

9th Annual International Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Conference :
Post-Pilgrimage: Beyond secularisation

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Biographies

George Cassar is a Historical Sociologist, Pedagogist, Andragogist and an Associate Professor of Heritage and Cultural Tourism at the Institute for Tourism, Travel and Culture at the University of Malta. He is author and/or editor of numerous books and academic journals. Publications also include many chapters in books and articles in academic journals on a variety of subjects including History, Sociology, Education, Tourism, Heritage Interpretation and Cultural Heritage.

Dane Munro, a Neo-Latinist, Historian and Cultural Interpreter, is based as an independent researcher and lecturer in Malta. He has recently concluded research at the Institute of Tourism, Travel and Culture at the University of Malta on past and present faith-based travel to Malta, including the origins of pilgrimage and theorising of religions past.

Abstract

This paper proposes to introduce the term ‘post-pilgrimage’ as a key concept to the theory of pilgrimage applied to the Western Christian point of view. Tourism and pilgrimage have been joined to the hip since Palaeolithic times and have since then dynamically developed. And since we apparently live in a post-modern world, in which ‘post-tourism’ and ‘post-secularism’ are well-known models in the theoretical field of tourism research, the idea of ‘post-pilgrimage’ is perhaps overdue.

Introduction

Post-tourism relates to consumers who accept that tourism is an illusion of reality, often carefully arranged by commercial interests (Smith, M., N. Macleod and M.H. Robertson 2010). Post-pilgrimage then belongs to the era of individualism, and to a certain measure, of secularism, where there is a paradigm shift from travelling to seek God to travelling to seek one’s self. Emphasis is instead on the reality of the illusion, carefully arranged by spiritual interests, but also acknowledging that commercial interests belong to pilgrimage as much as they do to any other kind of tourism. In post-pilgrimage, tourism and pilgrimage tend to blend together, as the commercial aspect is no longer a taboo, while also spiritually tourism and pilgrimage seem to blend seamlessly when it comes to fulfilment.

In post-pilgrimage, the situation is also different at some points from the medieval form of pilgrimage, which has apparently strongly influenced the Western normative thinking about pilgrimage, especially the idea of the ‘pure’ pilgrim. Medieval pilgrims set out on a journey to pay their debt to God and the arrival would be the apex of the whole undertaking. At the site they acquired their indulgences, having paid their debt to God, with or without the intercession of patron-saints, both by arriving and by making a financial sacrifice. Released of their burden, they could return home and would be possibly celebrated as the returning pilgrims who survived the ordeal (Reader 2015; Sumption 2003; Ure 2006; Webb 2002). The post-pilgrim might be disappointed on arrival, because the travel is regarded as the ‘thing’. Arrival on site, for instance at Santiago de la Compostela, means also being reduced, dramatically and anticlimactically, from a pilgrim to a tourist, *la fin du désir*.

In post-pilgrimage, however, the economic model of pilgrimage, described by Bell and Dale (2011) remains rather unchanged from medieval times. From fieldwork carried out in the last few years, it has emerged that giving monetary gifts to shrine is no longer understood to belong to the ‘Damnation or Salvation’ theme, but has shifted to the realm of sustainability, a personal responsibility of conscientious post-pilgrims that those who come after will still be able to enjoy the site (Munro 2017).

Dawn defines a pilgrimage as a ‘[p]hysical journey with a spiritual purpose,’ adding that at present many people make a pilgrimage not for the religious side of the matter, but for the spiritual side of the walk itself (2011: 34). The modern faith-based tourism is more self-medicated, unmediated and a reflexive affair (Olsen and Timothy 2006: 3). This trend seems to happen with less or no need of official religious structures and is likely much more an expression of lived religion. Post-pilgrimage may also be regarded as a self-healing tool, because only when the self is fixed, one may be able to discover the further fulfilment offered by pilgrimage. Akin to post-tourism, post-pilgrimage is as much experiential, as in a sense the emphasis is also on the self. This is inevitable, as many persons in the modern Western world seem to be focused on the self.

Since Victor and Ethel Turner proposed that, '[a] tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist' (1978: 20), the influence of post-tourism and post-secularism on pilgrimage must be, as a consequence, rather profound. Davie (2010) has pointed out that many have suggested that with the spread of secularisation, religion and religiosity will eventually disappear, including their externalisations, such as pilgrimage. That the contrary is happening, with pilgrimage and faith-based tourism becoming growth-markets, may justify the term post-pilgrimage too.

In analogy of the work of Davie (2010), post-pilgrimage may also be described as a freer version of the prescribed kind of pilgrimage on the basis of belonging and believing, while post-pilgrimage is a lived experience, and much more an idea of believing without belonging. Secularisation is no longer understood as a process of losing faith but more as a process of un-churching, in the sense that people often do not lose their belief in God but in the historic church itself for a number of reasons, while at the same time science has provided different answers which replaced the older religiously based answers to the same old questions.

From current fieldwork by the authors, a new trend was noticed of people who labelled themselves as multi-religious, in the sense that they combined the best elements of various religions, which were most relevant to their own situation. These multi-religious then enjoyed going to sites and pray or contemplate, without looking for what the official religions call 'the truth'. They were of the opinion that enjoying the best that religions had to offer was a mode of harmony, while bickering over the 'truth' was regarded as a mode of conflict.

Methodology

The methodology of this paper is based on literature, observation and participation in faith-based tourism.

Bibliography

(note – the references included here are a non-exhaustive sample from the relevant literature)

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