Spirituality in Silence and Nature: Motivations, Experiences and Impressions among Swedish Pilgrims

Anna Davidsson Bremborg
Faculties of Humanities and Theology of Lund University, Sweden
Anna.Davidsson-Bremborg@teol.lu.se

Received 27 February 2008; accepted 30 June 2008

Summary
Pilgrimages arranged by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sweden are a relatively new, but growing phenomenon. This study examines Swedish pilgrims' background, motivations, and experiences. Most pilgrims are highly educated, middle-aged persons with a strong relation to the church. However, a group of religiously interested persons with weaker bonds with the church was also identified. The pilgrims uphold a multitude of motivations both on an individual as well as on a group level. The most common motivation is a longing for nature, but three different motivation groups were identified: a leisure group, a spiritual-religious group, and an escape group. Depending on their motivations, the pilgrims appreciate diverse parts of the pilgrimage. One exception is the silent walk, which gets the highest score by almost everyone. The author discusses if the highly valued silence in group might reflect the power of strong self-expression values among Swedes found in other studies.

Keywords
pilgrimage, pilgrim, motivations, self expression values, Sweden

1 Introduction
Pilgrimage is a phenomenon which has expanded in Sweden during the last ten years, after having been forbidden in 1544 with the introduction of Protestantism. Though it now has been resumed as an activity in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Sweden one might see it as part of a greater interest for pilgrimages in Europe. It is, however, not theologically uncomplicated, considering the impossibility to lean upon the pilgrim theology of the medieval church. Swedish church leaders have thus strived to find a form and a pilgrim theology that attracts the people of today by focussing on the walking, and not on specific religious pilgrim places.
Pilgrimages are part of the supply of adult activities that is offered in parishes. In 2002, one-sixth of all parishes reported having arranged at least one pilgrimage (LUKA, 2003), a proportion that has probably increased since then. Pilgrimages are made by foot, but need not follow specific pilgrim trails, although some do. They can be walks between churches, from one church and back again, or just in a wood, a town, or a scenic place.

This article presents the result of a study of the participants, the pilgrims. The purpose is to analyze the participant’s background, motivations, and experiences.

2 Theoretical Background

2.1 Pilgrimage

Among scholars, pilgrimage was a neglected area for a long time. Apart from Victor and Edith Turners’ work (1978), not much happened until the 1990s. Today the scientific field of pilgrimages is on the rise. During the last years several scholars have questioned Turners’ positive view of pilgrimage as a liminal place, away from daily life and orders, shaping a communitas among the participants. “It is necessary to develop a view of pilgrimage, not merely as a field of social relations but also as a realm of competing discourses”, Eade and Sallnow (1991, p. 5) declared. The pilgrimage is not a homogenous place with a religious focus. Rather, the discrepancy between various pilgrims and between pilgrims and religious leaders makes it impossible to talk in general terms about pilgrimages. Each pilgrimage must be analyzed in its own context, with its particularities and dynamism.

One way to separate different kinds of pilgrimages is Morinis’ (1992, pp. 10-14) typology based on motivations and aspirations: devotional, instrumental, normative, obligatory, wandering, and initiatory pilgrimages. But motivation based categorization has proved to be empirically complicated. Distinctions between tourists and pilgrims are often blurred. People may change their intentions during the journey, someone who starts as a tourist becomes a pilgrim, and vice versa. Other aspects may also be put into the definition, and many researchers strive for new understandings of the concept of a pilgrimage (Badone & Roseman, 2004; Swatos Jr., 2006; Swatos Jr. & Tomaši, 2002). Sarah Schott (in: Swatos Jr., 2006) has drawn attention to pilgrimage as part of an identity-making process. Spending money on certain journeys reveals something about the individual, as does the presentation of the journey in narrative stories to others later. Schott presents a definition of pilgrimages where the journey’s consequences are in focus, instead of the