

Camino Transcendence in the Worship Experience

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Abstract

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For millennia, individuals have engaged in pilgrimages. The reasons for pilgrimage are as unique as the individuals partaking. Some travel to locations where miraculous events occurred hoping to experience the same. Others journey in the footsteps of holy people, seeking solidarity. A few have been known to engage in pilgrimage as an act of penance for wrongdoings. One individual may journey for self-awareness or learning while the other for the simple enjoyment of travel and relaxation. There are many reasons to journey on a pilgrimage, but one common outcome is transcendence. Focusing on the Camino de Santiago, this project explores the concept of transcendence and the elements of pilgrimage that lead to transcendent experiences. The Camino de Santiago is a series of pathways across Spain that converge on Santiago de Compostela, where the bones of Saint James, the apostle, are believed to rest. Numerous books, internet vlogs and websites, as well as movies and documentaries have been released documenting transcendent experiences on the Camino. This project will document some of those experiences. The goal of this exploration is to improve the local worship service experience. Worship, like pilgrimage, should lead to transcendence. By applying the discovered elements of pilgrimage, specifically the use of images and icons, *communitas*, and the pre- and post-experience, to the worship service, an environment more conducive to connecting with a great reality can be accomplished.

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Well, like the academy awards, the music is playing, and it is time for me to move on.

A PILGRIMAGE INTRODUCTION

You have a chance to examine your life – your thoughts, your goals and dreams, your relationships. You have time to scrutinize your priorities, to figure out what things aren't worth your time worrying about.¹

- Meg Maloney

Worship is a pilgrimage, or it can be. Each time people join together in worship – singing, praying, hearing the word proclaimed from a sacred text, and sending those worshipers home to practice the lessons learned – they are engaging in a form of pilgrimage. They travel into the story of a time and place where holy interactions occurred. Like the transcendent moments of that story, the modern-day worshipper is offered an opportunity to transcend and take the lessons learned from that experience into his or her community. Worship is a pilgrimage, or it can be. It can be a transcending experience if the leaders and preparers of that worship service are creating an environment conducive to pilgrimage.

This paper investigates the historical conversations surrounding transcendence, beginning with Plato and Aristotle and concluding with the 20th Century writings of Abraham Maslow and more recent contributions by Gregory Gorelik. After developing a working definition of transcendence, the conversation will focus on pilgrimage, specifically the Camino de Santiago. This conversation will consider the images and interactions one experiences while walking the Camino de Santiago as well as the pre-pilgrimage and post-pilgrimage experience. These elements of pilgrimage provide an

¹ Meg Maloney, *Slow Your Roll: Ruminations & Reflections on My Walk Across Spain* (N.p.: Bobti Mystic, 2020), 328.

individual with opportunities to experience transcendence and are transferable to a local worship service and in particular the United Methodist worship experience.

The final portion of this paper will include survey results demonstrating the need and desire for more transcendent opportunities. After revealing the need and desire for local church worship leadership to create an environment more conducive to transcending, the conversation will conclude by applying those transferrable elements of the Camino de Santiago to the local church worship experience. This application will include suggestions for adapting the elements of a walking pilgrimage to better suit the worship event. Additionally, this paper will offer suggestions for further research.

The Camino de Santiago was chosen as a model for transcendence based on multiple interviews with those who have walked the path across Northern Spain and journal reports, both written and broadcast, which speak to the transcendent and spiritually transforming nature of the pilgrimage. Meg Maloney, a 55-year-old female from California, writes about the transformative experience of the Camino in her book, *Slow Your Roll*. As quoted above, she finds the Camino de Santiago conducive to spiritual-awakening and awareness. Her journey along the Camino Frances (one of multiple Camino de Santiago routes that will be discussed below) expanded her sense of self and her role in a large community. This paper will include quotes from various pilgrims, including myself, that support and elucidate the transcendent nature of pilgrimage.

HISTORICAL REFLECTION ON TRANSCENDENCE

There is, however, very clearly a problem of transcendence. The very term suggests inaccessibility, a mere beyond to one's experience. - Can the term be given any positive significance, and if so, how?²

- Charles M Bakewell

Before proceeding with our conversation on transcendence, I must acknowledge that, aside from a reference to Buddhist observations on transcendence in the studies of Gregory Gorelick, the individuals discussed below represent Western thought. Since this project focuses on creating an environment conducive to transcendence in the local church worship service in the United States, the lack of Eastern thought may be permissible. Future research on the topic could benefit from expanding the conversation to include more Buddhist, Hindu, and other Eastern discussions on transcendence.

Some of the earliest contributions to the idea of transcendence come from the Greek philosophers – Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus. Plato (428BCE – 348BCE) maintained that God is “transcendent – the highest and most perfect being – and who uses eternal forms, or archetypes... God must be a first cause and self-moved mover otherwise there will be an infinite regress to causes of cause.”³ For Plato, all creation begins with an act of God, the first cause of all existence, and an individual seeks knowledge from or of God but this knowledge can only occur through a divinely-initiated revelation. Paul

² Charles M Bakewell, “The Problem of Transcendence,” *Philosophical Review* 20, no. 2. (March 1911): 121, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2177654#metadata_info_tab_contents.

³ Brian Morley, “Western Concepts of God,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer Reviewed Academic Resource*, accessed August 29, 2022, <https://iep.utm.edu/god-west/#:~:text=To%20Plato%2C%20God%20is%20transcendent,the%20imperfections%20inherent%20in%20material.>

Tyson in his essay, “Transcendence and Epistemology: Exploring Truth Via Post-Secular Christian Platonism,” states that “Plato seeks to bring divine wisdom into view – wisdom which cannot be grasped by merely human capacities, but must hence be received, in humility, from the god.”⁴ As the first cause, only God in Plato’s view can reveal or cause the individual to know God. Additionally, Plato believes that innate knowledge is proof of God’s existence and revelation. Humans possess knowledge of the world that is essential for survival and progress that is not learned by experience. Possessing knowledge that one did not learn is proof to the Platonist that a transcendent being was involved. Creation would devolve into chaos and destruction without this revealed and innate knowledge and continued work of a transcendent being imparting such knowledge. In short, one cannot know God, unless God reveals the transcendent nature.

Aristotle (384BCE-322BCE), similar to Plato, asserts the existence of a divine being or God and argues that God “imbues all things with order and purpose...God is passively responsible for change in the world in the sense that all things seek divine perfection.”⁵ The changes occurring in the created world are the result of the individual and creation seeking to become more like God. “This perfect and immutable God is therefore the apex of being and knowledge.”⁶ One may conclude from Aristotle that the path to understanding God involves observing the surrounding world.

⁴ Paul Tyson, “Transcendence and Epistemology: Exploring Truth Via Post-Secular Christian Platonism,” *Modern Theology* 24, no.2 (April 2008): 247. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.2007.00444.x>.

⁵ Brian Morley, “Western Concepts of God.” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource*. Accessed January 31, 2023. [https://iep.utm.edu/god-west/#:~:text=Aristotle%20made%20God%20passively%20responsible,\(or%20its\)%20divine%20existence](https://iep.utm.edu/god-west/#:~:text=Aristotle%20made%20God%20passively%20responsible,(or%20its)%20divine%20existence)

⁶ Aristotle, “On the Heaven.” *The Physics, I, 9*. Paul Tyson argues that Aristotle believes the underlying reality of creation is eternity. In comparing Aristotle’s view of transcendence and eternity to the philosophy of Plato in his aforementioned article, “Transcendence and Epistemology,” Tyson writes that “In Aristotle, however, because we have divine illumination, through the divine faculty of reason, and because Nous is believed in and its attractive power is physically manifest in the transular cosmos, an isomorphic

Several centuries later, Plotinus (204CE-270CE) would build upon Plato' and Aristotle's concepts of transcendence and become one of the early voices for Neoplatonic philosophy. Plotinus argues that "The One" is beyond reason. One cannot fully understand or discuss the transcendent except through an indirect discussion of the power displayed by the (The One) transcendent.⁷ In addressing Plotinus' concept of "The One" and the ability of individuals to unite or know "The One," Edward Moore would write that for Plotinus perfect contemplation reveals the transcendent reality but does not provide full access to the transcendent. Perfect intellect, which Plotinus viewed as timeless, can bring one close to understanding "The One" but will always fall short. Moore writes,

The One can be said to be the 'source' of all existents only insofar as every existent naturally and (therefore) imperfectly contemplates the various aspects of the One, as they are extended throughout the cosmos, in the form of either sensible or intelligible objects or existents. The *perfect* contemplation of the One, however, must not be understood as a return to a primal source; for the One is not, strictly speaking, a source or a cause,

relationship between reality and our faculties of perception is posited, so we can see the true meaning of all that we perceive from the most commonplace aspects of daily life, all the way up to the divine heavens themselves."

⁷ Edward Moore, "Plotinus," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource*, accessed October 7, 2022, <https://iep.utm.edu/plotinus/>. Moore writes, "the One cannot be known through the process of discursive reasoning (*Ennead* VI.9.4). Knowledge of the One is achieved through the experience of its 'power' (*dunamis*) and its nature, which is to provide a 'foundation' (*arkhe*) and location (*topos*) for all existents (VI.9.6). The 'power' of the One is not a power in the sense of physical or even mental action; the power of the One, as Plotinus speaks of it, is to be understood as the only adequate description of the 'manifestation' of a supreme principle that, by its very nature, transcends all predication and discursive understanding.

but rather the eternally present possibility — or *active making-possible* — of all existence, of Being (V.2.1).⁸

One could conclude that Plato, Aristotle, and, to a degree, later Neoplatonic philosophers like Plotinus associated the transcendent with the initial and continued cause of knowledge and existence.⁹

Plotinus would argue that creation emanates from “The One” yet with each subsequent emanation, the ability to contemplate the transcendent becomes more difficult.¹⁰ For example, the first emanation comes directly from “The One,” but all subsequent emanations derive from previous emanations. With each new generation, the ability to contemplate “The One” becomes more difficult.

Though this discussion does not offer full justice to the early Greek philosopher’s arguments, one can surmise that for Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus mere human existence and knowledge is evidence of and, in the case of knowledge, a path toward experiencing the transcendent. Though the transcendent does not need creation, it is the first cause or “active-making possibility” (according to Moore) of life and intelligence. The human task is contemplation – using reason to uncover the process and characteristics of transcendence. We exist to understand that which is not us.

⁸ Ibid. Moore, “Plotinus,” accessed October 7, 2022, <https://iep.utm.edu/plotinus/>.

⁹ Ibid. Moore.

¹⁰ Ibid. Moore.

Augustine (354CE-430CE) would argue in the fourth century that God is free and his creative and sustaining work is an act of free love.^{11 12} Since the goodness or love of God is found in creation, one could discover God’s mind by reflecting on creation, but, like Plotinus’s view of contemplation, that reflection would be an incomplete understanding of God. Augustine writes in his *Confessions* that one can grasp a portion of the infinite and imagine more, but the finite cannot grasp the entirety of the infinite.¹³ Augustine’s concept of God’s continued creative and sustaining work in creation overcomes the Plotinian idea that successive emanations become “less real” and consequently less revealing of eternal reality.

Meister Eckhart (1260CE-1328CE) expresses in his sermon, *The Nearness of the Kingdom*, the ability to connect with God as an internal uniting. He writes, “In similar fashion our salvation depends upon our knowing and recognizing the Chief Good which is God Himself. I have a capacity in my soul for taking in God entirely.”¹⁴ The

¹¹ Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine. Book XII, Chapter 4-8*. In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Volume 1*, edited by Philip Schaff, 176-178. Augustine writes, “...in Thy Wisdom, which was born of Thy Substance, created something, and that out of nothing...and, therefore, out of nothing Thou didst create heaven and earth – a great thing and a small – because those are Almighty and Good, to make all things good.” God’s goodness creates good.

¹² Robert Schneider, “Theology of Creation: Historical Perspectives and Fundamental Concepts.” *Science and Faith*, Berea College, accessed August 29, 2022. <https://peped.org/philosophicalinvestigations/augcreatio/>.

¹³ Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine. Book VII, Chapter 5*. ed. Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Volume 1* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 104. Augustine writes, “But You, O Lord, I imagined on every part environing and penetrating it, though every way infinite; as if there were a sea everywhere, and on every side through immensity nothing but an infinite sea; and it contained within itself some sponge, huge, though finite, so that the sponge would in all its parts be filled from the immeasurable sea. So conceived I Your Creation to be itself finite, and filled by You, the Infinite. And I said, Behold God, and behold what God has created; and God is good, yea, most mightily and incomparably better than all these; but yet He, who is good, has created them good, and behold how He encircles and fills them.”

¹⁴ Meister Eckhart, “The Nearness of the Kingdom,” *Christian Classical Ethereal Library*, accessed September 1, 2022, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/eckhart/sermons.v.html>. Eckhart writes, “The heavens are pure and clear without shadow or stain, out of space and out of time. Nothing corporeal is found there...Nothing hinders the soul so much in attaining to the knowledge of God as time and space.”

transcendent God becomes immanent within the individual's soul as opposed to one's surroundings. For Eckhardt, like many of the philosophers and theologians before him, God is infinite and cannot be understood in finite creation but only when the infinite chooses to unite or reveal the god-self to the soul. According to Eckhart's sermon IV, "True Hearing," creation does not merely exist as separate from God but hinders an individual from transcending to God. He writes, "Three things hinder us from hearing the everlasting Word. The first is fleshliness, the second is distraction, and the third is the illusion of time. If a man could get free of these, he would dwell in eternity, and in the spirit, and in solitude and in desert, and there would hear the everlasting Word."¹⁵

Though God stands apart from creation for Eckhart, Baruch Spinoza (1632CE-1677CE) would argue that God is all, and therefore all humanity and creation is part of the infinite substance.¹⁶ Spinoza would associate God with an eternal substance found in all nature. His immanent, all encompassing, description of God would lead some to describe Spinoza as an atheist, while others would call him a pantheist, and a few characterize him as a "God-intoxicated man" seeing God in everything.¹⁷ Following Spinoza's eternal substance thinking, one could conclude that transcending occurs through simply being and knowing oneself and the surrounding world.

G. W. F. Hegel (1770CE-1831CE), who follows a similar vein of thought, argues that the infinite of spirit is "visible for all to see in the very events of history," and "God

¹⁵ Meister Eckhart, "True Hearing," *Meister Eckhart's Sermons*, accessed September 5, 2022, http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1260-1328,_Eckhart,_Sermons,_EN.pdf.

¹⁶ Leszek Kolakowski *Metaphysical Horror* (Penguin, London, 2001) 78-80. http://www.faculty.umb.edu/gary_zabel/Courses/Spinoza/Texts/Kolakowski%20On%20Spinoza.htm.

¹⁷ German romantic writer and philosopher, Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg (AKA Novalis) is the first known individual to refer to Baruch Spinoza as God-intoxicate.

is the essence of rationality.”¹⁸ For Hegel, connecting with the transcendent God is possible through intellect and contemplating one’s surroundings and time.

Immanuel Kant (1724CE-1804CE) held a position different from Hegel’s, acknowledging the existence of an absolute or God, but one that cannot be intellectually known. Genevieve Lloyd argue in *Reclaiming Wonder* that Kant believed, “The proper goal of the mind’s struggle is now the Absolute, construed as Absolute Ego, in which the human mind finds its destiny...[yet] there is no access to complete knowledge, no matter how hard we try.”¹⁹ God exists in a realm outside our own that reason cannot know – a realm of experience and values. With Kant, as well as Hegel and Spinoza, one can witness a shift in transcendence conversation from a focus on the object of transcendence – God or others – to the subject – the individual seeking to transcend. Instead of focusing on defining an unknowable Absolute and/or the Absolute’s methods for creating and interacting with creation, the conversation focuses on the individual’s methods and experience of the revealed transcendent.

American philosopher and psychologist William James (1842CE-1910CE) provides a more pragmatic view of God that illustrates this movement when he writes, “On pragmatistic principles if the hypothesis of God works satisfactorily in the widest sense of the word, it is true.”²⁰ In other words, if one’s belief in God causes that individual to act in a specific manner and the outcome of that action is viewed by that individual as successful, then, at least for that individual, the reality of God is proven.

¹⁸ Brian Morley, “Western Concepts of God,” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer Reviewed Academic Resource, accessed August 29, 2022, <https://iep.utm.edu/god-west/>.

¹⁹ Genevieve Lloyd, *Reclaiming Wonder* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 188.

²⁰ “William James,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, last Modified November 2, 2021. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/james/>.

This pragmatic view places heavy focus on the individual and his/her experiences and the idea that God/the transcendent produces good in those who truly experience God/the transcendent.

Abraham Maslow (1908CE-1970CE) focuses on defining transcendence in a manner that is independent of belief in God. From a loss of time, the ability to think beyond one's culture, past, ideology, or the ability of an individual to love are a few examples of transcendence for Maslow. Though Maslow's typology includes religious aspects, most of his transcendence types focus on the ability of an individual to connect or relate to other individuals and groups. One could conclude that for Maslow transcendence is the ability to expand one's consciousness and leads to the fulfillment of self-actualization - the highest level in his hierarchy of needs.²¹ Transcendence is a method for becoming more fully human.

GORELICK, SUBLIMITY IN NATURE, AND NON-RELIGIOUS TRANSCENDENCE

Our task in this discussion is neither to critique every philosophical and theological argument for or against the concept of transcendence nor to provide an explanation of the in-depth intricacies of each position on the transcendence of God but simply to recognize the continued human quest to understand the nature of transcendence and to uncover a method or methods by which one can connect with an infinite or absolute reality that is beyond one's physical, mental, and spiritual boundaries. Each of the afore-mentioned philosophers, psychologists, and theologians acknowledged the

²¹ Abraham Maslow, "Various Meanings of Transcendence," *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 1, no 1 (1969): 66. <https://www.atpweb.org/jtparchive/trps-01-69-01-056.pdf>.

existence of the infinite reality or God but differed in their manner of approaching or understanding that reality or God. How does a person connect with God? The answer to this question can greatly impact the manner in which a pastor ministers to her or his local church.

Recent studies across various fields continue to focus on uncovering methods by which individuals can surpass their physical, mental, and spiritual boundaries. Two individuals in particular engaging in this process are Liseth Bethelmy and Jose Corraliza. They argue that, “the wilderness is one of the most widely recognized sources of transcendent emotion.”²² Transcendence for Bethelmy and Corraliza is revealed through emotions and they developed an assessment tool to uncover an individual’s ability to experience ‘awe’ and ‘sublimity’ through landscapes. They name the assessment tool the Sublime Experience of Nature (SEN). Citing many of the philosophers previously mentioned in this study, Bethelmy argues that “sublime emotion toward nature is defined as a transcendent, spiritual emotion involving epiphany and a mix of heightened fear (awe) and pleasurable emotions, like wellbeing and others.”²³ Their assessment tool proved 81% reliable. ²⁴ The tool not only considers the instances when nature inspires awe but also “inspiring energy.” “Inspiring energy “is defined as a feeling that awakens a sense of vitality, happiness, and unity between the self and nature.”²⁵ The assessment tool

²² Lisbeth C. Bethelmy and Jose A. Corralize, “Transcendence and Sublime Experience in Nature: Awe and Inspiring Energy,” *Frontiers in Psychology* (March, 2019): 1, <https://ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6424873/>.

²³ Bethelmy and Corralize, “Transcendence and Sublime Experience in Nature,” 6. The authors refer to Bethelmy’s dissertation to define sublimity and its connection to transcendence. Lisbeth C. Bethelmy, “Experience of the Sublime in the Emotional Bond with Nature: An Explanation of the Pro-environmental Orientation” (PhD diss., University of Madrid, 2012).

²⁴ .81 reliability score is considered good. The closer the score is to one the more that test is considered consistent. A .81 reliability test score acknowledges that .19 or 19% of retesting overtime may contain errors.

²⁵ Bethelmy and Corralize, “Transcendence and Sublime Experience in Nature,” 17.

finds that nature inspires a reduction of self-boundaries and an increased oneness with the environment. Assessing individual experiences in Spain, they discover that nature provides their subjects with an opportunity to expand their sense of identity. Nature is no longer a separate entity but connects with the individual in a manner that expands the individual's sense of self. An area of further study might be to apply the assessment tool specifically to the Camino de Santiago.

In addition to studies of transcendent encounters with nature, transcendence research has expanded to include other non-religious disciplines, such as marketing and nursing. Radhika Duggal, with Forbes, argues that companies need to consider transcendence in marketing to new generations and demographic groups. Focusing heavily on Millennials and Generation Z (Gen Z), the author urges companies to use transcendence thinking to create a “perspective that includes more than simply our own personal needs...It’s a higher-order need that enables [the business] to maximize harmony with the world around us.”²⁶ Using Maslow, Duggal describes Millennials and Gen Z as highly transcendent or self-actualized individuals. These individuals possess “passion points” and these “passion points” are deep social and personal desires uniting each member of that generation to live and act with united purpose. For Duggal, “passion points” are a form of transcendence. A strong marketing team should understand the “passion points” for a perspective clientele and help the customer achieve that passion

²⁶ Radhika Duggal, “Transcendence: The Basis of Your Company’s Social Purpose.” *Forbes* (April 7, 2022): 2-3. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescommunicationscouncil/2022/04/07/transcendence-the-basis-of-your-companys-social-purpose/?sh=148653dd26f1>.

through the company. Gregory Gorelick, who will be discussed later, might categorize Duggal's approach to transcendence in the workplace as exploitation.²⁷

Medicine is another discipline considering the benefits of transcendence. If transcending is the ability to expand one's sense of identity and understanding to include the larger community, then an act of transcendence can benefit the medical professional's ability to care for patients. Consider the "platinum rule" being promoted in hospital quality and compliance. The golden rule states, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,"²⁸ but the "platinum rule" states, "Do unto others as they would want done unto them."²⁹

The golden rule focuses on the medical professional. Under the golden rule, an individual's responsibility is self-awareness - know yourself and what you want, then apply your desires to the treatment of the patient. The platinum rule recognizes the uniqueness of each individual and asks the medical professional to expand his or her treatment beyond self-awareness to other-awareness. The medical professional adhering to the platinum rule will expand his or her sense of care to include the patient. The consequence is a more collaborative treatment plan and better bedside manner.

²⁷ Gregory Gorelick. "The Evolution of Transcendence." *Evolutionary Psychological Science* (2016): 301. Gorelick states "There are, however, cases of religious authorities who have issued transcendence-inducing knowledge at a cost to receivers of that knowledge." One can interpret Duggal's use of transcendence as a marketing tool for business as a mutual benefit to company and customer – for example Bombas receives a profit when the customer buys clothing. A portion of that profit is given to a local charity. Bombas gains financially and the customer experiences a sense of improving the community. However, one can view the business as manipulating the desire to support a charity in order to gain profits.

²⁸ Matthew 7:12

²⁹ Quint Studer, "You've Heard of the Golden Rule, but What About the Platinum Rule?" *Pensacola News Journal* (updated March 12, 2002). Accessed October 27, 2022. <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/youve-heard-golden-rule-platinum-130033959.html>

The business and medical approaches to transcendence reveal a shift in the conversation, focusing less on understanding and experiencing God and increasing one's understanding and experience of other individuals, groups of individuals, and other aspects of creation. Another shift, beginning as early as the time of Aristotle, involves methodology. As previously discussed, some philosophers, like Plato and Kant, argue that connecting with God is beyond human understanding and methods unless revealed or made possible by the transcendent. For Plato, only God can make God's self known, but Aristotle initiates the idea that one can experience the transcendent by observing the created world. As previously discussed, future philosophers would debate the ability to understand the transcendent, yet individuals like Hegel would argue the ability to think of God is evidence of the existence of God. William James would argue that where behaviors associated with God's revelation are practiced effectively the existence of God is proved. Transcendent methodologies would continue to increase in numbers with more contemporary researchers like Gregory Gorelik.

Building upon much of the philosophical and theological history that we have discussed, Gorelik traces the evolution of transcendent thought and the current methods by which individuals experience knowledge beyond their self-limitations. Music, ritual mimicry, and ascetic practices are a few of the methods "during which an individual uncovers something, heretofore hidden, or makes connections among heretofore unrelated aspects of one's personal or intellectual life."³⁰ Gorelik defines transcendence as an experience "marked by a subsumption of the individual self in an all-encompassing reality. The boundary between the self and the outside world is broken and a more

³⁰ Gorelick, "The Evolution of Transcendence," 295.

expansive perspective diffuses throughout all aspects of one's experience."³¹

Transcendence is not the loss or ignoring of the self to focus on the other as may be construed in the previously discussed "platinum rule," but the infusing of the self into a greater, once unknown, community. In a circular fashion, the ego or identity is not negated but expanded to participate with, while also being molded by, the other.

With this approach in mind, the direction in which one transcends should be considered. Ursula Goodenough maintains that transcendence is vertical and horizontal.³² Vertical transcendence is one's ability to know and experience God. Vertical transcendence may be referred to as revelation or hierophany. To use Mircea Eliade's language, one could equate vertical transcendence with the "axis mundi." The "axis mundi" is a place where God and humanity meet. Pilgrimage sites and routes involve places of vertical transcendence, such as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Vatican, and Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela to name a few. Though Eliade focuses on locations, whether formally established or part of a less formal spiritually liminal experience, vertical transcendence may occur at an infinite number of locations and at various times. Though certain times or festivals may have a history of transcendent experience, vertical transcendence may occur at any time.

³¹ Gorelik, 287.

³² Goodenough, Ursula, "Vertical and Horizontal Transcendence." *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*, 36, no.1 (year): 24. https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/bio_facpubs/93/. Goodenough explains the characteristics of and connection between the two forms of transcendence. In arguing for a transcendence that leads to Green Spirituality or a greater care of the universe, she concludes each category of transcendence is connected. In particular, the nature of a vertical transcendence should lead to a horizontal. For Goodenough, vertical transcendence is located in the mind that should become tangible in horizontal transcendence that is anchored in life.

Horizontal transcendence involves one's ability to expand his/her identity to include the surrounding world. We are not isolated individuals but part of a community with those around us. Though Goodenough's attention, in regard to horizontal transcendence, centers on connecting with nature, her theories of transcendence can include expanding one's connection to other individuals.

Recent attempts have been made to quantify both vertical and horizontal transcendence. In line with Goodenough's focus on nature as an object of horizontal transcendence, the previously mentioned Sublime Experience of Nature (SEN) scale provides evidence that one's surroundings can inspire awe, fear, vulnerability, and a perceived connection or "oneness" and "harmony" with a greater universe.

In addition to assessment tools gauging horizontal transcendence, multiple tools have been developed to measure an individual's level of vertical transcendence, including the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWB), the Spiritual Perspective Scale (SPS), the Transcendence Scale (TS), and the Spiritual Transcendence Index (STI) to name a few. Each tool focuses on different aspects of the transcendent experience such as existential wellbeing (SWB), awareness of God in daily life (SPS), an individual's capacity to "stand outside of their immediate sense of time and space" leading to a great sense of connection with others and the universe (TS), and the motivations facilitating the experience of transcendence (STI).³³ This discussion is not an in-depth critique and does not express the fullness of each study, but it reinforces our awareness of the historical and current attempts to understand and initiate an act of transcendence.

³³ Larry Seidlitz, Alexis D Abernethy, et al, "Development of the Spiritual Transcendence Index." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41, no. 3 (2002): 440-441.

For the sake of this conversation, it is the research of Kitson, Chirico, et al that will guide our work. Their research shows the difficulty of quantifying transcendence and maintains that a more reliable method for assessing transcendence may be less anecdotal or motivational but observational. Referencing Buddhist attempts to understand transcendence, they write, “Even Buddhist teachers do not accept self-reports of meditation experience at face value, but rather assess practice history, the manner and emotional state in which the report is given and retrospective observations of behavior.”³⁴ It is this focus on practice history that serves as a foundation for our investigation into the level of transcendence within my social context.

³⁴ Alexandra Kitson, Alice Chirico, et al. “A Review on Research and Evaluation Methods for Investigating Self-Transcendence.” *Frontiers in Psychology* November 5, 2020.

AMERICAN MIDDLE-CLASS SUBURBAN CHURCH AND TRANSCENDING

I am the lead Pastor of a 300+ worshipping Methodist church in the southern suburbs of Houston, Texas. Aside from a six-year appointment in Tyler, TX, I have served over ten years in three different appointments in the suburbs of Houston. All have been in master plan communities with middle class families. The ethnic breakdown is majority white, with an increasing number of Latinx and a small minority population of (less than 3%) African American. Most of the current worshipping community has a history of Christian worship with less than ten percent joining the church with no previous Christian worship experience. Further research could include expanding the survey to include more ethnically diverse communities.

As stated previously, worship is pilgrimage...or it can be. It is an opportunity to travel, spiritually through the scripture, to another time and place. Like pilgrimage, worship can offer the individual an opportunity to transcend. Again, to transcend is to become subsumed into a greater reality where one's identity is shaped by and connected to God and others. Consider for a moment, the image of the cross. The cross is vertical and horizontal. Transcendence is seen in the cross when the individual reaches up to the divine and out towards others. The goal of the Transcendence Questionnaire that was offered to my church worshipers, beginning on September 1, 2022, was to learn what elements of the local worship service facilitated transcendence. Fifty-three individuals completed the questionnaire representing five different age groups.³⁵ This number represents 20.9% of the average worshipping attendance. Questions were asked on a scale

³⁵ Ages groups include Generation Z (18-25), Millennials (26-41), Generation X (42-57), Baby Boomer (58-76), and the Silent Generation (77+).

of zero (0) to five (5), where 0 represents never and 5 represents always. The questionnaire divided the worship service experience into its isolated parts or elements. These elements include the welcome and announcements, fellowship or greeting time, prayer, music, sermon, communion or the Lord's Table, baptism, quiet time or meditation, and blessing and benediction. The questionnaire also considered the transcendent nature of the worship space and the use of images in worship. Additionally, the questionnaire asked the respondent to consider pre- and post-worship activities, such as electronic communications prior to worship that prepare the individual for the worship experience, the welcoming received in the parking lot and at the doors to the church, bulletins or worship guides, one's sleep patterns the night before worship, study opportunities after the service that focus on the worship experience, and informal gathering after worship (i.e. lunch with other worshipers) where the worship experience is discussed.

The final portion of the questionnaire asks the respondent to rate on the same 0 to 5 scale the worship experience's impact on behaviors. In line with Kitson, Chirico, et al research on Buddhist transcendence, this portion of questions focuses less on the respondent's subjective view of transcending in worship and more on the outcomes of transcending through a worship experience. Does an individual's experience of transcending cause that same person to change behaviors? If one transcends, then one's behaviors should reflect that expanding of identity to more fully include God and others. We ask each respondent if worship leads him or her to develop new relationships with neighbors, to serve those in need, to seek a closer relationship with God, to pray more, to

study scripture, to talk with another person about faith, or to engage with people from other cultures and backgrounds.

A few concerns with the questionnaire are merited. First, the respondents are members of the church where I serve. Though each respondent was informed that answering the questionnaire was voluntary and their identity would not be known by me (the pastor), we should still consider that some answers may be skewed based on that individual's relationship with me. Those with a favorable opinion of me might answer questions in a more favorable light while those with a poorer opinion might answer in a more negative manner. Second, this questionnaire does not consider that some respondents may experience transcendence in worship but not have the ability or access to demonstrating the behaviors that this questionnaire associates with transcendence. Third, this questionnaire assumes that transcendence in worship triggers certain behaviors. This study does not consider that an individual may participate in the behaviors that we label as transcendence-induced without actually transcending in worship. One may read the Bible for multiple reasons that do not include worship transcendence. One does not need a transcendent worshiping experience to participate in service projects or conversations with people of other cultures or backgrounds. Future research on worship transcendence could consider additional questions about non-worship influences that trigger behavior change. Finally, we should consider that the questionnaire gauges past experience and not desire. For example, as will be seen in the results, worship space receives a 2.585 on the transcendence scale. This result reveals that a portion of our respondents do not experience transcendence regularly through the worship space arrangement, but this result does not provide information on the

respondent's opinion as to whether this element can be used to create an environment for transcendence. It simply shows that an individual has not previously experienced transcendence through worship space arrangement. Future studies on the transcendent nature of space in worship should consider asking whether an individual considers that an element of worship can be conducive to transcending.

For this study, the goal was to determine the level of transcendence occurring through worship in a specific suburban United Methodist Church in the southern United States of America and determine if certain elements of that church's worship experience could be improved to create an environment more conducive to transcendence. This study is built upon the premise that any answer less than a 5 reveals an opportunity to improve.

The results are below:

Transcendence Questionnaire Results

Portion 1 Elements Leading to Transcendence

Element	Average
Electronic Communication Pre-Worship	2.321
Bulletins or pre-worship instruction	2.321
Worship Space Set-up	2.585
Fellowship and Greeting	2.66
Welcome and Announcements	2.679
Pre-worship Sleep	2.755
Images and Worship Items	2.925
Pre-worship Greeting	2.925
Charge or After-worship Activity	2.962
Lunch Discussions	3.038
After-worship Study or Service	3.176
Blessing	3.245
Quiet Time or Meditation	3.736
Sermon	3.868
Music	3.885
Prayer	3.943
Baptism	4.173

Communion 4.231

Transcendence Questionnaire

Results

Portion 1 Elements

Leading to Transcendence

Generational Comparison

Element	Gen Z	Millennia I	Gen-X	Baby Boomer	Silent Gen
Electronic Communication Pre-Worship	1	1.6	1.818	2.909	3.2
Bulletins or Pre-worship Instruction	0.5	1.3	1.818	2.909	3
Worship Space Set-up	0.5	0.6	2.227	3.091	3.4
Fellowship and Greeting	1	1	2.273	3.136	3.6
Welcome and Announcements	1.5	2.6	2.227	3.091	3.4
Pre-worship Sleep	2	2.3	2.409	3.045	3.2
Images and Worship Items	0.5	1.6	2.409	3.409	4.2
Pre-worship Greeting	1	3	2.636	3.227	3.8
Charge or After Worship Activity	0.5	3	2.636	3.273	3.8
Lunch Discussions	2.5	4	2.909	3	3
After-worship Study or Service	3	4.3	3.091	2.909	3
Blessing	1.5	3	2.955	3.636	3.6
Quiet Time or Meditation	2.5	2	3.5	4.091	4.4
Sermon	2.5	4	3.91	3.864	4.2
Music	3.5	2.6	3.591	4.045	4
Prayer	3	3.6	3.773	4.182	4.2
Baptism	3	4.6	4	4.409	4
Communion	1	4.6	4.136	4.318	4.6

Transcendence Questionnaire Results

Portion 2 Transcendent Behaviors

Behaviors	Average
Develop a Relationship with Someone of Another Culture or Background	2.943
Develop a New Relationship with a Neighbor	2.981
Pray	3.774
Share Your Faith with Another Person	3.849
Seek a Closer Relationship with God	3.962
Read the Bible	4.115
Serve Those in Need	4.17

Focusing on the Portion 1 results, we discover that, aside from communion and baptism, all elements fell in the 2 to 3 range with electronic pre-worship communication about the worship service and bulletins receiving the lowest score for transcendence at 2.321 and communion scoring the highest at 4.231 on the same scale.

The generational comparison chart provides additional insight into the appeal that each element has for various age groups. For example, images used in worship were more conducive to transcendence for Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation than Millennials and Gen Z. Further research is merited to determine whether images become more important as an individual ages or if images are simply more important to different generational groups.³⁶ Aside from music, most elements of worship became more instrumental in facilitating transcendence with each subsequently older generation. The outlier to this conclusion is music and its transcendent impact on Gen Z versus Millennials. In the case of music, Gen Z experiences a greater amount of transcendence than Millennials. Similar outliers are found with sacraments. Regarding baptism and communion, Generation X had a lower experience of transcendence than Millennials, yet Gen Z results show that sacraments, specifically communion, had little transcendent impact. Additional research on the sacramental impact on Gen Z through Generation X may shed more light and bring more guidance to the worship leader. Aside from these

³⁶ A larger sample size could be merited to determine the validity of images and their impact on the differing generations. Before surveying the congregation, one hypothesis was images would be more conducive to transcendence for younger generations. This questionnaire results did not prove the hypothesis. An addition study may consider one's past history with the images and that history's impact on the individual. Does the amount of interaction that an individual has with an object impact his or her ability to embrace that object as conducive or a signifier of God or others?

outliers, the elements of worship facilitated greater transcendence in each subsequent, older generation.

Portion 2 of the questionnaire allows us to test the transcendence claim by exploring behavior. Does the claim to transcend result in behavior change? Like portion 1, no element in portion 2 scored 5. According to the results, the greatest behavior change due to worship is witnessed in respondents engaging in acts of service to those in need with an average score of 4.17. Fewer people were inspired to develop relationships with neighbors and people of other cultures at 2.981 and 2.943 respectively.

With the goal of creating a worship experience that is conducive to transcendence, the results of this questionnaire reveal that opportunities are present in local worship services. It is this study's belief that pilgrimage, and specifically the Camino de Santiago, can provide guidance for creating more transcendent opportunities in the worship experience.³⁷

³⁷ The rationale for choosing the Camino de Santiago over other pilgrimage sites or pathways is anecdotal. Various written and video accounts by pilgrims of the Camino describe moments of worship and connection with God and others. These accounts can be found on Camino promotion websites and www.youtube.com. After years of watching and reading these accounts, I decided to explore the Camino and uncover the elements that facilitate the transcendent experience. It is my assertion that other pilgrimage sites and pathways possess the same elements and, also, lead pilgrims into a transcendent experience. The Camino de Santiago was chosen based on the vast number of stories documenting such moments of transcendence.

THE HISTORY AND EXPERIENCE OF THE CAMINO DE SANTIAGO

The Camino de Santiago is a series of trails across the Iberian Peninsula and Europe (Map 1). These trails unite at various locations as they move west, ultimately converging in Santiago de Compostela, where the relics of Saint James the Greater are believed to rest. Through word-of-mouth testimonies, books, online documentaries, television and movies, the Camino has grown in popularity since the 1980's. A pilgrimage like the Camino de Santiago possesses many elements that are conducive to spiritual reflection and create opportunities for transcendence.³⁸

Christian tradition maintains that Saint James evangelized the Iberian Peninsula before returning to Jerusalem where he was martyred in 44 CE by King Herod Agrippa.³⁹ Though varied stories describe the events that led to James' body being returned to Spain, one legend states that James' followers retrieved his body, placed it in a boat, and angels guided it across the Mediterranean Sea to the coast of Spain, near Finisterre. Upon arrival, a local queen named Lupa placed the bones in a cart and attached it to a team of wild oxen. The oxen were allowed to roam freely; and where they stopped, the bones were buried. This location later became Santiago de Compostela.⁴⁰

³⁸ Unless otherwise indicated the use of the word 'Camino' will refer to the Camino de Santiago in general. Where a specific Camino route will be discussed, the specific names will be used, such as Camino Primitivo, Camino Ingles, Camino Frances, etc.

³⁹ Acts 12: 1-23

⁴⁰ David M Gitlitz and Linda Kay Davidson, *The Pilgrimage Roads to Santiago: The Complete Cultural Handbook* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000), preface XIII. Another common story maintains that the disciples of James sailed his body to Spain, where the apostle had evangelized. Upon arriving they looked for a place to bury his bones. Queen Lupa set several challenges before the disciples, promising to help if the disciples successfully completed all challenges. The last challenge involved two untamed oxen on a nearby hill. If the disciples could yoke those oxen, Queen Lupa would grant permission to bury the bones. The oxen, aware of the holy nature of the bones, "placidly allowed themselves to be harnessed." Saint James' bones were buried on a nearby hill.

In the early Ninth Century, a Galician hermit named Pelagius had a vision of stars shining on a nearby field. Following the vision, he found the long-forgotten bones and reported the discovery to the local church. There, Bishop Theodore sent messengers to King Alphonso II, requesting that the king travel to the field and verify that the bones were those of Saint James. Alphonso II, also known as Alphonso the Chaste, traveled a path from Oviedo, Spain, which would later be known as the Camino Primitivo. He confirmed that the bones belonged to Saint James and declared him the patron saint of Spain. The village that grew around this site was named Campus de la Stella (Field of Stars) and a monastery was built at the site.

News of the discovery spread across Spain and throughout the Catholic Church, leading to an increase in people visiting the site. Some of these travelers claimed to experience healing miracles, which led the church to promote Campus de la Stella as a pilgrimage destination. Over the first several centuries, the Catholic Church promoted Santiago de Compostela, alongside pilgrimages to Rome and the Holy Land. This promotion contributed to a growing desire to recapture Spain from Muslim rule through the Reconquista.⁴¹ By the 12th and 13th Century as many as 500,000 pilgrims made the trip to see the resting place of Saint James' body each year.⁴² The church built hospitals and hostels along the Camino paths and in particular, the Camino Frances, which became

⁴¹ John B. Wright, "The Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, Spain." Wiley Online Library, last edited March 10, 2014, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/foge.12026>.

⁴² Though the reasons for engaging on a Camino pilgrimage vary, the first pilgrims were often sent on pilgrimage by the church. Some traveled as an act of penance for sin while others were sent as an act of devotion. Today, an official pilgrim, who qualifies to receive a certificate must travel a specific number of kilometers based on the mode of travel and travel for religious/spiritual or educational purposes. The actual numbers of pilgrims traveling will be higher than the office reported numbers due to the fact that some travel for non-religious reasons or do not report their journey to the office Camino de Santiago office.

the most traveled path to Santiago.⁴³ The Knights Templar were commissioned by the church to protect pilgrims, including physical and financial protection.⁴⁴ Written in 1140, the *Codex Calixtinus* served as the first official pilgrim's guide. This guide provided the pilgrim with information ranging from the towns one would visit, to rivers from which one could and could not drink, to the shrines and churches that one should visit, and the behavior one should expect from people living along the Camino.⁴⁵ Famous pilgrims include Charlemagne, Francis of Assisi, Dante Aligheri, and Rodrigo Diaz, also known as El Cid.⁴⁶

The Reformation and various wars in Europe would lead to a decline in pilgrim numbers, but the 20th century witnessed a resurgence. Francisco Franco ruled Spain from 1939 to 1975 and promoted pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostela as an act of patriotism.⁴⁷ Additional attention to the Camino occurred in the mid-1980s through the early 2000s with the release of several books focusing on the pilgrimage, including *The Camino: A Journey of the Spirit* by Shirley MacLaine, *The Pilgrimage* by Paulo Coelho, and *I'm Off Then: Losing and Finding Myself on the Camino de Santiago* by German

⁴³ The Camino Frances is a 790km (490 miles) Camino route that begins in Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, France and continues through Pamplona, Burgos, and Leon, Spain before arriving in Santiago de Compostela.

⁴⁴ Luis Torras, "The Templars and the Origin of Banking." *The New Barcelona Post*, accessed on May 24, 2022, www.thenewbarcalonapost.com/en/the-templars-and-the-origins-of-banking and Tim Hartford, "The Warrior Monks Who Invented Banking" *BBC: Business*, accessed on May 24, 2022, www.bbc.com/news/business-38499883. The Knights Templar developed a banking system that included coded passwords to protect pilgrims' financial resources. Originally developed for Crusade-era individuals traveling to Jerusalem, the banking practice was used for those traveling to Santiago de Compostela.

⁴⁵ "Codex Calixtinus, Book V," in *The Pilgrim's Guide to Santiago de Compostela*, ed. William Melczer (New York: Italica, 1993), 84-133.

⁴⁶ Kate Russell, "History of the Camino de Santiago," accessed May 15, 2021, <https://magazine.nd.edu/stories/history-of-the-camino-de-santiago/>.

⁴⁷ Lynn Talbot, "Revival of Medieval Past: Francisco Franco and the Camino de Santiago," *Camino de Santiago in the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 37. Talbot writes, "In the early years of Franco's dictatorship, mass gatherings, fiery speeches, and pilgrimages united the political and religious powers, and annually, Santiago de Compostela became the preferred venue to commemorate Santiago's support of the Nationalists."

comedian Hape Kerkeling. Additionally, movies like *The Way* starring Martin Sheen, the documentary *I'll Push You*, and YouTube videos have fueled interest in the Camino de Santiago. More than 300,000 people officially completed the journey to Santiago de Compostela in 2018 and 2019.⁴⁸ The reasons for hiking the Camino vary with each individual, but the Pilgrims Office in Santiago de Compostela, which maintains records on those who complete the Camino, found at the end of 2021 that approximately 45% of all pilgrims, who completed at least 100km of the Camino and received a certificate of completion, walked the path for “religious and other” reasons.

On October 23, 1987, the Council of Europe declared the Camino de Santiago the first European Cultural Itinerary because its 32 routes connect a number of European countries, allowing for cross-cultural conversation and great opportunities for European unity. In 1993, UNESCO declared the Camino de Santiago a world heritage site due to its historical significance and the cross-religious and cultural exchanges that occur among pilgrims walking the path.⁴⁹

MY CAMINO EXPERIENCE

My journey along the Camino de Santiago occurred from April 18 to May 6, 2022 along the Camino Primitivo. I chose the Camino Primitivo for multiple reasons. First, my schedule allotted no more than nineteen days for this pilgrimage. This time frame eliminated a full Camino Frances (790 km) or Camino Portugues (616 km) experience.

⁴⁸ “Camino Statistics: How Many People Walked the Camino in 2021?,” accessed May 14, 2022, <https://followthecamino.com/en/blog/camino-statistics-how-many-people-walked-the-camino-in-2021/>. 347,598 pilgrims completed the required 100 km walk or 200 km bicycle or horse ride into Santiago de Compostela. This number does not include those that did not register their Camino completion with the Pilgrim’s Office in Santiago or those that did not acquire the required number of Pilgrim Passport stamps.

⁴⁹ UNESCO World Heritage Convention, “Routes of Santiago de Compostela: Camino Frances and Routes of Northern Spain,” accessed May 14, 2022, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/669>.

These two routes are the most popular, with approximately 81% of those completing the Camino de Santiago traveling on one or the other. The third most popular path is the Camino Ingles (110 km) from Ferro to Santiago de Compostela. This third path might have allowed me to conduct on-the-trail research and have conversations with other pilgrims, but the path may not have provided me with enough time to build the level of comradery necessary to engage honestly with other pilgrims about their rationale for and the impact from walking.

I needed to find a two- to three-week path or limit my walk to a portion of a longer route. Concerns that walking the last portion of a longer route would limit my ability to build *communitas*, which will be discussed later, with individuals who previously formed strong relational bonds led me to choose the Camino Primitivo.⁵⁰ This path, originating in Oviedo, Spain, is considered the original Christian route to Santiago and from the time of Alfonso II to the early 10th Century was the most popular pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela (Image 1).

With the rise of Alfonso IV of Leon (c 926) and ongoing conflicts between European kings and the Moors to reclaim the Iberian Peninsula, the popularity of the Camino Primitivo diminished, and a newer pathway originating in France and passing south of the Cantabrian Mountains became the more traveled route. Alfonso IV and, later, King Sancho the Great of Pamplona continued to promote the newer path, called the

⁵⁰ Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*. (New York: Columbia, 1978), 13-14. “*Communitas* is an informal community that develops around a shared experience or rite of passage. In *communitas*, social standing, identity, ideology or affiliation outside of that activity hold no bearing on the formation of the community.”

Camino Frances, as the primary path to Santiago de Compostela, building hospitals, monasteries, and other pilgrim support facilities.⁵¹

The Camino Primitivo is a 310 km (192 mile) path from Oviedo to Santiago de Compostela. Primitivo means primitive or original. As the path traverses the Cantabrian Mountains, it passes by the ruins of Hospital de Fonfaraon and Hospital de Valparaiso⁵² before descending to the shuttered dam of Embalse de Salime reservoir. The trail continues east to the Roman-walled city of Lugo before joining the Camino Frances in Melide and a final 50 km walk into Santiago de Compostela. Like the other routes, the Camino Primitivo offers way-markers to guide pilgrims as well as numerous images – signs, statues, shrines, and churches – indicative of the Camino’s religious origins. These images create an environment that is conducive to transcendence. These images remind the pilgrim of those that have walked the same path previously and invite the pilgrim to become subsumed in the story of the towns and people who have maintained and been shaped by the Camino. One is no longer the person he or she was before the transcendent moment but develops a new sense of being that includes God and others.

⁵¹ “The History of the Camino de Santiago,” (blog), accessed April 8, 2022. <https://caminoways.com/the-history-of-the-camino-de-santiago> and Marina Perez Toro, “The Camino de Santiago,” accessed May 18, 2022, <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/the-camino-de-santiago-cathedral-of-santiago-de-compostela/OAWBDrH9T-6yKQ?hl=en>.

⁵² The Camino Primitivo splits into two pathways for approximately 26 km. The Hospitales Route ascends a portion of the Cantabrian Mountains and is the path one travels to visit the remains of Hospital de Fonfaraon and Hospital de Valparaiso. The alternate path descends into the Rio de la Pola valley. The alternate path increases the Camino distance by 4 km. The two paths reunite at Alto de Pola.

IMAGES and ICONS

In *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, Edith and Victor Turner discuss icons in the Christian Church.

As all know, every symbol has a signifier and a signified. The signifier is the sensorily perceptible vehicle of a concept...For example, a specific image of the Virgin Mary is a signifier meant to represent not only the historical woman who once lived in Galilee but the sacred person who resides in heaven.⁵³

For the Turners, the signifier is the image or icon and the signified message or being that the icon reveals. Though all may not be familiar with this concept of icons as signifiers to a signified, as is witnessed in the Eighth Century with the Iconoclast Controversy,⁵⁴ the dual designation applies well to the images and icons found along the Camino de Santiago. From the numerous images of Saint James and the monuments portraying those that played significant roles in the development of the pilgrimage route, to images of scallop shells, the Camino images not only represent specific individuals and locations, but they point to a deeper, more transcendent reality. To use the Turners' language, these icons and images are signifiers pointing to a more transcendent and spiritual identity.

One challenge to the transcendent nature of icons and images on the Camino de Santiago is that an individual should have a cognitive understanding of or belief in the signified if the signifier is to be effective. Many walk the Camino with no intent of

⁵³ Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 143.

⁵⁴ *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1997), 815-17.

spiritual formation or religious affiliation. Individuals from all faith backgrounds, including those with no faith, hike the Camino each year. For an icon or image to lead a pilgrim into an experience of transcendence, as we define it, that pilgrim must have the ability to connect that item to God or others. This is not the case for many pilgrims. We must acknowledge that the transcendent nature of the icons discussed here is limited to a select group of pilgrims.

The Camino Primitivo begins with the image of Alfonso the Chaste. Standing beside the entrance of the Cathedral of San Salvador, the statue of Alfonso, the first Camino pilgrim, stands with his hand to his heart and faces west towards Santiago de Compostela (Image 2). Within 25 feet of the statue, in the tiled walkway is a plaque marking the beginning of the journey. The plaque reads, “At the beginning of the ninth century. From this Basilica of the Savior, the Asturian monarch, Alfonso the Chaste, initiated the first of the pilgrims to Compostela to venerate the tomb of Saint James the Great and to establish the Basilica there in his honor.”⁵⁵ The route begins with the story and image of the first pilgrim, inviting current pilgrims to associate their pilgrimage with those that have gone before. The pilgrim is not independent, separated by time from those that have gone before, but walks with those that have gone before. The pilgrim transcends his or her time to engage in an act of *communitas* with King Alfonso to venerate Saint James. The monument to Alfonso the Chaste with the historical background plaque initiating the pilgrim’s journey on the Camino Primitivo is an invitation to transcend.

⁵⁵ Modified translation provided by Google LLC, “Google Translate” (Mountain View, CA: Google, 2022).

A word is warranted concerning the idea of *communitas* with those that have passed. Turner would argue that *communitas* occurs between individuals experiencing a liminal or liminoid experience.⁵⁶ Can a person experience *communitas* with those that have walked the same path but at different times? By Turner's definition the answer is "no." However, one can experience a sense of solidarity with those that have walked the Camino previously. Just as an individual sharing his or her experience on the Camino can inspire other individuals to walk the Camino, the story of Alfonso II can inspire interest and a sense of solidarity with this original pilgrim. Therefore, one could interpret a solidarity that inspires similar action as a form of *communitas*. Further research on the impact of historical figures on current practices could provide a deeper understanding of the boundaries of *communitas*.

On April 19, 2022, at 7:20pm, four pilgrims sat on a small concrete wall separating the Alfonso the Chaste monument from the walkway. Two were from Switzerland and two from the United Kingdom. All were taking a rest day in Oviedo before beginning the Camino Primitivo. They had recently completed a tour of the Cathedral San Salvador and had spent time praying before the statue of "Pilgrim Jesus" inside.

As they discussed their plans for the following day, Anna, a Swiss pilgrim, ran over to the plaque and waved her companions over to the spot. She said, "Wir beginnen hier. Alfons hat hier angefangen. Wir beginnen hier (We start here. Alfonso began here. We begin here)." For these and many pilgrims, the Camino begins with a call to

⁵⁶ Victor Turner definition for *communitas* can be found in footnote 45.

transcend time and connect or find solidarity with those who had walked this path previously, specifically Alfonso the Chaste, the original pilgrim.

The statue and plaque are not the only images that call the pilgrim to transcend. As my conversation with the four pilgrims continued, they insisted that I tour the Cathedral San Salvador before embarking on my pilgrimage. Randall, from London, shared a saying that I had heard multiple times over my two-day stay in Oviedo. “Quien va a Santiago y no al Salvador, visita al lacayo y no al Señor (He who goes to Santiago and not to San Salvador, visits the servant and not the Lord).” The Camino begins with a call to transcendence. A pilgrim on the Camino Primitivo should experience the Lord – to expand one’s sense of self to include a connection with God.

San Salvador, the Cathedral of Oviedo, contains multiple relics and images that invite a pilgrim to connect with the greater church, stories in scripture, and God. These relics and images include the Shroud of Oviedo or Sudarium, one of the clay water or wine pots from the wedding in Cana, and Pilgrim Jesus.⁵⁷

Pilgrim Jesus stands to the chancel’s left (Image 4). The statue is an image of Jesus, robed in red and blue, holding the world in his left hand and making the ICXC symbol of blessing with his raised right hand.⁵⁸ Jesus is standing on a column adorned

⁵⁷ The veneration of icons and relics has been debated since the 4th century and cannot be fully addressed in this project. In the 8th and 9th, century Eastern church leaders argued that icons assist in worship and should be venerated while Western church leaders argued that icons assisted in teaching stories, but veneration was unacceptable and pulled focus off Christ. Centuries later, the Protestant reformers would argue against relics and icons, asserting that saints are part of the body of Christ like other Christians. To elevate a saint or relics of a saint distracts the Christian from full devotion to Christ. One could consider the iconoclastic controversy and condemnation of relics as misunderstanding the religious practices of distant churches and cultural bias. For more information, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1997), 814-815 and 1379.

⁵⁸ Aleteia, “What do the Hand Gestures in Icons Mean?,” accessed May 26, 2022, www.aleteia.org/2016/06/12/what-do-hand-gestures-in-icons-mean/amp. The IC XC hand symbol involves

with scallop shells. As will be discussed later, the scallop shell is a symbol of pilgrimage and the *communitas* that develops among pilgrims and the miraculous power offered through the Saint.

Before the statue is a set of candles and a kneeling rail. Though the current candles are coin-triggered, electric lights, the lighting of candles is considered in many religious traditions to be a visible representation of human prayers ascending to God. Pilgrims are encouraged to visit Pilgrim Jesus before beginning the Camino and pray for God's presence and safety for their journey. When I visited, a short queue had formed by pilgrims desiring to pray.⁵⁹

Leaving Oviedo on the Camino, multiple churches and images of Santiago on buildings, fences, signposts and monuments remind one of the religious origins of the route and the belief that the pilgrim is not merely on a cross-country hike but is partaking in a spiritual journey. As one reaches Puente de Gallegos (9.4 km), a 13th Century bridge leads into the town and a stone monument welcomes pilgrims to cross the Nora River below (Image 5). Though the signage next to the statue does not address its meaning, one notices the statue is made of two similarly shaped, yet differently sized, surrealistic human figures connected in the center while reaching out in opposite directions. Both sides are similar but unique. Considering that this bridge had been destroyed shortly before the start of the Spanish Civil War to prevent enemies from crossing, one could conclude that the monument represents unity and connection. This bridge and monument

the fingers situated in such a manner to form the Greek letters IC XC. These letters are the first and last letters in the Greek words for Jesus Christ – IHCOYC XPICTOC.

⁵⁹ My tour of the Cathedral of San Salvador occurred at 4:15^{PM} on April 20, 2022. This was the evening before I began walking the Camino de Santiago and one day after encountering the Swiss and English pilgrims at the statue of Alfonso the Chaste.

become a metaphor for horizontal transcendence. This bridge and monument seem to represent opposing sides abandoning their isolated positions to create a new identity shaped by each other.⁶⁰

Another aspect of transcendence is found as one enters Tineo, Spain (67.5 km from Oviedo). Overlooking much of the town is a large sundial. Standing on the sundial is a metal statue of a pilgrim, and the pilgrim's walking staff is the pointer that sheds light on the dial, revealing the time (Image 6). Written on the dial are the words, "Viator Horam Aspice Et Abi Viam Tuam," or, "Traveler, note the hour and go your way." This message seeks to remind the pilgrim of the connection between one's current state of being and the act of pilgrimage. This message does not specifically speak of connecting with God or others but may have a transcendent impact. The pilgrim is to pause and reflect on his or her identity. After such time of reflection, the pilgrim is encouraged to begin his or her journey. One may conclude that the journey involves becoming something greater as he or she progresses. The pilgrimage becomes imbued with the possibilities of transcendence.

Another statue exemplifying the transcendent qualities of the Camino is in Castroverde, Spain (185.2 km from Oviedo). In the plaza on the west side of the Igrexa de Santiago Apostolo de Castroverde is a stone fountain of five children sharing an umbrella (Image 7). Water flows from the top of the umbrella, then down the sides to the basin. While this monument has no visible connection to Saint James, the pilgrimage, or God, the fountain's placement on the Camino path and in front of a church dedicated to

⁶⁰ This description comes from a conversation with Sabas, a pilgrim from Seville, Spain. At approximately 10:30am on April 21, 2022, Sabas and I stopped to take pictures, and resting on the Puente de Gallegos bridge, we discussed the statue. We believed that the monument could represent unity among people.

Saint James cannot be avoided. One can easily interpret this fountain as a message of community where no one is isolated in their journey but is connected to others for support and protection. Transcendence calls individuals to recognize their identity in others and the manner in which the wellbeing of one impacts the wellbeing of all.

The most encountered icons on the Camino Primitivo and other Camino routes are the stone way-markers. Pilgrims follow the yellow arrows on these meter-high way-markers. After one crosses the border from Asturias to Galicia along the Camino Primitivo, the way-markers begin displaying the kilometers left to walk to reach Santiago de Compostela (Image 8). These way-markers serve as examples of transcendence. From the moment one leaves Oviedo, the pilgrim will notice small stones placed on the way-markers. These stones can represent a pilgrim's struggle or burden.⁶¹ As the pilgrim walks the Camino, he or she may discover a solution to a burden. At that point where the burden is solved or a new perspective on the struggle is discovered, many pilgrims place a stone on the nearest way-marker.

In some circumstances, stones are placed on behalf of a friend or family member for whom the pilgrim is walking the path. At some significant spot along the path, the pilgrim places the stone in honor or memory of the loved one. Margaret, a pilgrim from the United Kingdom, said her primary purpose for hiking the Camino Norte and Primitivo was "to relax and enjoy a holiday in Spain."⁶² Yet she revealed after several days of hiking together that she was walking to remember her sister who passed away in

⁶¹ Elizabeth Kilcoyne, "A Stone in My Pocket," May 26, 2022, <http://www.ephemerereview.com/a-stone-in-my-pocket>. Kilcoyne offers a brief history of the Camino de Santiago and her experience, focusing on the tradition of stone carrying.

⁶² Margaret from Manchester, England, interview by the author, Las Tiendas, April 24, 2022.

2019. Margaret had previously walked the last 100 km of the Camino Frances and shared that experience with her sister. Motivated by Margaret's story, her sister decided to walk the Camino with Margaret but passed away before a trip could be planned. Margaret carried a stone for her sister that she placed on a way-marker as she entered Santiago de Compostela.

As a pilgrim, I found myself participating in this practice. On September 23, 2021, while jogging through my neighborhood, I was hit by a car. This accident involved multiple surgeries, a lengthy recovery, and post-traumatic stress disorder. This accident almost prevented me from walking the Camino Primitivo. Before leaving for Spain, I took a rock from the accident site and carried it with me to the 23km way-marker. There I spent time in prayer and placed that stone on the marker before continuing my journey to Santiago.

Mircea Eliade might classify the way-markers where pilgrims place stones as *axis mundi* or places and moments where earth and the heavens meet.⁶³ I consider this act of stone leaving as transcendence – the old identity is expanding into a new sense of self through a connection with God at the way-marker.

Though way-markers may be the most prominent locations for leaving stones, pilgrims lay stones at many shrines, churches, and memorials along the Camino. As one reaches Alto de Palo along the Pola de Allande path before uniting with the Hospitale Route, one finds a memorial with several dozen stones. The plaque at this site reads, “En recuerdo de Antonio Jose Perez, Hasta el final de nuestro camino viveras en nuestro

⁶³ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt, 1987), 36.

corazon. Te queremos et suseia. Camino primitivo - el palo, Agosto 2018,” or, “In memory of Antonio Jose Perez, until the end of our road, you will live in our hearts. We love you. Buen Camino.. Primitive Road – El Palo, August 2018. (Image 9)”

The placement of stones at another person’s memorial site is an act of connecting with those who have gone before on the path and seeing one’s journey as connected to others’ journeys. This act of stone laying at memorials is similar to the transcendence that occurs when one chooses to recognize and walk in the path of Alfonso the Chaste. The pilgrim is not Alfonso the Chaste or the individual who is memorialized, but one sees his or her identity connected to and shaped by those individuals and their stories.

The scallop shell is another symbol of the Camino de Santiago and the pilgrim journey in general. The shell image is not only featured on some of the way-markers, but it is also worn by many pilgrims. One tradition says that the use of the scallop shell by pilgrims is connected to Santiago de Compostela’s location near the coast. Scallop shells “are common on the Galician coast, [and] early pilgrims could easily gather the shells and take them back home. Another version says that one of the earliest of St. James’ miracles was his rescue of a knight who had fallen into the sea. When the knight arose from his watery grave, he was covered with cockleshells, and thus they became linked with Santiago.”⁶⁴ One can apply this story of healing to the modern-day pilgrim. As the shell-covered knight is healed by Saint James, the shell-wearing pilgrim finds emotional and spiritual healing as he or she progresses along the path.

⁶⁴ David M Gitlitz and Linda Kay Davidson, *The Pilgrimage Roads to Santiago: The Complete Cultural Handbook* (New York: St. Martin’s, 2000), Preface XV.

The use of the scallop shell on way-markers reinforces the transcendent nature of the Camino. Though not seen in all regions, the placement of the shell on the marker reveals the direction of the path. The foot or base of the shell points in the direction that one should turn. The line or grooves of the shell converge in the direction of the pathway and symbolically represent the destination of the path — Santiago de Compostela. The significance of this placement can be understood as ‘all paths lead to Santiago’ or ‘all pilgrims unite as they walk the path.’ The scallop shell not only symbolizes the individual’s new identity as a pilgrim walking in the tradition of Saint James but also represents the uniting of the individual with others as they progress along the path.

Pilgrims walking the Camino Primitivo unite with Camino Frances pilgrims in Melide, Spain. As those two groups of pilgrims get closer to Santiago, they unite with pilgrims walking the Camino Norte in Arzua (12 km west of Melide). Upon reaching Santiago, those three pilgrim groups unite with all other pilgrims. As one journeys along the path, he or she meets more pilgrims and consequently is provided with more opportunities to experience horizontal transcendence or *communitas*. Some pilgrims, however, find the increase in the number of pilgrims, especially in Melide, distracting and feel that the large number can rob one of the ability to connect with God or vertical transcendence.

On my journey, the number of pilgrims walking the last 100 km greatly increased compared to the first 200km. Prior to reaching Lugo, I was able to walk several

kilometers without seeing another pilgrim.⁶⁵ After Lugo, I was never more than a few yards from other pilgrims at any given moment.

Additionally, the influx of new pilgrims can frustrate those who walk longer distances. While walking the Camino Frances, Meg S. Maloney describes feeling resentful at the “fresh-faced [pilgrims], with shiny new hiking poles and unscuffed hiking boots.”⁶⁶ She had to remind herself to show hospitality, be kind, and welcome the new hikers that would be alongside her on the final days to Santiago.

All the Camino routes offer pilgrims a seemingly infinite number and variety of images and icons that invoke a sense of transcendence, yet one image that all paths share is the botafumeira (Image 10). The botafumeira hangs over the chancel in the Cathedral de Santiago. The botafumeira is a censor weighing 53 kg (116.84 lbs.) and 1.5 m (4.92 ft) tall. Requiring eight individuals, referred to as tiraboleiros, to operate, the censor swings at 68 km/hour across (and through) the transept of the cathedral on holy days and when reserved by pilgrims.⁶⁷

Dating back to the late fourth century, censuring in worship was used to cover the smell of the congregation. A liturgy dating to the time of Charlemagne acknowledges this practice, “Hoc incensum ad omnem putorem noccum exstiguendum, Dominus benedicat,

⁶⁵ A pilgrim may receive a certificate of completion upon reaching Santiago de Compostela if he or she has walked a minimum of 100 km or 200 km if they are riding a bicycle or horse. Many pilgrims will begin their journey in Sarria, Spain, on the Camino Frances, or Lugo, Spain, on the Camino Primitivo, in order to receive a certificate of completion.

⁶⁶ Meg S. Malony, *Slow Your Roll: Ruminations & Reflections on My Walk Across Spain* (Coppell, TX: Bobtimystic Books, 2021), 239.

⁶⁷ Cathedral de Santiago, “Liturgy,” accessed May 30, 2022, <https://catedraldesantiago.es/en/liturgy/>.

et in odorem suavitatis suae accendat,” or, “May the Lord bless this incense for the removal of every harmful stench and kindle it for the perfume of its sweetness”.⁶⁸

Considering the large number of pilgrims completing the Camino de Santiago during the Medieval period, the use of the botafumeira to remove the “harmful stench” seems plausible, yet Thomas Aquinas offers an additional explanation for the use of incense in worship.

We use incense, not as commanded by a ceremonial precept of the Law, but as prescribed by the Church; accordingly we do not use it in the same fashion as it was ordered under the Old Law. It has reference to two things: first, to the reverence due to this sacrament, i.e. in order by its good odor, to remove any disagreeable smell that may be about the place; secondly, it serves to show the effect of grace, wherewith Christ was filled as with a good odor...⁶⁹

The pilgrim mass said at the Cathedral de Santiago falls within the parameters of what Aquinas’ *Summa* would consider general worship, offering one a glimpse into the transcendent nature of the botafumeira. Though the incense can cover a multitude of smells, its use as a signifier of the grace of Christ reminds the pilgrim that this often final act of a Camino de Santiago pilgrimage is not a mere celebration of physical accomplishment but is an experience of God’s presence and grace.

⁶⁸ E.G. Cuthbert F. Atchley, *A History of the Use of Incense in Divine Worship* (London: Longmans Green, 1909), 2003.

⁶⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, III: Question 83 The Rite of this Sacrament*, accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/4083.htm>.

Glen, a man who did not consider himself a pilgrim or intend to walk the Camino for spiritual reasons, began his Camino in Lugo, Spain on April 28, 2022. Along with two other friends from Dublin, Ireland, Glenn became part of my Camino community. The reason he gave for walking the Camino was to “enjoy a simple holiday with good friends and beer.” When any conversation arose about the spiritual or religious characteristics of the Camino de Santiago, Glenn would mock the church and declare that everyone else could go to the cathedral in Santiago, but he was going to the bar. He said that he had “spent enough time in church as an altar boy” and “did not need some priest staring him down.”⁷⁰ After reaching Santiago on May 3, Glenn attended the 7:30PM Pilgrim’s Mass where the botafumeira was operated. During the next day’s lunch, someone asked Glenn about his experience at the mass. As he began to speak about the censer, he found himself unable to speak. He said later that he “could not believe that he was so emotionally moved by a bunch of incense.”⁷¹ In short, the use of the botafumeira creates an environment in which one may consider her or his identity and connect with God in a visible and olfactory manner.

LANDSCAPES AS ICONS AND IMAGES

The landscape of the Camino de Santiago is also significant. Though not crafted by human hands as the other icons and images along Camino, the landscape provides an opportunity for pilgrims to transcend. In *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes*, Belden C. Lane discusses the ideas espoused by Victor and Edith Turner when he writes, “In desert

⁷⁰ Glenn from Dublin, Ireland, conversation with the author, Casa Modesto, Vilamor, Spain, April 30, 2022.

⁷¹ Glenn from Dublin, Ireland, conversation with the author, Restaurante Casa Paredes, Santiago de Compostela, May 4, 2022.

and mountain wilderness, people discover liminal places suggesting thresholds between where they have been and where that are going.” He argues that landscapes, whether emotional or physical, metaphorical or literal “mark important points of transition in [people’s] lives.”⁷² Lane’s use of the word “transition” finds resonance in our definition of transcendence. Transcendence is not an abandonment of self, but a transition of the self into a new, expanded sense of existence in connection with God and others. One may also consider nature and other elements of creation in this expanded sense of self. The pilgrim is presented with the opportunity to transition from the individual who existed prior to the journey into a new person. For Lane, this opportunity can occur through literal, physical landscapes. Dr. Jeremiah Gibbs, University of Indianapolis chaplain and director of the Lantz Center for Christian Vocations & Formation, is also a Camino de Santiago guide. He argues from a similar position when he says that humans are not made to travel at high speeds. “We naturally travel at a few miles per hour...when you are walking you see the flowers, that you would otherwise drive by. You see the people that would be a blip in a car, but when you are walking a trail or through a town, they have a new kind of presence.”⁷³ This presence invites the pilgrim into an all-encompassing reality and, as we learned from Gorelik’s definition of transcendence, expands his or her perspective throughout all aspects of one’s experience.

The landscapes of the Camino de Santiago offer the pilgrim opportunities to contemplate creation, God’s role, and the bond between humanity. Multiple accounts of

⁷² Belden C. Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality* (New York: Oxford, 1998), 38.

⁷³ Jeremiah Gibbs, “Walking as Spiritual Practice: Camino de Santiago and Spiritual Health,” accessed April 7, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7fVF-TpgoVM>.

the Camino speak of an ‘awe’ and ‘inspiration’ that is found along the trail. I experienced one of these moments while climbing out of the Pola de Allande valley to Alto de Palo. This was the highest point on my itinerary and the second highest point on the Camino Primitivo.⁷⁴ Much of the climb was shielded by thick forest and fog. As I hiked within a few hundred yards of the peak, the path cleared, revealing the landscape that I had previously traversed. Upon reaching the peak of Alto de Palo, I sat for approximately an hour, looking down on the clouds that I had traveled through and marveling at the surrounding mountains and clouds that once concealed my path and the terrain below (Image 11). Interpreting the works of Pseudo-Dionysius, Lane explains the signifying characteristic of cloud-covered mountains. “The cloud covered mountain became [sic] a symbol of what the heart longs for most, as well as what the mind is least able to comprehend. The mountain symbolized for him [Moses] the glory of God reflected in each created being, as well as the necessity of negating everything that is not God in one’s ascent to the divine mystery.”⁷⁵ Rising out of the clouds to the heights of Alto de Palo can serve as a metaphor for transcendence. As we physically emerge from the valley and clouds to the peak of Alto de Palo, we can emerge from the clouds of our past identity to a new existence shaped by and collaborating with God.

Climbing mountains is an obvious symbol for overcoming challenges and of accomplishment. Whether it is the high Pyrenees and O Cebreiro or the lower altitude hill

⁷⁴ The Camino Primitivo splits into two paths at Buspol, Spain for a distance of 20km (approximately) before reuniting. One can travel the Hospitales Route over the mountains or the Pola Allande route into the valley. The Pola Allande path allows for pilgrims to continue the pilgrimage during inclement weather that would make the Hospitales Route unsafe. Both paths re-unite at Alto de Palo. The Hospitales route contains three abandoned medieval-era hospital ruins and ascends to the height of 1200+ meters. The second highest point on the Primitivo is experienced where the two paths reunite.

⁷⁵ Lane, *Solace*, 107.

of Cruz de Ferro on the Camino Frances, the numerous mountains and hills of the Camino routes offer pilgrims an opportunity to reflect on their journey with a sense of great accomplishment.

Sebas, a pilgrim from Seville, Spain, spoke of this sense of accomplishment. He was sitting at Bar Xestoso outside of A Lastra (170 km from Oviedo) after climbing out of a valley where A Degolada is located. The 3 km distance includes a steep 169 m (554 ft) climb. The bar at the top of this steep climb was filled with exhausted pilgrims. Most had climbed higher hills but none with an incline as steep as this section. Because the trail was wet from the previous night's rain, this climb made Bar Xestoso a much-desired resting stop. A new community formed around the feeling of achievement that we would discuss on several occasions as we journeyed toward Santiago de Compostela. Sebas said, "The 6 km to O Cadavo will be nothing compared to that last kilometer." The group of Spaniards, French, Irish, Italians, and Americans nodded in agreement and pride at our accomplishment. Climbing to the top of a mountain is a physical feat that symbolizes one's ability to transcend challenges and strengthen resolve to overcome any future obstacles. Transcendence leads to more transcendence. One mountain scaled leads to an assurance that the next mountain can be scaled.

Not only does the image of a mountain signify approaching the divine and one's ability to accomplish great feats, but mountains also signify wisdom and reflection. For one to transcend, an individual must reflect on who he or she is so as not to return unchanged but to become someone new.

For almost an hour, Margaret, the previously mentioned pilgrim from England, and I sat near the top of Alto de Acebo (Image 12). This mountain serves as the border

between Asturias and Galicia. We were at the edge of a wooded area, near several wind turbines, looking toward the east at the territory we had traveled. Our vantage point allowed us to see the path, towns, and hills we had walked over the previous four hours. Margaret and I recounted the events of that morning and the previous stages of our Camino journey from Oviedo. Alto de Acebo is the last of the Asturian mountains. Though there are more hills or mountains in Galicia, none rise to the height of the ones we had scaled. We discussed the lessons we learned and experiences encountered in the prior seven days. Lesson One: Never be afraid to take a break on a hill, even if you had a break a minute earlier. It is your pilgrimage. You set your schedule. Lesson Two: Be a donkey and walk back-and-forth, side-to-side if you cannot walk straight up a hill. Lesson Three: If you need to crawl up the hill on your hands and knees then crawl up the hill. Lesson Four: Always look back and appreciate where you came from. Lesson Five: Sometimes a steppingstone is a cow pie, so be careful where you put your foot.⁷⁶

Turning back to Lane's interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius, we find support for the idea that the mountain signifies wisdom and reflection. "The mountains symbolize...the necessity of negating everything that is not God in one's ascent to the divine mystery."⁷⁷ To negate we must reflect on who we are, look back on our lives to discover the portions of ourselves that do not allow us to transcend. These portions differ with each individual, but some examples may be past trauma, ideologies, or one's social and familial context. Looking back on the path (the landscape) we had walked, we felt a sense of accomplishment and wisdom. We traveled far and high. We had learned

⁷⁶ Margaret from Manchester, England, conversation with the author, Alto de Acebo, April 27, 2022.

⁷⁷ Belden C. Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality* (New York: Oxford, 1998), 107.

valuable lessons in those first days of our pilgrimage that would make us new and stronger for the final days of our journey.

Richard of Saint Victor discusses the four modes in which individuals experience images and icons. A Scottish theologian living in the 12th century, Richard considers contemplation prideful when it excludes the divine. In his mystical writings, *Benjamin Major* and *Benjamin Minor*, he promotes a successive progress of thought from visible contemplation of objects to the soul's rapture into the divine presence - what this project would define as transcendence.⁷⁸ The first step in this process is a literal view. We see the object's physical characteristics — color, size, shape, etc. The second involves an object's significance — what is the purpose and story behind the object? The third involves the meaning and truth behind the object and its creation — what story does the object tell us about its creator or the culture in which it was made? The fourth mode is a deep spiritual method of seeing the object — what new reality can one envision when seeing the object and what divine reality is revealed?⁷⁹

Richard of Saint Victor reveals what Victor and Edith Turner would promote centuries later: monuments, churches, shrines, landscapes, and other icons and images possess meaning deeper than the five senses can reveal. Literal objects can signify a spiritual reality and create an environment where an individual can transcend his or her identity to develop a new sense of self in connection with God and others.

⁷⁸ "Richard of Saint Victor" *New Advent*. Accessed January 31, 2023.

<https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13045c.htm>

⁷⁹ Philip Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory, and Identity* (London: SCM Press, 2001), 58.

Richard of Saint Victor and the Turners force one to consider the sacramental nature of images and landscapes. Are images and landscapes sacramental or metaphorical? Do icons merely point to God, or do they transform into something more spiritual and godly? A sacrament is a visible sign or act of God's love to humanity. This definition comes from a reflection on sacramental theology of Saint Augustine and John Wesley. Commenting on Augustine's *Tractates on the First Letter of John*, Justin Holcomb and David Johnson write,

When fully realized, sacraments connect us to the mystery of salvation in love. Augustine teaches that the fundamental mystery of existence is God's love...All sacraments point to the Incarnate Christ as God's love for us and helps us return that love for God and neighbor. In the sacramental economy, God reaches out to humanity with His salvific love and humans are transformed in order to respond in love.⁸⁰

Similar to Turner's position on the dual nature of images as signifiers and the signified, Augustine understands sacraments as visible signs used by God to convey God's love. One could compare Augustine's sacramental theology to semantics. Semantics is the study of meaning. Every word has meaning, yet every word contains unique letters. Letters are visible symbols. Each possesses a unique sound and meaning. When combined to form words, that combination of those letters conveys a meaning that is different from its unique parts or letters. Additionally, this meaning may vary depending on the individual experience with

⁸⁰ Justin S. Holcomb and David A. and Johnson, *Christian Theologies of the Sacraments: A Comparative Introduction* (New York,: New York University Press, 2017), 44, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.drew.edu/10.18574/nyu/9780814724323.001.0001>.

the word. It is the varying nature of interpretation that leads us to John Wesley's understanding of sacraments.

John Wesley, an Anglican priest, is the founder of the Methodist movement. Though this movement would later become a separate Christian denomination, Wesley's understanding of the sacraments would derive primarily from his Anglican roots. He writes in his revision of the *39 Articles of Religion in the Book of Common Prayer*,

Sacraments ordained by God, are not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession; but rather they are Signs of Grace, and God's good will toward us, by which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our faith in him.

These are two Sacraments ordained of Christ our Lord in the Gospel; that is to say, Baptism, and the Supper of the Lord.⁸¹⁸²

Following Wesley's rationale, the determination as to whether an icon or image is a sacrament rests on two criteria. First, the physical item or image must be independent in and of itself yet at the time of the administering of the sacrament that item or image is inseparable from an inward spiritual identity, specifically God's grace. Second, a sacrament must be ordained by "Christ our Lord." Though one could argue that *Alto de*

⁸¹ Paul W. Chilcote. "15. John and Charles Wesley" In *Christian Theologies of the Sacraments: A Comparative Introduction*, (New York, USA: New York University Press, 2017), 275-276.

⁸² Ole E. Borgen, "No End Without the Means: John Wesley and the Sacraments." *Asbury Theological Journal* 46, no 1. (Spring 1991). Accessed on October 31, 2022. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/155819092.pdf>. Both Chilcote and Borgen argue that Wesley's sacramental theology is based on the Church of England Catechism. For Wesley the both the sign and the signified, or the inward spiritual reality of God's grace, love and presence, are unique yet inseparable in the sacrament.

Palo, the botafumeira, scallop shells, and the many landscapes and icons found along the Camino represent both an outward reality and an inward spiritual reality that would denote a sacrament, Wesley's sacramental theology would not designate them as sacraments because Christ in the scripture did not designate them as such. As this research is focusing on creating an environment using items and icons to facilitate greater transcendence in a local worship service, and in particular a United Methodist Church, we will adhere to Wesley's sacramental designation and avoid referring to these items as sacraments. However, one cannot deny a functional similarity between the sacraments and the images and icons found along the Camino. One could argue that John Wesley's dual criteria designation reveals an awareness that certain non-Christ designated objects could possess an outward, physical identity while at the same time conveying an inward spiritual grace. This recognition finds support when Wesley speaks of "means of grace."

Wesley defined means of grace as "the ordinary channels whereby he [God] might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace."⁸³ Means of grace include the sacraments but according to Ole Borgen in *No End Without the Means: John Wesley and the Sacraments*, means of grace "can be almost anything. Whatever is conducive to holiness and love becomes, to that extent, a means of grace."⁸⁴ Means of grace are conducive to transcendence. These channels offer the individual an opportunity to connect with God. I would argue that means of grace are more than metaphors.

⁸³ John Wesley, "Means of Grace." *Words of Wesley*. Accessed November 9, 2022.

<http://www.wordsofwesley.com/libtext.cfm?srm=16>

⁸⁴ Borgen, "No End Without Means." Borgen argues that Wesley divided Means of Grace into three categories, all conveying God's grace. The categories are general, prudential, and instituted. General involves behaving as God ordained people to behave and in such grace is received. Prudential involves the ability of God to impart grace through any object, action or situation. Instituted means of grace are experienced through church instituted practices, such as prayer, proclaiming of the Word, fasting, Christian conferencing, and the sacraments.

Metaphor uses a more concrete or known object or event to describe a more abstract and unfamiliar object or event. One could argue, as we do, that pilgrimage is a metaphor for worship or life in general. One can argue that scaling a mountain through the clouds to a clear peak is a metaphor for overcoming challenges with a new awareness. Images and landscapes can have a metaphorical characteristic yet means of grace possess a conveyance character. The icon or image does not merely provide meaning but allows the conveying of grace. With this understanding in mind, one could easily classify the images and icons, as well as other interactions as means of grace for transcendence – not sacraments by Wesleyan definition but sacramental in function.

PILGRIMAGE *COMMUNITAS*

Another means of grace or transcendence experienced on the Camino is “*communitas*.” The Turners’ research on pilgrimages provide insight into the transcending characteristic of *communitas*. During liminal experiences, such as a pilgrimage, an informal and spontaneous bonding of “comradeship” forms, describing the bonding as an “essential and generic human bond.”⁸⁵ *Communitas* possesses an egalitarian nature, where the hierarchical structures and boundaries found in a non-liminal world dissolve into a more coequal structure.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Images and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*. (New York: Columbia Press, 1978), 250. Turner uses the word ‘social antistructure’ interchangeably with “*communitas*.” They write that “a relational quality of full unmediated communication, even communion, between definite and determinant identities, which arise spontaneously in all kinds of groups, situations, and circumstances. It is a liminal phenomenon which combines the qualities of lowliness, sacredness, homogeneity, and comradeship.”

⁸⁶ Benjamin I. Boone and James P. Barber, ed. “This Is the Way: Faculty on the Camino de Santiago,” *Pilgrimage as Spiritual Practice: A Handbook for Teachers, Wayfarers, and Guides*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2022), 190. Building upon the Turner definition of *Communitas*, the author writes, “Camino culture creates a sense of *communitas* wherein power dynamics shift and pilgrims associate as co-equal members of a “Camino family.” This phenomenon occurs in many contexts along the Camino.” The author encourages individuals leading study-abroad programs on the Camino, and presumably more experienced

Important to this study are the three categories of *communitas* as defined by the Turners. Spontaneous *communitas* forms through unplanned or spontaneous interactions. Individuals from various backgrounds and experiences unite in a shared liminal experience. Normative *communitas* is a second form that can arise from spontaneous *communitas*. This bonding is an attempt to maintain the community that arises in a liminal space and time after the liminal moment has passed. The third form of *communitas* is ideological or instituted, where a structure is formed to maintain the transformation and ideology that developed as a result of the liminal event.

An example of the three forms of *communitas* can be witnessed in the Emmaus Walk experience.⁸⁷ An Emmaus Walk is a weekend retreat offered in several communities throughout the United States and other nations, focusing primarily on the protestant tenets of the Christian faith. Participants, often called pilgrims, spend time in worship and prayer, learning from guest speakers and receiving “agape.” Agape are small gifts from friends, family, and churches. Spontaneous *communitas* arises between the pilgrims. These pilgrims belong to various social, economic, and ethnic groups but bond through the experience of participating together in the weekend retreat. Normative *communitas* arises through the fourth day groups. No pilgrim is required to participate in a fourth day group but encouraged to continue to meet with other pilgrims for prayer, learning, and accountability after the Emmaus Walk weekend is complete. These normative communities can last from a few weeks to several years. Ideological *communitas* occurs when churches form Emmaus Ministries, funding continued activities

pilgrims, to remain aware of the egalitarian nature of *communitas*. The student-teacher structure and boundaries can be less dynamic on the Camino than in the classroom.

⁸⁷ <https://www.upperroom.org/walktoemmaus> provides more information on the Emmaus Walk Retreat.

and, in some circumstances, creating official worship services following the Emmaus Walk worship style. The Turners discuss the tendency of churches to promote ideological *communitas* when they write, “The church has always been a deft integrator, and bishops have, on the whole, tried to channel popular enthusiasm in orthodox directions – in other words, to effect a kind of social sublimation – rather than to quash it.”⁸⁸ To keep an experience of spontaneous or normative *communitas* from moving in an undesirable direction the church “sanctions” the bonding and works to direct the movement. Like the Emmaus Walk retreat, the Camino de Santiago provides pilgrims with multiple opportunities for the three categories of *communitas*.

One of the most visible forms of *communitas* along the Camino is spontaneous. This form of *communitas* develops as people from different backgrounds and ideologies unite in a common activity. Emile Durkheim uses the word “collective effervescence” to describe this form of *communitas*. Explaining Durkheim’s ideas, Simon Dein writes, “that the performance of a collective ritual causes an ecstatic state of shared excitement or ‘collective effervescence’...resulting in an alignment of emotional states and a sense of belonging and assimilation in all ritual participants.”⁸⁹ Dein concludes from Durkheim’s argument that transcendent experiences facilitate *communitas*. Religious practices, such as the means of grace, when celebrated with others create spontaneous *communitas*.

I experienced spontaneous *communitas* within one hour of beginning my Camino. At the city limits of Oviedo, on a hill overlooking the city, I met the aforementioned,

⁸⁸ Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage*, 192.

⁸⁹ Simon Dein, “Transcendence, Religion and Social Bonding.” *Psychology of Religion* 2020, Vol 42. 77.

Sebas. Sebas spoke little English. I spoke very little Spanish. Sebas was athletic with a history of outdoor hiking including multiple Camino pilgrimages. As mentioned previously, I was recovering from an accident and not able to keep pace with Sebas, yet a spontaneous *communitas* formed. We hiked 22 kilometers, attempting to teach each other our native languages, sharing a meal, and assisting each other along the route. Though we did not travel each day together, we would often look for each other and inquire with other pilgrims about the status of the other.

As referenced previously, I found Sebas with several other pilgrims at Bar Xestoso, outside of A Lastra, Spain. As I climbed, short of breath and looking for a place to rest, I heard a group of pilgrims shout, “el vaquero” or “The Cowboy.”⁹⁰ On a previous leg of the Camino, Sebas gave me this name because I lived in Texas. He was part of this group. Though he had his own pilgrimage to walk and developed new relationships with these and other pilgrims, he felt connected to and concerned for me. He asked multiple pilgrims, including many in this Bar Xestoso group, if they had seen “el vaquero” and shared the story of our meeting on the first day of the pilgrimage. Not only had he felt a connection with me but the other pilgrims, who had yet to meet me, felt connected to “el vaquero.”

Communitas moves an individual beyond the boundaries of his or her identity into a larger connective system with others. The individual’s wellbeing and sense of identity is expanded to include others journeying with him or her through the liminal experience. For Sebas, we were connected and my well being impacted his sense of accomplishment.

⁹⁰ Sebas gave me the nickname after learning that I lived in Texas. He associated Texas with “cowboy culture” and the 1980’s television show *Dallas*.

This spontaneous *communitas* extended beyond Sebas to those pilgrims I had not met. Sebas's story of "el Vaquero" created a sense of connection between them and me. This connection with unmet pilgrims reveals that *communitas* can extend beyond the immediate relationship and further research should consider whether *communitas* can develop between individuals in different locations or times. Additionally, one should consider if *communitas* requires mutuality. Sebas's pilgrim friends demonstrated a sense of *communitas* toward me, but I had not developed a sense of *communitas* toward them until meeting them at Bar Xestoso. Is this phenomenon true *communitas* or does *communitas* occur only in a mutual relationship?

Another example of spontaneous *communitas* involves Sarah and Margaret, of whom I previously referenced. Both were from Manchester, England, on a month-long holiday. I met them in Salas, Spain. The two began their Camino in Bilbao, Spain. Having walked for nearly 20 days, Sarah had become injured with severe shin splits – also known as tibia stress syndrome. The route leading out of Salas to Tineo, the next portion of the pilgrimage, involved several steep, rocky climbs and it was raining. Sarah was concerned that the path would aggravate her injury. She and Margaret were contemplating their options when I met them. Overhearing their conversation, I introduced myself and voiced my concerns with the portion of the Camino leading to Tineo. I asked if they wanted to share a taxi. We engaged in some debate concerning the use of taxis on the Camino but agreed that the safest path forward was by automobile. We spent the day talking about our lives, history, homes, and reasons for walking the Camino. Aside from our shared language, we had little in common – ethnically, religiously, or our rationale for the pilgrimage, but a spontaneous *communitas* developed

that would continue into Santiago. Walking most of the remaining portions of the Camino together, we assisted each other through more physically demanding portions of the path and waited for each other when delayed. Sarah's injury would cause her to return home before completing the Camino, but Margaret continued the journey as part of my Camino *communitas*. This *communitas* was most evident on the second to last day of the pilgrimage as we neared O Rua, Spain. As previously discussed, I planned to place a stone of remembrance on the 23km way marker as a means of symbolically overcoming my accident and giving thanks to God for the lessons learned from my trauma. As we neared the marker, Margaret encouraged me to continue along the trail without her, while she walked alone to think about her journey. I continued along the path as requested. I would later learn that my story of faith and plan to leave a stone as a means of surrendering the event to God inspired her. Though she insisted that she was not a religious or spiritual individual, she decided to use her time alone to find a rock to leave on a way marker as a means of honoring her sister, who was supposed to join her on the Camino but had passed away.⁹¹

Spontaneous *communitas* may also be organized to the degree that a special event inspires individuals to develop community. For example, in 2014 Justin Skeesuck and Patrick Gray completed the Camino de Santiago. Justin suffered from a neuromuscular disease and was bound to a wheelchair. Patrick, his long-time friend, agreed to push him. Their story was told in the 2017 book, *I'll Push You*, and the movie to follow. Their story led to a nonprofit that works to promote the Camino de Santiago among individuals with mobility difficulties by matching them with other individuals who will assist. Though an

⁹¹ Conversation with Margaret on May 3, 2022 by author.

instituted *communitas* has developed from Skeesuck and Gray's pilgrimage, spontaneous *communitas* developed when their organization promoted an accessibility Camino in 2022 where previously unconnected individuals united to participate. See image 12 below.

Individuals inspired by Skeesuck and Gray's experience volunteered to participate, developing spontaneous *communitas* with the individuals they assisted. For Turner, spontaneous *communitas* occurs in the liminal space and the methods by which someone arrives, whether by an institution such as the church or a non-profit like "I'll Push You" or by individual means, are eclipsed by the relationship development that occurs during the transformative event.

The final two types of *communitas* arise from a desire to maintain or recreate spontaneous *communitas*. Normative *communitas* is witnessed in the continuation of relationships after the pilgrimage ends. Pilgrims meeting on the Camino may desire to continue their connection upon returning home. Shortly before leaving on my Camino de Santiago pilgrimage, I participated in a shell ceremony. This event is sponsored by the Texas Gulf Coast Chapter of the American Pilgrims on the Camino. This is an annual celebration where all individuals preparing to hike the Camino de Santiago that year who live in the Gulf Coast area of Texas receive a pilgrim shell and backpack blessing. While attending, I met several individuals who continue to communicate with pilgrims they met along the Camino. One in particular was Austin. Austin encouraged me "to take my time on the Camino, make friends with everyone and those friendships will continue long after

you return home.”⁹² Austin shared that he continues to speak with those he met, and he has returned with some of them to hike the Camino additional times.

The shell ceremony also represents instituted *communitas*. As mentioned above, the Gulf Coast Chapter of the American Pilgrims on the Camino hosts this and other events that promote the Camino de Santiago. This organization provides credentials and works with organizations in Spain to maintain and improve amenities along the path. This institution promotes *communitas* among pilgrims through quarterly publications, financial aid, hospitalero and pilgrim-etiquette training, and regular local and nationwide gatherings.⁹³ These gatherings provide individuals with an opportunity to reflect upon their Camino experience through conversations and develop new relationships with those who have also hiked the Camino.

Communitas occurring on and after the Camino de Santiago experience creates an opportunity for the pilgrim to expand his or her sense of identity to include others. The pilgrim is no longer an isolated and independent person but part of a system of relationships. Sebas, Sarah, Margaret, Austin, and other pilgrims are unique individuals, yet through the act of pilgrimage on the Camino, each connected with other pilgrims to create and experience a greater and more robust encounter than any solo journey would have allowed.⁹⁴ This is what Goodenough referred to as horizontal transcendence – expanding one’s identity to include other individuals. Utilizing Martin Buber’s

⁹² Conversation with Austin on March 6, 2022 with the author.

⁹³ “History of the Camino,” accessed November 11, 2022, <https://americanpilgrims.org/history-of-the-camino/>.

⁹⁴ Turner, 131. Turner argues that “The decision to go on pilgrimage takes place within the individual but brings him into fellowship with like-minded souls, both on the way and at the shrine. The social dimension is generated by the individual’s choice, multiplied many times.”

philosophy of the “I-It” and “I-Thou” relationship, we can conclude that *communitas* occurs when the individual no longer sees others as ‘it’ but ‘thou.’ ‘It’ exists for itself. In the “I-It” mindset, one objectifies and isolates the other. One may see value in the other but not in the relationship to self. In the “I-Thou” mindset, one’s sense of self is shaped by and participates in shaping others. The ‘I-Thou’ exists in a network where all individuals influence all individuals and one’s sense of ‘I’ cannot fully be ‘I’ without others.⁹⁵ The “I-Thou” relationship that is inherent in *communitas* is like pointillism. Pointillism is a painting technique using tiny dots of various colors. These dots are unique and individual, but they combine with other dots in a pattern to form a larger image. Each pilgrim is a unique individual. Connecting those pilgrims in an act of *communitas* leads to a greater pilgrimage experience.

THE OVERLOOKED PRE- AND POST-EXPERIENCE

On January 30, 2022, the Gulf Coast Chapter of the APOC hosted a training hike along the Buffalo Bayou near downtown Houston, TX. These regularly scheduled hikes allow individuals to train and develop *communitas* with other pilgrims. While walking with Jack, who had hiked the Camino French Way on two previous occasions, he said, “Your Camino truly begins when you return home.”⁹⁶ This statement was repeated by multiple individuals that day and reveals that a pilgrimage extends beyond the boundaries of the actual event. Echoing the Turners’ work on pilgrimage, Samuel Sanchez y Sanchez writes, “sacred travel has been viewed as a ritualized process in which, after being immersed in a liminal space, the pilgrim is transformed through sacred experiences

⁹⁵ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*. (Mansfield Center, CT: Martino Publishing, 2010), 28-29.

⁹⁶ Conversation with Jack on January 30, 2022 by author.

whose testimony and effect are, upon the pilgrim's return, shared with the community that he or she had temporarily sought to abandon."⁹⁷ The pilgrim returns home with a new sense of identity, purpose, and skills, applying this new pilgrimage-gained wisdom to improve his or her home. Arsene is an example of a pilgrimage extending beyond the actual pilgrimage. Arsene was born and educated in Bilbao, Spain, but had spent several years as a young professional in Barcelona, Spain. He described his time in Barcelona as fast and fun. He said that "he had a good job that paid well."⁹⁸ The COVID-19 pandemic led to the loss of that job. He tried to find another without success and decided to leave Barcelona and return home to live with his parents in Bilbao. Considering his return home a sign of failure, he decided to walk the Camino. He said, "You find yourself on the Camino and I want to find myself before I go back to Bilbao."⁹⁹ Arsene desired an identity-shaping pilgrimage that would improve his life and continue in the days and years following his Camino.

Exploring the tendency for pilgrimage to extend beyond the pilgrimage experience, Snezana Brumec conducted a study of 32 Camino de Santiago pilgrims and concluded that the liminal experience can expand beyond the physical and time boundaries of a pilgrimage. Liminality may begin during the planning and preparation stage of a pilgrimage and extend into the post-pilgrimage time and location. Both atheist and faith-affiliated pilgrims report a greater sense of self-transcendence and a decrease in self-enhancement that extended upon returning home. Concerning her use of self-

⁹⁷ Samuel Sanchez y Sanchez, "Lost and Found: Material Culture and Personal Transformation on the Camino de Santiago," *The Camino de Santiago in the 21st Century: Interdisciplinary Perspectives and Global Views*, (New York: Routledge, 2016), 147. For Sanchez the mark of a pilgrimage – sacred travel – is transformation witnessed in post-Camino behavior.

⁹⁸ Conversation with Arsene outside of Ferreira, Spain on May 1, 2022.

⁹⁹ Conversation with Arsene on May 1, 2022.

transcendence and self-enhancement, the former complies with our definition of transcendence in that an individual is able to expand his or her sense of self to include others and/or God. The individual discovers that one's identity is connected to the surrounding world that, at one time, had been distinct from the individual. Self-enhancement involves a sense of identity improvement. A self-enhanced individual discovers a new sense of intellectual, emotional, and spiritual vitality. Brumec's research demonstrated that self-transcendence and self-enhancement do not need to be mutually exclusive, citing multiple pilgrims who developed an enhanced sense of self through transcendence. This finding corresponds with our definition of transcendence, where one does not negate his or herself but expands his or herself to connect with God and/or others.

Brumec found that multiple pilgrims continued demonstrating self-transcendence upon returning home. Many pilgrims reported that lessons learned on the Camino continued as they returned home. I discovered this post-Camino continuation of the pilgrimage. Near the end of my pilgrimage, on the portion of the route between Melide, Spain and Arzua, Spain, I found myself hiking faster than on previous portions of the route. I passed many pilgrims with a simple, "Hola" or "Buen Camino" and I was not taking time to engage in any further conversation. Halfway through the day's hike, I stopped to eat and pray. While pausing for a moment and staring at the landscape, I experienced an 'axis mundi' moment – a moment of transcendence. In that moment of awe at the scenery and thanking God for giving me this time, I had a spiritual awareness that I should take smaller steps. Repeatedly, this thought bombarded my mind – "Take small steps!" Do not rush through the moment or you will miss these sights and the

people that are on your path. I spent the final two days of hiking taking small steps. It added hours to my day, but I met more people on those final days than the ones before and witnessed more amazing sights. This lesson continued upon my return home to a denomination on the verge of an ecclesiastic split and an anxious local church. I carried this “smaller steps” lesson of patient listening and observing into the split of the United Methodist denomination.

Brumec writes “that an important after effect of the Camino de Santiago is a changed personal hierarchy of values.”¹⁰⁰ This improvement in self-transcendence is reflected in higher pro-social activities conducted by returning pilgrims. Additional evidence of this conclusion is found in the response Patrick Gray made concerning his support of Justin Skeesuck. “The Camino has made this much clear to me: I want my life to demonstrate love, sacrifice for others, compassion, and the value placed in relationships.”¹⁰¹ This clarity led Gray and Skeesuck to launch, the previously mentioned organization, *I’ll Push You*. The creation of the *I’ll Push You* organization aligns with Brumec’s data that 31.7% of the study subjects report increased religiosity and pro-social activity upon returning home.¹⁰²

One cannot neglect the pre-Camino experience. My Camino preparation began in January of 2021 with increased exercising, including running and walking an average of 12 miles a week that increased to 20 miles as the date of departure neared. Multiple

¹⁰⁰ Brumec, “The Camino de Santiago in Late Modernity: Examining Transformative Aftereffects of the Pilgrimage Experience,” *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage* 9, no. 6, 2021.

¹⁰¹ Justin Skeesuck and Patrick Gray, *I’ll Push You: A Journey of 500 Miles Two Best Friends and One Wheelchair* (Chicago: Tyndale House, 2017).

¹⁰² Ibid, Brumec, “The Camino de Santiago in Late Modernity: Examining Transformative Aftereffects of the Pilgrimage Experience.”

YouTube content creators, who focus on the Camino de Santiago, encourage physical training prior to hiking the Camino.¹⁰³ Sara Dhooma, who has completed more than 20 Camino de Santiago hikes, states in an interview with RobsCamino that one can walk the Camino without preparation but that Camino becomes a safer and more enjoyable experience when the pilgrim prepares properly.¹⁰⁴ It should be noted that one of Dhooma's suggestions is not to prepare too much. She encourages pilgrims to plan a couple extra days to allow for the unknown – such as an injury that requires rest or a local festival that may be occurring during the time of your pilgrimage. She encourages a basic overview preparation – physical training, appropriate gear and general itinerary; but over planning may force the hiker to aggravate injuries due to a lack of rest or rushing through stages and missing moments of reflection. Dhooma encourages pilgrims to prepare mentally. One should consider the reason he or she is hiking and continue considering that reason throughout the pilgrimage, allowing it to change if needed as one progresses through his or her pilgrimage. In January of 2021, my reason for hiking the Camino was to study the impact of the Camino on individual spirituality for a doctoral project. As the pilgrimage neared, the reason shifted to include recovery from an accident and proving to myself that I could still accomplish big feats, such as hiking 190+ miles. As I walked the Camino, my rationale shifted to include developing a mantra for the final years of my

¹⁰³ Jeremiah Gibbs, “Meet My Camino Pilgrims for 2022!! The journey of 33 pilgrims from Indianapolis to Santiago, YouTube Video, 14:35, March 1, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v7kw_vJvB5Q; Rebecca Barcarcel, “How I Trained for the Camino de Santiago” YouTube Video, 11:31, July 22, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dlhJvxy4knI>; RobsCamino, “The Five Camino Tips with Sara Dhooma,” YouTube Video, 14:36 April 20, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RtEZEFIGkVs> . These are three of multiple video blogs on Camino de Santiago preparation.

¹⁰⁴ RobsCamino, “The Five Camino Tips with Sara Dhooma.” Sara discusses footwear preparation, the gear that one should use and not use, and the physical training needed to optimize one's Camino experience.

career in ministry. I am not sure that my final rationale would have been reached without the mental preparation and reflection described by Sara Dhooma in her interview.

Images, *Communitas*, and the pre- and post-pilgrimage experience are a few of the elements of the Camino de Santiago that assist the pilgrim with expanding his or her sense of identity to include God and others. It is these elements that can assist the local worship leader in creating a worship experience more conducive to transcendence.

LOCAL WORSHIP IS PILGRIMAGE

As noted, several times above, worship is a pilgrimage...or it can be. Consider with me the local worship experience in a United Methodist Church in the suburbs of Houston, Texas. A group of individuals join together to hear and/or read a piece of scripture. Music, prayer, and a series of announcements and greetings precede and prepare the individuals for the scripture story. A speaker or preacher offers the sermon, explaining the circumstances behind and a meaning to the scripture reading. Following that sermon, the congregation sings, prays, and receives a blessing before leaving the worship space to return home. Is this a pilgrimage? Consider the service again.

The worshiper leaves the comfort of home to join with others at another physical location to experience the story of a distant time and place. The preacher and other worship leadership serve as pilgrimage guides, leading worshipers (or worship-pilgrims) through various elements of the service, preparing the individuals for an 'axis mundi' moment in scripture message.¹⁰⁵ The sharing of that scripture creates an opportunity for the individual to envision him or herself in the story. The worshiper-pilgrim travels spiritually into the story and shares a moment of *communitas* with other worshiper-pilgrims and the individuals in the scripture story. He or she through the guidance of the preacher/pilgrimage guide discovers the actual events and a deeper spiritual knowledge. Following this scripture reading and sermon, the worshiper-pilgrim is offered the

¹⁰⁵ Individuals assisting the worship leaders and the materials used in the service contribute to the worship pilgrimage experience. Materials, such as bulletins, resemble pilgrimage maps guiding the individual along the journey. Those assisting are like more experienced pilgrims offering insight into the journey.

opportunity to return home – back into society - as a different individual, taking the deeper spiritual knowledge into his or her everyday life.

If we accept that a worship service can be an act of pilgrimage, then we can apply with some adaptation the elements of pilgrimage that are conducive to transcendence – such as images, *communitas*, and the pre- and post-pilgrimage experience – in a manner that helps the worshiper-pilgrim expand her or his identity to include God and others.

Consider the images found along the Camino de Santiago trail that create an environment for transcendence. These images remind the pilgrim of the history of the Camino and those that have walked the route previously. These images invite the pilgrim to connect with the greater story of the Camino and its transcendent qualities. These images direct the pilgrim mentally and physically. Churches should utilize more icons and images in worship as a means of teaching and connecting the individual with God and others.

The incorporation of images and icons in worship – especially Protestant worship - can trigger resistance. As noted previously, Christianity has a history of conflict over the use of images and icons. Proponents argue that they facilitate worship, assisting individuals in imaging and understanding faith stories and concepts. Opponents argue that the use of images and icons leads to idolatry. Many years ago, when preaching in Tyler, Texas, I offered a sermon series that utilized images from Star Wars to lead the congregation into scripture. This series included the use of two three-foot-tall figures from the Star Wars movies. After preaching the first sermon, I received a complaint from a church member claiming that I was introducing idolatry into the church and this individual ended his written complaint with the words “Sola Scriptura.” Martin Luther,

the proponent of “Sola Scriptura” and spark that ignited the Protestant Movement sought to renew the church and promoted among his followers and many Protestants to come a series of Sola’s – Sola Scriptura, Sola Fide, Sola Gratia. Protestants would argue that one needs little more than scripture to understand God’s will and they spurn many Roman Catholic traditions – including the use of images – as unnecessary. One could look at the rejection of worship icons and images as an unfortunate response to a deeper concern that Luther and other Protestants had with the Roman Catholic Church at that time. It is an unfortunate response that has carried over for centuries and robbed Protestant worshippers of a means of grace or experience of transcendence. Specifically, icons and images provide worship leadership with an additional means of conveying information.

Many local United Methodist Churches in suburban Houston convey information through hearing. Announcements, sermons, prayers, and music are designed to bring awareness to God and offer the individual opportunities for service, fellowship, and other activities; yet this information is primarily shared through hearing. Images and icons are invaluable to worship because they stimulate multiple senses. Research has revealed that cognition and memory increase substantially when additional senses are stimulated. Scientists have long known the impact of stimulating the senses as a means of learning and memory.¹⁰⁶ One can learn through hearing, but include seeing, smelling, tasting and

¹⁰⁶ Marieke van der Schaal, “Learning through the Senses,” *Medical Education*, 53, no 10 (2019), 960-962. Accessed on February 5, 2023. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/medu.13943> and Michael Liedke, “Neurophysiological Benefits of Worship,” *Journal of Biblical Foundations of Faith and Learning*, 3, Article 22. Accessed on February 6, 2023. <https://knowledge.e.southern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1063&context=jbfl>. Both van der Schaal and Liedke discuss the association between sensory experiences and memory. The more one’s senses are stimulated the greater the possibility of learning and remembering. Van der Schaal refers to the connection between sensory experiences and memory or learning as embodied cognition.

touching in the experience and the likelihood of learning and remembering is increased. Incorporating more images and icons allows for more sensory stimulation.

When images are used in worship, those images tend to focus on a picture displayed on a screen to assist the auditory message that the preacher offers. If there is an altar, it is a simple table like many other tables, holding a bible, candles, flowers and/or elements for communion for that particular day's service. Parameters have little meaning beyond telling worshipers the current season in which the church finds itself. For some, stained glass and banners are merely decorations that we find appealing or important for our current state. For many, those images do not signify a greater connection with God or others, but are mere items used in the immediate worship service. Local worship leaders can provide an opportunity for transcendence in worship by embracing and sharing the history and deeper significance of the images being utilized in worship. The images and icons are not merely reinforcing the spoken word (what is heard) but have a meaning and power within themselves to point to God and others.

Children's sermons can provide an opportunity for conveying this significance and history. For example, in 2018, while I was serving at the previously mentioned church in Tyler, Texas, the church leadership decided to add a children's message to the worship service.¹⁰⁷ These messages offer children, ages 2-12, a more child-friendly understanding of the sermon scripture for that day. In February 2019, I fell ill with the flu and another clergy was hired to preach the sermon. The worship leadership team did not receive this preacher's scripture in advance of the worship service and the children's

¹⁰⁷ The church in question is Pollard United Methodist Church (Tyler, TX). I served as senior pastor for this congregation from June 1, 2015 to June 30 2021.

pastor was unable to prepare a children's message that aligned with the adult sermon. A decision was made for the children's pastor to forego speaking on the specific scripture for that day and instead talk about the objects that the children see in worship. This Sunday was a communion Sunday for the church and our children's pastor talked about the meaning of the bread, the cup, and the Christ candle that the church lights on communion Sundays. Additionally, she talked about the people who prepare communion for the church prior to worship and the names of individuals who purchased the items we used in communion, many who have previously died. Though this specific children's sermon was longer than most of our children's sermons, the message allowed our children and adult worshippers to understand that communion involves more than a connection with Christ but a connection with other worshippers both present and in the past.

It is the connection with worshippers in the past that could create conflict for some Protestant worshippers. The Camino de Santiago paths offer the pilgrim multiple opportunities to learn the history of this pilgrimage and the significant figures that participated in the development and practice of the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage, such as Alfonso II or Saint James. Protestantism tends to reject the notion of saints. Though some would acknowledge and use the word "saint," many Protestants do not tend to view these individuals as any more important than a modern-day believer. They may have played a significant role in the history of the church but many Protestants consider elevating a saint or prominent church historical figure as unnecessary, arguing that all focus should remain on Christ; yet recapturing the stories of significant individuals is inspiring and beneficial to leading worshippers into a greater understanding of their ability

to connect with God. Our children's pastor's lesson on those past worshipers that purchased the communion trays and cups inspired the current worshipers to see their giving and service to God as a means to connecting with God plus an opportunity for creating *communitas* with those that will come after. The same trays that held the bread that served those in the past, hold the bread for those today, and will hold the bread for those in the future. We walk in the footsteps of past saints, and they inspire us to set footsteps for those that come after. Acknowledging past saints and their stories of transcendence inspires us to follow and likewise transcend. Acknowledging past saints and their stories is not usurping the story of Christ or a detour from connecting with God but leads the worshiper towards God. Protestant worship needs to embrace saints.

The week following this children's sermon, we received feedback from multiple parents and adults, some of whom did not have children, expressing their appreciation for the lesson on our worship items or images. Some shared that they had never considered the history and deeper meaning of the objects in worship. Additionally, one parent shared that for several days after the children's message her daughter would shout "It's Jesus!" when she would see bread.¹⁰⁸ Not only did this practice allow the congregation to connect with God through a greater understanding of the Lord's presence in communion but also facilitated a greater connection between worshipers – past, present and future.

This children's message moment reinforces the importance of sensory stimulation for memory and learning. Let's spend more time focusing on the sacraments.

Communion is the most transcendent event for my local church members according to

¹⁰⁸ Conversation with Amanda H conducted by author in March 2019. Amanda shared that one of her daughters, for an entire week following the children's message, referred to bread as Jesus. This occurred at home, in the grocery store, and at restaurants.

the previously mentioned questionnaire. This event stimulates multiple senses. An individual feels the bread in his or her hands. In the case of intinction, that individual may feel the cool, wetness of the wine or juice. As the worshiper tastes the bread, he or she also smells the aroma. This sensory stimulation creates a memory that can arise the next time that individual sees, touches, tastes or smells bread, like a little girl shouting, “It’s Jesus!” when she sees bread. The memory of experiencing God in communion can be experienced outside of the service, if we take full advantage of sensory stimulation in worship.

Altars can provide additional opportunities to stimulate the senses plus reinforce and extend the worship experience. Altar arrangements stimulate multiple senses – visual, touch, and smell – to reinforce the message of the service. In my suburban United Methodist Church, the altar stands in a chancel area and the closest worshiper sits sixteen feet away. Moving the altar closer to the worshipers could improve the potential for sensory stimulation and an experience of learning and transcendence. Moving the altar table from the chancel into the midst of the congregation and inviting individuals to approach and experience the altar (before, during, and after the worship service) will assist in creating a more conducive transcendent experience, similar to a pilgrim walking the Camino and touching the icons and images that rest along the path and teach the pilgrim about the history and spiritual significance of the pilgrimage. Additionally, more effective planning, budgeting for, and communicating the worship topic with the individual who prepares the altar is vital to creating this sensory experience. Preparation, accompanied with a willingness to allow worshipers to approach the altar for a closer look, smell, and touch, can create a memory-inducing sensory experience that will

continue into the future. This movement can benefit other worship furniture like baptismal fonts and prayer kneelers. Moving these objects into the middle of the congregation symbolically conveys the inclusive nature of worship and promotes both horizontal and vertical transcendence. The altar no longer belongs to the worship leaders – clergy and assistants, but to the entire community. All have access to these axis mundi/transcendent places, and all are united in a *communitas*, where worship hierarchies dissolve into a community of equals journeying to a greater spiritual connection with God. The use of the Botafumeira in the Cathedral of Santiago exemplifies the transcendence that can occur when worship furniture and equipment are moved from a clergy-only space into the midst of the congregation. Though the priest and the tiraboleiros light and maneuver the botafumeira, the smoke spreading throughout the congregation through the swinging of the botafumeira, creates an environment where worshippers are engulfed in both horizontal and vertical transcendence.

To use the Turners' terminology, objects (images and icons) are signifiers, pointing us to a greater story, message, or being (the signified). Altar, baptismal fonts, censers, and other worship objects are signifiers. These are not idols pulling worshippers away from God or scripture but accompany scripture to connect individuals to God.

Teaching the congregation that images and icons are more than decorations for a worship service and moving such items into the locations where worshiper can readily sense, share, and appreciate those items can help the worship leader create an environment of transcendence. The worshiper will begin to see the spiritual meaning behind the image or icon and each subsequent encounter with that image or icon will remind the individual of that lesson and connection with the signified.

Another area where worship leaders can create an environment more conducive to transcendence through image involves awareness of the pre- and post- worship experience. We already discussed ways to create memories, but let us now consider incorporating every day, non-worship images into the local worship service to reinforce post-pilgrimage transcendence. This process involves worship leaders being present in the community and aware of landmarks.

If a pilgrimage begins before one starts walking the path and continues after the pilgrims return home, then worship leaders need to consider the images that a pilgrim-worshiper experiences outside, before and after the actual local worship service and how those images can be included in the greater message of the local worship experience. For example, three miles from our worship space is an inlet that connects Clear Lake to Galveston Bay (Image 13). A new bridge is being constructed over the inlet connecting Seabrook to Kemah and League City. Prior to 1926, people wishing to travel from Seabrook to Kemah or League City traveled more than 15 miles. In 1926, a draw bridge was constructed over the inlet connecting the two communities. In 1986, the draw bridge was replaced by an elevated four lane bridge; and in 2023, a new, taller toll bridge will be completed alleviating traffic and allowing for more commerce and interaction between the two communities.

This bridge is an image that many in the Bay Harbour Church community see on a daily basis. A growing percentage of the church membership live north of this bridge and travel across the inlet daily. What would have been an obstacle many years ago is bridged. As Bay Harbour focuses on overcoming obstacles that separate people, such as poverty, extreme ideologies, and homelessness, we have used the image of this bridge

to signify God's uniting of people and overcoming obstacles. This is similar to the message one could find on the Camino de Santiago in Puente de Gallegos, Spain (See Image 5). The monument in Puente de Gallego stands at a bridge spanning a river that had once separated rival communities during the Spanish Civil War. This bridge is more than a path over water but a daily reminder of two communities overcoming the past to unite, like the bridge connecting Seabrook and Kemah.

We incorporated an image that our worshiper witnesses on a daily basis into the message of scripture. Our hope was that individuals seeing or driving over this bridge would connect that experience with the transcendent moment she or he experienced in worship, thus extending worship transcendence into the post-worship experience.

Tying an image that one sees in daily life, outside of local worship, to the message of that local worship service, extends the worship pilgrimage beyond the local service. Another image lesson from the Camino that can benefit the local service includes progress-tracking. Examples of progress-tracking on the Camino are the way-markers and the pilgrim's passport. Let us start with way-markers.

Way-markers were discussed previously. They stand one meter tall and display the image of a scallop shell and the kilometer distance to Santiago de Compostela. At many points on the route, where the path splits in multiple directions, these way-markers keep the pilgrim on path and reduce the anxiety that one may experience taking a wrong turn. In addition to these way-markers, the Camino contains, primarily in cities and towns, maps. These maps are usually located on the side of the path as one enters and

leaves the town or city.¹⁰⁹ They offer the pilgrim, especially those pilgrims who are less familiar with the path, an overview of the route that one needs to travel to progress along the Camino.

Worship should consider the value of way-marking. A worshiper can find a worship service, especially one that is new to the individual, confusing. Those who worship regularly may know the various elements of worship with little confusion. However, a new worshiper may find a service without explanation or direction anxiety-inducing. Bulletins are way-markers.

Since COVID-19, many churches in the southern suburbs of Houston have eliminated bulletins. The worry that the COVID-19 virus could be transmitted through touch led some congregation to remove any objects that would facilitate the transfer of the virus. When research proved that transmission through touch was unlikely, few churches returned to the practice of offering bulletins for worship. We should note that some local churches continued to offer bulletins but through electronic means such as church apps and websites that could be accessed through one's cell phone. The challenge with providing a bulletin through a phone app is that it requires a guest to download the church's app before using and a guest may not be willing to add the app until he or she is ready to commit to that church. Additionally, some worshipers may find the need to use a personal phone during worship distracting. Worship leadership should consider reinstating the use of bulletins to provide the first-time worshiper with guidance.

¹⁰⁹ An example of the Camino way-marking maps can be found in the Camino de Santiago Park that is located at Calle Corvera and Calle Soto del Barco in Oviedo, Spain. This park stands at the northwest edge of Oviedo before the Camino de Santiago enter the rural hills of Asturias. The map located at this park illustrates the Camino pathway between Oviedo and Grado, Spain.

Another form of way-marking on the Camino de Santiago is the pilgrim's passport. Many of the pilgrims on the Camino find the pilgrim's passport valuable. As a pilgrim journeys along the route, she or he receives stamps in the passport, documenting progress. Stamps are available at albergues, hotels, restaurants, churches, and some stores. Each stamp is unique to the location where it is received. On several occasions, when dining with other pilgrims, we compared our stamps and the events experienced at and near the location where the stamp was received. I found myself, on multiple occasions along the Camino, staring at my pilgrim's passport and contemplating the progress I had made with a sense of pride. Worship leadership could incorporate a similar process into worship and the discipleship journey. Might a method of marking progress benefit the worship experience? The opportunity for worshipers to reflect on their spiritual growth and participation could reinforce the worshiper's desire to continue attending worship and growing spiritually. This practice occurs in many churches with children. Consider the attendance charts that have been used in many children's Sunday School classes, where each Sunday a child receives a star on the chart, celebrating his or her participation in that Sunday's activity. If the worship goal is creating an environment where an individual can experience transcendence, then participation by that individual is vital. Acknowledging attendance could lead to a greater desire to be present in that transcendent environment.

One suggestion that could be easily enacted in many congregations is using attendance tracking software. Providing and encouraging worshipers to sign-in at a computer kiosk or in-worship registration folder would be the first step in tracking attendance. Sign-in information could be transferred to tracking software. Worship

leadership should acknowledge or celebrate those who have attended. One easily instituted method of recognition is sending a ‘thank you’ email or letter to worshipers or providing a special meal for those who have reached a certain level of attendance or participation. If a transcendent experience occurs, worship leadership can document that experience in the tracking software and acknowledge that moment on future anniversary dates.

Let us now consider the ways that *communitas* can promote transcendence in the local worship service. We must remember that *communitas* by definition is a form of transcendence.

While walking the Camino de Santiago, I experienced *communitas* through three practices – Camino meals, assisting others or being assisted by others, and on-path conversations. These practices can be easily adapted to the local worship experience. Consider the spontaneous and normative *communitas* that occurs when people eat together on the Camino. My first meal on the path occurred with Sebas at Restaurante El Tendejon de Fernando outside of Escamplero, Spain. As discussed previously, Sebas and I met outside of Oviedo, Spain. Unable to communicate due to our language barriers, we walked this first leg of the Primitivo speaking little until we stopped at this restaurant for a mid-morning snack break. Sebas offered to pay for my snack and drink. As we ate, he offered me a Spanish vocabulary lesson. With my little Spanish and his little English and a considerable amount of hand gesturing, we learned about each other. We discussed family and careers. It was at this location that Sebas gave me the nickname, “Vaquero” after discovering that I was from Texas. A meal, big or small, is an opportunity to pause one’s routine to nourish the body and can also be an opportunity to nourish the mind and

one's relationships. Sabas and my relationship began on the trail but was nourished during the meals.

Individuals come together for a local worship experience but their *communitas* is nourished when they eat together during and/or after the worship experience. Consider again the transcendence survey conducted at my local church. The questionnaire asked individuals to assess their level of transcendence through lunch-time conversations focusing on the worship service. On a scale of 0 to 5, the generational range was 2.5 to 4. With Gen Z falling on the lower end with a 2.5 average and Millennials setting at the top of the range with 4.0. The total average is 2.981. One can conclude from this data that individuals are more likely to experience transcendence when discussing the worship topic during a meal.

Many local churches have a history of sharing meals after worship service. My current church schedules two church-wide meals a year and hosts Wednesday evening family meals, called Family Table, in the Spring and Fall months. These meals include a short devotion but focus primarily on fellowship, which can be an opportunity for horizontal transcendence. Opportunities for greater transcendence are possible in post-worship meals when the individuals are encouraged to discuss the topic of that service. The leaders of the worship service and meal could provide a list of topics and questions for the individuals to discuss. One challenge to this style of encouragement was noted previously in our discussion of instituted *communitas*. Some individuals may view this as fake or manufactured relationships. Therefore, the leaders of a post-worship meal need to be careful in the amount of pressure that is applied to directing the meal conversations.

Another meal method that could benefit worship *communitas* is incorporating the meal into worship. This may not work in all churches due to the worship space, but those churches that worship in gymnasiums or fellowship halls with movable chairs could set up tables and serve a meal that is consumed during the worship service. The conversation would be limited due to the elements of the service such as singing, prayer, and the sermon, but the worship leaders could incorporate moments within the service where individuals are encouraged to talk amongst themselves about the topic.

One consideration to utilizing meal *communitas* in association with worship is financial. Churches should consider encouraging small groups or Sunday School classes to eat together after worship and discuss the topics. Most small groups and Sunday School classes are examples of *communitas*. Encouraging and even providing financial assistance for these groups to eat together and discuss the worship topic could lead to greater transcendence. Financially supporting *communitas* meals can improve the inclusive nature of the church. Instead of *communitas* among those that have the financial resources to dine-out or prepare enough food to share, the church assisting financially allows those with financial difficulties to participate.

Assisting others or being assisted creates multiple opportunities for pilgrims to develop *communitas* along the Camino de Santiago. I met the aforementioned Margaret and Sarah on my third day of the Camino in Salas, Spain. Both Margaret and Sarah had been suffering from shin splints and had determined to take a taxi to the next city. At the same time, I had been struggling with sore muscles and stomach pain from poor nutrition that made hiking the next section of the Camino physically and mentally difficult. Learning about my situation, Margaret and Sarah offered to share the taxi ride. Their

offer to assist turned into several hours of discussion concerning family, careers, national politics, and the reasons each of us decided to hike the Camino. I felt a growing sense of *communitas* with Margaret and Sarah. When Sarah's shin splints did not improve and she was forced to return to Manchester, England, I continued to maintain my *communitas* with Margaret, offering her my hiking poles to assist and helping her through more rugged portions of the trail.

There is an old cliché that says, "Misery loves company." The truth is that company often finds, develops within, and conquers misery. To put it in the words of Proverbs, "As iron sharpens iron so does one person sharpen the wits of another."¹¹⁰ This assisting others and being receptive to assistance is an example of horizontal transcendence and a practice that can promote vertical transcendence, especially in the local church.

Promoting vertical transcendence requires further discussion. I was introduced to section shepherds while serving as the Pastor of Outreach Ministry at Tomball United Methodist Church, in Tomball, Texas. Shepherds are members who are assigned sections within the sanctuary with the responsibility of recognizing guests and providing information and assistance. Additionally, these shepherds attempt to introduce the guest to other worshipers with similar affinity. Too often we assume that everyone coming to a worship service is familiar with all the elements of worship and their meaning. This is not the case. The goal of section shepherds is to lessen the anxiety that can arise with being new to a congregation. When individuals are confused about the worship elements and

¹¹⁰ Proverbs 27: 17

the practices of a specific congregation, anxiety can arise and distract the worshiper from experiencing transcendence. Local churches should consider methods of connecting guests with more experienced worshippers with similar affinity.

There are multiple ways to promote *communitas* in the local worship service but a final method that will be considered in our discussion is on-path conversations. Though I found conversations during Camino meals and assisting one another most conducive to transcendence during my Camino pilgrimage experience, the discussions occurring with random pilgrims provided me with many opportunities for *communitas*. As I walked with individuals from the United Kingdom, Spain, France, Italy, Russia, and various other parts of the world, I discovered a commonality that transcended national identity and a spirituality that was not monopolized by any one group or individual. These conversations evolved from simple introductions to deeper spiritual concerns.

Consider with me the opportunities worship can offer individuals that are similar to the conversation-invoking nature of the Camino. Mission and service activities, where multiple individuals work side-by-side, can create an environment where individual conversations move from pleasantries to deeper theological information. This is particularly possible when local church leaders provide individuals with theological questions to discuss while serving together. The local worship service could become the event where such questions are given for worshipers to explore and discuss with others both within and outside of the worship experience. Worship leaders could schedule time in each service for such conversation or challenge the congregation to continue discussing after worship in small groups and at meal. Like the Camino experience that extends well after one's return home, the worship leader needs to consider methods for

extending the worship conversation, and the possibility for connecting with others and God, into the minutes and hours that follow the service. Preachers, worship leaders, and those assisting in the development of the worship service should consider opportunities to engage the congregation in the worship theme after the final blessing. One method for consideration is substituting the typical worship format for an act of service or actual pilgrimage experience. Several United Methodist Churches in the Houston area have instituted a “Church Has Left the Building” worship experience, where worshippers engage in hands-on service activities or local pilgrimage experiences instead of their usual worship experience. Many “Church Has Left the Building” experiences include a brief sermon or scriptural theme, and the worshippers are encouraged to discuss the theme in light of their act of service or pilgrimage. The interaction between individuals while working and traveling together creates a conducive environment similar to that experienced on the Camino de Santiago.

CONCLUSION

The Church needs to step up and help them transform their pilgrim experience into a vital spiritual life once they get home.¹¹¹

-Rebekah Scott

Experiencing burn-out, Rebekah Scott and her husband, Patrick O’Gara, decided to walk the Camino de Santiago in 2001. The experience impacted them so much that they left their careers in the United States to operate an albergue in Moratinos, Spain. Their years of service reveal a common thread weaving its way through the lives of many pilgrims – theophany. People experience the divine on the Camino. What Scott calls theophany, others may call transcendence. As noted previously in this discussion, many theologians and philosophers reveal to us that people want to know and connect with something greater than themselves. People need transcendence and the Camino de Santiago provides individuals with the opportunity to transcend.

The local worship service can offer individuals this opportunity. One element of pilgrimage that can facilitate these opportunities and deserves further research is movement. Movement is an unavoidable, and welcoming, aspect of pilgrimage. It is the arena in which one experiences the greatest concentration of sensory stimulation. As one moves along the path, new sights, smells, and sounds emerge with each step. Movement itself is touch. The air touches the skin. Clothing and the feeling of muscles contracting and expanding provide additional stimulation. Movement embraces multiple sensory

¹¹¹ Terrence Handley MacMath, “Interview: Rebekah Scott, founder, Peaceable Projects.” *Church Times*, last edited February 2, 2023, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2023/27-january/features/interviews/interview-rebekah-scott-founder-peaceable-projects>.

experiences that reinforce learning and memory. Beyond standing and sitting for different elements of the worship service, can the worship leadership incorporate more physical movement into the worship service to create more opportunities for transcendence? Some congregations incorporate movement into the worship service through the creation of stations that correlate with the worship theme. It is the desire to use movement as a means of transcendence that leads other churches to incorporate prayer labyrinths into their arsenal of spiritual disciplines.

The Christian worship calendar is a form of movement that deserves additional research. Moving from Advent into Christmas, through ordinary time into Lent and Easter, followed by Pentecost and a second ordinary time, the Christian worship calendar contains special observances that move the worshiper through the story of Christ and the formation of the church. An area for further research could focus on the level of transcendence worshipers experience in local worship services that observe/move through the Christian calendar versus those that do not. If movement facilitates transcendence then one could conclude that a church that observes the Christian calendar experiences a greater connection with God and others.

Promoting transcendence in the worship service can also improve inter-personal, inter-cultural relationships. The world has always been a place of conflict. One person does not agree with another, and conflict occurs. One group deems another as a threats and conflict occurs. One community in a quest for power or what they view as their right neglects another group in order to claim that powers and conflict occurs. When one individual or group is wronged, the response is to strike back with the same, if not more, force and conflict occurs. Transcendence is God's gift to humanity that calms the storms

that rage between us. Remember, “transcendence is the subsumption of the individual self in an all-encompassing reality. The boundary between the self and the outside world is broken and a more expansive [and egalitarian] perspective diffuses throughout all aspects of one’s experience.”¹¹²

To expand one’s sense of self to include God and others is transformative. Knowing God and knowing those whom God loves (John 3:16) is a call to consider the needs and desires of the Creator and other people. Transcendence is the spark that ignites social, economic, and ecological justice, as well as greater acts of service, witness, and relationship building. Subsumption into a greater reality with God and others demands that we embrace the identity and needs of the other. It demands that we understand and work toward the healing of others because healing the other in a transcendent world heals us. Simply stated, transcendence calls us to reflect on our behaviors and root-out anything that does not value God and others. The local worship service, like a pilgrimage, is an event that should promote transcendence. Worship is transcendence...or it can be.

¹¹² Gorelik, 287.



Image 2: Alfonso the Chaste of Oviedo



Image 3: Plaque marking the beginning of the Camino Primitivo



Image 4: Pilgrim Jesus. Image provided by <https://londontraveller.org/>



Image 5: Monument at Puente de Gallegos



Image 6: Tineo Pilgrim Sundial



Image 7: Castroverde fountain outside of the Church of Saint James



Image 8: Way-marker located on the Camino Primitivo as one ascends to Alto de Acevo, prior to crossing the border into Galicia.



Image 9: Memorial to Antonio Jose Perez at Alto de Palo



Image 10: Botafumeira on May 5, 2022 at the 12:00pm Pilgrim's Mass



Image 11: Alto de Palo

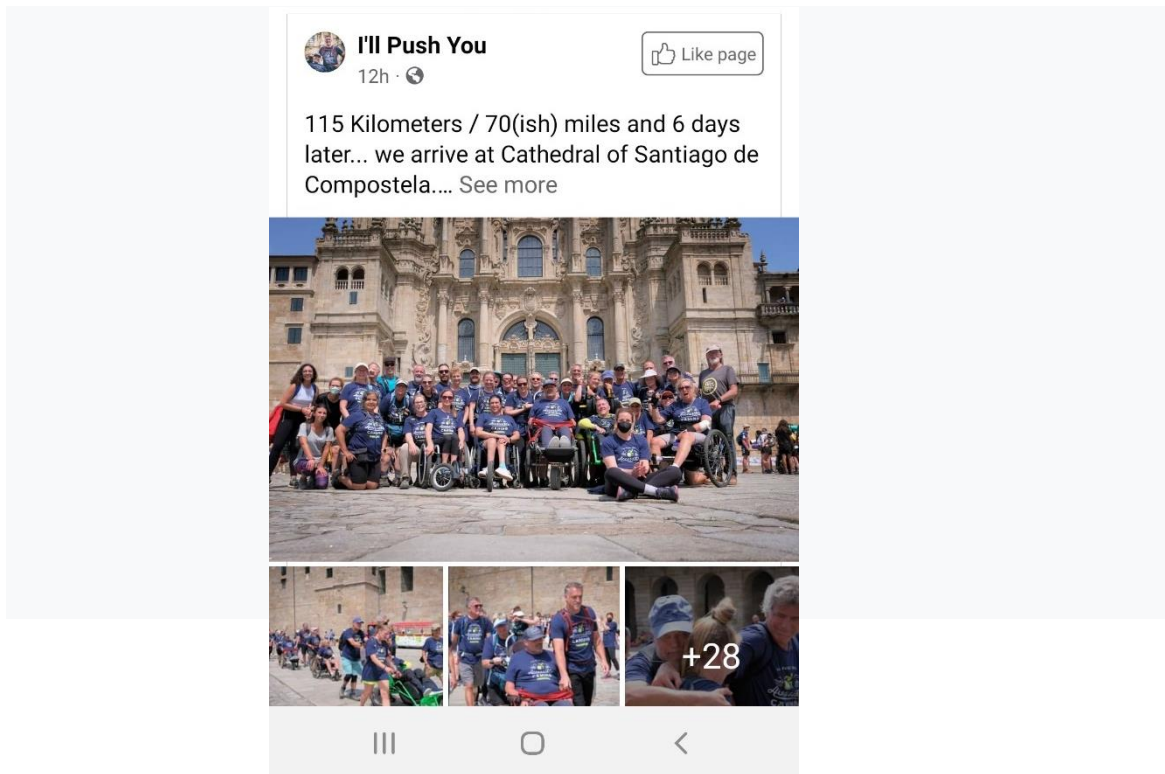


Image 12: Facebook post from the I'll Push You group page. The image shows the group's arrival at the Cathedral in Santiago de Compostela.¹¹³

¹¹³ Image provides by Daniel R Castro on the Camino de Santiago All Routes Facebook group page on July 17, 2022 at 11:38PM

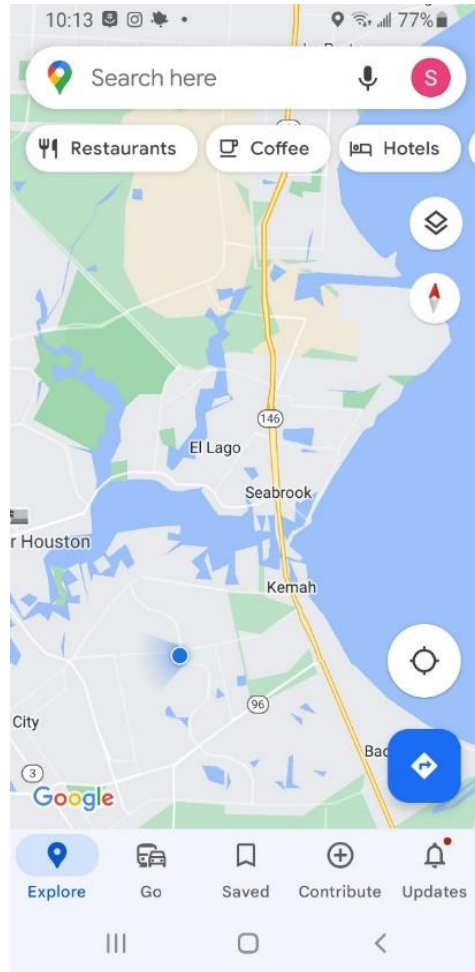


Image 13: The Blue Circle represents the location of Bay Harbour United Methodist Church. The inlet connecting Clear Lake to Galveston Bay is located northeast of the church between Seabrook and Kemah.

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