at the limit of my looking, the work of my eyes is done. And although I have immersed all the reflections in the spirals of analysis and hermeneutics, and would seem to have discovered what they are about, I recognise that 'even now I do not know them'. There is so much more to learn and to come to know and meanwhile the lived world of pilgrimage continues to flourish through the love and practice of millions.

[113] Mitchell, Stephen (1995) *Ahead of all Parting: The Selected Poetry and Prose of Rainer Maria Rilke* Edited and translated by Stephen Mitchell, Modern Library

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APPENDIX: Full Transcript of Interview Questions

Opening Phase

When did you do your pilgrimage? Was it your first experience? If a repeat pilgrim, how often before and when previously? Had you a clear purpose/motivation for taking on this pilgrimage? Did you set out as to pilgrim alone or in planned company? What kind of preparation, if any, did you engage in before beginning your pilgrimage? How did you find that preparation and what were you paying attention to? Do you recall any other anticipations you may have had? Do you have a regular fitness or other such body practice? How much time per week/per day do you give to that? How different or 'in alignment' from that/those practice/s were the challenges of this/these pilgrimage/s?

Mid-Stage

How was your first day? In terms of the bodily challenges - what was the hardest part of that first day? What was the hardest part overall? How important was it to you that it would be physically challenging? Were there any surprises for you in that or in other ways? Were you aware of how other pilgrims were working with the challenges of the pilgrimage? What impact did that have on you? In your normal routine how much time would you ordinarily spend outdoors? Per day? Per week? How did you find being out of doors for much the time during this pilgrimage? How would you describe your relationship generally to the outdoors/to being in Nature?

Final Stage

Returning to your core motivation/purpose - how does that motivation/hope/expectation sit with you now? (If a spiritual purpose or outcome is/was part of that I would be grateful for further elaboration on that?) How would you describe the overall impact of the pilgrimage on you? Were there any lasting impacts of the pilgrimage on you, on your physical/ social/ psychological / spiritual self? Or, perhaps in terms of how much time you spend outdoors or in how you relate to the outdoors since your return? Or in your

interest in doing other pilgrimages? Is there any other aspect of your pilgrimage experience that we haven't touched on yet that you would like to tell me about?

Two-Site Pilgrims (those who have done both Lough Derg and the Camino)

What do you think are the similarities and differences between the two pilgrimage experiences?

Which did you find more challenging – physically, socially, mentally, psychologically, spiritually?

Would you have a preference between them? Can you elaborate on what is under/behind your choice?

In terms of your dominant 'spiritual leaning', as it were, which of the two pilgrimages suits you best?