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Manifestations of Religious Freedom in the Context of the Camino de Santiago

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This study analyses the positive manifestations of religious freedom among pilgrims on the Way of St James (Camino de Santiago, Spain), a pilgrimage way that pilgrims have followed to the tomb of St James the Apostle in Spanish Galicia, since the Middle Ages. The purpose of this study is to present the manifestations of religious freedom in the experience of Polish pilgrims on the Way of Saint James on the basis of in-depth interviews conducted in the summer of 2019 in Santiago de Compostela (n=50).

Key Words: Camino de Santiago, religious freedom, interviews, research

Introduction

The Camino de Santiago (The Way of St James) pilgrimage way, which pilgrims have walked since the Middle Ages to the tomb of St. James the Apostle in Spanish Galicia, has undergone various changes over the centuries due to religious, cultural and political conditions (Farias *et al.*, 2019). The first pilgrims began their journey at the threshold of their own houses, going to Santiago de Compostela, and then returned on foot.

The main research question of this paper is how pilgrims express their religious freedom on their Camino and whether their freedom is in any way restricted. Does the Camino offer a unique opportunity to express religious freedom, unlike in everyday life, and whether the Camino experience is different from a typical tourist experience?

Analysing the experiences of pilgrims on the trail of St. James, regardless of their faith and religiosity, they very often emphasise the aspect of freedom. This is confirmed, among other things, by the results of research on Polish pilgrims in 2016,

people who are planning to go on Camino de Santiago again feel a greater sense of freedom on the road than those who do not intend to return to the trail (Drzewiecki et al., 2016:213–214).

In order to analyse the manifestation of religious freedom among pilgrims, first the theoretical frame will be presented, then the method of the research conducted and the results, and finally the proposed conclusions and discussion.

Literature Review

The theoretical frame of the research first requires a definition for the meaning of religious freedom as was applied during the research. A philosophical and theological perspective will be presented first, followed by the framework of existing research. Finally, examples of restrictions on religious freedom in the Camino de Santiago will be presented.

Religious freedom from a philosophical and theological perspective

Religious freedom in the legal sense is most often defined as freedom in the sphere of religious and philosophical beliefs or, in a broader spectrum, as any activity of philosophical beliefs, i.e. both in the sphere of internal beliefs and external religious and non-religious practices (Papis *et al.*, 2018). The concept of freedom of choice or ability to choose is common. It is a concept of freedom that dates back to antiquity in the teachings of Aristotle and Cicero. In *Politics*, Aristotle defines freedom, which is ‘to be expressed in the fact that everyone does what he or she likes’ (Piechowiak, 1999:261), which is a certain basic concept of freedom. The term peregrinus also illustrates the freedom of someone who will not be stopped on his or her way or turned away from his or her chosen goal by anything (Roszak, 2017).

In view of the fact that the Camino de Santiago is a cultural pilgrimage itinerary closely linked to Christian tradition, this dimension of religious freedom in theology will also be briefly outlined. From the Christian

perspective of theology, religious freedom is focused on looking at the human being who is confronted with the fact of Revelation, the human being to whom God reveals Himself, that is to say, is made known through the *theophane*, prophecy, word and in the person of Christ. The concept of freedom described would be expressed in an attitude of acceptance or rejection, therefore in the attitude of everyone towards the revealed God. The question under consideration may be whether a human remains free in the face of the revealed God. The second question is whether someone can accept Revelation itself without worship. But since worship is a natural response to God's Revelation, it seems that the answer to this question should be negative. Consequently, pilgrims' statements will be analysed, among other aspects, from the point of view of manifestations of religious freedom expressed through various forms of devotion.

In this context, it is worth pointing out that after the visit of John Paul II in 1982, the St James Way was recognised by the Council of Europe in 1987 as the first European Cultural Way and in 1993 it was included on the UNESCO World Heritage List (Mróz, 2016). It is therefore not surprising that the Camino is associated with cultural symbols derived from Christian heritage (Huzarek, 2014). Nevertheless, pilgrims other traditions also find more universal symbols on Camino. An example is the ritual of 'leaving a stone' at Cruz de Ferro, on the Camino Frances. Thanks to the fact that the meaning of rituals and symbols is not imposed on Camino, each pilgrim can experience them in his or her own way without judging or evaluating which kind is better. This and other symbolic and ritualistic activities on the Camino can therefore be shared by pilgrims regardless of their religious beliefs and identification (Moulin-Stożek, 2019).

Review of research on religious freedom

The research carried out so far indicates that religious freedom enhances other liberties, gender equality included (Grim & Finke, 2011). Some countries by limiting religious freedom try to protect another right – most notably gender equality (Brandt & Kaplan, 1996; Rivers, 2007; Rose, 2014). A review of the research suggests that religious regulation is on the rise worldwide, with the vast majority of democratic nations taking active steps to limit religious freedom (Fox, 2008; Madeley,

2003). Religious regulation is not rare. Around 2011, 59 percent of the world's population lived with high or very high government restrictions on religion, and more than half of the world's countries include stipulations in their constitution or basic laws substantially restricting religious freedom (Pew Forum, 2011). It is therefore not surprising that in a number of studies, religious freedom is examined from the negative viewpoint (Ben-Nun Bloom, 2015; Glock, 2012). Because the research presented in this paper concerns Polish pilgrims, it is worth noting that Polish society has a unique history of religious freedom. Announced in 1573, the Warsaw confederation (1573) was the first document in Europe to guarantee religious freedom. Since 1945 Poland belongs to one of the most monolithic countries in ethnic and religious terms. However, international reports evaluate Poland as a generally 'free country' in terms of religious life (Pew, 2017). Notwithstanding this, current research on religious freedom in Poland presents reports on restrictions and examples of violations to the rights to freedom in this field (Sadłoń & Wesołowska 2019). This noticeable tendency shows the need to pay attention to the positive experience of religious freedom that the pilgrims of the Camino have experienced.

Religious freedom, which by its very nature cannot be measured empirically, can only be defined by its manifestations. In the methodology of statistical research such variables are called hidden (latent) variables. An example of using latent variables is the law of universal gravitation, based on empirical observations, developed by Newton. In many fields of social sciences, researchers are often interested in directly unobservable, hypothetical constructs, called latent variables or hidden (latent) characteristics (Byrne, 2012). Each latent construct is represented by several observable behaviours whose mutual similarity is based on a common hidden source, i.e. the postulated latent reservoir (Raykov *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, the analysis of pilgrims' experiences will be carried out in the further part of the analysis with regard to the manifestations of their religious freedom.

In relation to the study of Genoveva Millán Vázquez de la Torre (Vázquez de la Torre *et al.*, 2012), which analysed the profile of a pilgrim, it was found that the degree of pilgrim satisfaction with the pilgrimage is dependent on their religious commitment. Therefore, although the

pilgrims' sense of identity has undoubtedly evolved over the centuries, the visible differences between them and other types of tourists are characterised by the concern to preserve the religious character of the pilgrimage (Roszak, 2019; Horvat & Roszak, 2020). Thus, while many pilgrims use more expensive and comfortable accommodation services, the state hostels (Spanish *albergue*) fill up very quickly every day during the pilgrimage season.

The results of a study on the psychological consequences of religious symbols in public space, which was carried out in 2013 at the University of Warsaw, drew attention to certain aspects of the subject. The authors found a major lack of knowledge on the psychological consequences that religious symbols can have for religious and non-religious people visiting, studying and working in a public space. Therefore, the influence of religious symbols in a public university space on the psychological condition of students was examined: their self-esteem, as well as the positive and negative influence. Crosses are visible symbols in many public institutions such as schools, offices and hospitals, which makes Poland one of the least religiously neutral European countries (Gruber, 2010). An interesting study on symbolic and religious practices on the Camino was conducted by Daniel Moulin-Stožek (Moulin-Stožek, 2019). According to him, the Camino creates a context in which pilgrims coexist, both integrated into the religious world of symbols and constructing their own world of meanings and references, not directly related to pre-established frames, but vaguely or carelessly related to experiences and feelings (Oviedo *et al.*, 2014; Oviedo, 2019).

Other studies show that places which have been the cultural environment of childhood socialisation are role models for their future inhabitants. Thus, objects in orphanages (e.g. religious artefacts) not only express individual identity, but can also shape it (Hummon, 1989). In an ethnographic study, Mazumdar and Mazumdar (2009) proposed concepts of 'home as a religious space' and 'ecology of religion' to describe how religious artefacts and landscape architecture helped immigrants to renew their links with past experiences and environments. The authors (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1993) argue that religion, through rituals, connects people to places, and places as environments of sacred behaviour and

socialisation connect people to religion. Furthermore, the presence of dominant cultural symbols can have a positive impact on those whose identity is reflected in the dominant culture (Schmitt *et al.*, 2010).

Daniel Moulin-Stožek's extensive study of graffiti, improvised sculptures and other objects placed on the trail by pilgrims indicates a kind of syncretism. At the same time, they allow pilgrims of different religious, cultural and social backgrounds to carry out a common ritual of pilgrimage and thus engage in religious discourses and practices. The author described the Camino as a reality different from everyday life, free and at the same time ordered (Moulin-Stožek, 2019).

In the context of the subject of religious freedom and the understanding of it as freedom to profess and speak about religion, the Camino de Santiago involves an almost complete lack of restrictions on the expression of religiousness. However, to show the full spectrum of religious freedom, examples of the restriction of religious freedom on the Camino de Santiago such as the demands for the removal of the sculpture of Santiago Matamoros (Saint James the Moor-slayer) from the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela so that it does not 'hurt the feelings' of Muslims should be noted.

As such situations are the exception rather than the rule, they are not included in the main research results of this study.

Methods

In order to properly diagnose the essence of the phenomenon, it was decided to choose a qualitative study using the methodology of individual in-depth interviews with pilgrims according to the guidelines of Steinar Kvale (Kvale, 2010). On the basis of the developed scenario of undertaking interviews during a two-month-long Erasmus+ grant research internship in the Centro Europeo de Peregrinacion Juan Pablo II, Santiago de Compostela, Spain (24.07.2019 - 23.09.2019), in-depth interviews (n=50) with pilgrims were conducted. The possibility of carrying out the interviews at the place where the pilgrims ended their journey was an ideal opportunity to get fresh information about pilgrims' current experiences. Despite the prepared interview scenario, the questions

Table 1: Study Schedule

Testing method and technique	Actions implemented	Research tool	Number of actions carried out
Desk research	Library query, analysis of existing data		
In-depth interviews using qualitative research methodology	Development of the author's own interview scenario for Polish pilgrims on the Way of St. James / Camino de Santiago	Intelligence guide	50 in-depth interviews
	Conducting interviews in Monte do Gozo from 07.2019 - 09.2019		
	Transcription of interviews		
	Categorisation		
	Analysis of the test results		

were modified on an ongoing basis and adapted to the interaction of the respondents (Ruby, 1997). All survey participants agreed to participate and all of the data obtained are in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and national research commission and the Helsinki Declaration of 1964 as amended, or with comparable ethical standards. As part of the subsequent activities, the transcripts of the interviews were encoded and anonymised, and analysed with MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2020. The coding process, which consists of

defining areas within the analysed data, involving the identification and recording of one or more fragments of text or other type of data ... that express, at a theoretical or descriptive level, the same idea (Gibbs, 2008: 38).

This was carried out efficiently by using MAXQDA software. MAXQDA's advanced search functions offers everything to be expected from professional data analysis software – from a simple one-click activation system to advanced retrieval options for finding overlaps, groups of words, code colours, and more. In this way, the main topics were identified:

- freedom of worship,
- freedom of speech and prayer, and
- religious freedom in terms of symbolism.

Testing procedure

The idea to carry out the study was inspired by the author's personal experience of the Camino pilgrimage and working for three-months in the volunteer service (June-August 2014) at the Centro Europeo de Peregrinacion

Juan Pablo II, on Monte do Gozo. During this time, many pilgrims showed great willingness to talk and told very personal stories about their life and their experience of the Camino. Their fresh perspective immediately after the pilgrimage was also very clear, as well as their openness and sincerity, and the multitude of different aspects and themes of their statements.

For this reason, it was decided to select a site for the study, 5 kilometres away from Santiago at Monte to Gozo. This hill is the first place on the French Way (Camino Frances) from which the destination is visible—the soaring towers of St James' Cathedral in the city centre, which stand out in the Santiago landscape. Also the infrastructure layout of the Centro Europeo in Monte do Gozo is conducive to carrying out a series of in-depth interviews because, despite the presence of many pilgrims, it gives the opportunity to find secluded places where you can have a personal, long and casual conversation.

The two-month stay under the Erasmus+ internship scheme made it possible to plan interviews with fifty different pilgrims. While recruiting participants, it was ensured that the respondents were diverse in many respects. There were 22 interviews with women and 28 interviews with men. Two respondents came by bicycle from Poland, two came on foot from Poland. Most of them travelled the Camino for the first time, but some for the second, third or even fourth time. Among the respondents there were representatives of diocesan clergy, consecrated persons, volunteers, high school graduates, students, pensioners, artists, people in other

professions and those who remained unemployed. Moreover the selection was via convenience sampling, based on the availability of respondents. The average interview time was about 45 minutes, and the longest conversation lasted about an hour and a half.

The pilgrims were informed by volunteers at the reception desk in the albergue (a hostel or lodging for pilgrims on the Way of St James) that there was a person who was undertaking doctorate research on the Camino who would like to interview pilgrims. The pilgrims often immediately reported their willingness to participate in the study and booked specific hours to meet with the researcher. It happened that they typically waited for the end of dinner to talk late into the evening or at night (sometimes the last interview ended even midnight). Some brought their notebooks from the Camino to the interview to tell in more detail about their experiences and thoughts from the way. It also happened that the next day after the interview that participants came to talk about something they forgot to mention during the interview. Such additions were subsequently added to their interviews.

Many times the conversation was beneficial to both sides. The respondents willingly talked about their experiences because it was a form of telling someone about what was important to them. They were happy to find a person who listened to them willingly and patiently. They also knew that they were participating in something that was necessary for science and it was also important for them that they took part in a scientific study. This made them feel that they would contribute to something important, related to the Camino, which they thought was valuable, so they wanted others to know about it too. A lot of people said:

But maybe I won't say anything so brilliant, my story is so ordinary

to which they heard in response:

It's good, because I'm looking for a real Camino experience and not some kind of extraordinary.

All interviews were recorded with an *Olympus Digital Voice Recorder DS-3500* professional dictaphone and then copied to the memory of a laptop and a flash drive. At the beginning of the interview, each of the respondents was asked if they agreed to have the interview recorded on a dictaphone. They were also informed that all

statements would be anonymised, that they were not obliged to answer any of the questions, and that they could interrupt the conversation at any time. They were encouraged to feel at ease and to speak frankly about their needs if, for example, they needed a break during the conversation or wanted to change the place of the interview. Such situations occurred a couple of times; meeting these needs of the respondents resulted in their trust and greater openness of speech. All respondents except one person agreed to be called by their first name. This also resulted in greater openness and sincerity of speech. It is also worth emphasising that it is a general custom on the Camino that most people call each other by name regardless of age, education or profession. This makes the pilgrims equal so that one is not in principle more important or higher than the other.

Results

The analysis of the interviews made it possible to identify areas in which Polish pilgrims experience religious freedom on the Camino de Santiago. Three main fields were distinguished: liturgy, freedom of speech and the presence of symbols, which will be described in detail and then presented in Table 2 in the form of sample quotations of pilgrims' statements.

Freedom of worship: Mass and pilgrims' blessing

The priests who walk the Camino route usually carry items needed to celebrate Mass. During the hike they put on sports clothes, so other pilgrims are not always aware that they were dealing with priests. However, one of the priests talked about how he tried to bless other pilgrims along the way. It also happened that people who found out he was a priest asked him to give them a blessing. On the other hand, pilgrims emphasise that they try not to judge others because of their religious beliefs, possessions, education or skin colour. Those who declare themselves as believers are not ashamed of practicing their faith in public. They also often emphasise the other more direct and sincere nature of their relationship with other pilgrims on Camino because they treat this pilgrimage differently from other tourist expeditions. The rite of the pilgrims' blessing also makes strangers feel communion with other pilgrims, surround themselves with mutual care and assistance, invite them to a common table and

treat them almost like family members. One can therefore say that the Camino's religious character is manifested in the practice of love for one's neighbour in everyday life situations. Many of the pilgrims pointed out that thanks to the blessing received, the pilgrim does not feel lonely during the journey and feels the presence of God, who gives him or her strength to overcome difficulties and certainty that he or she can count on God's help. The pilgrims who travelled in the company of a priest also pointed out how important daily participation in Mass and the priestly blessing is for them. Among the pilgrims there were also those who, walking in a group of several people along the way, blessed each other and expressed the belief that the road without the blessing would not be the same and would have less value. A woman who walked with her husband told about the fact that during the Camino they undertook blessings each morning, praying and making the sign of the cross on their foreheads.

Several pilgrims mentioned that during the ritual of the pilgrims' blessing on the way, each of the pilgrims had the opportunity to tell everyone his or her name, where he or she came from and why he or she went on the Camino. This gave strangers the opportunity to get to know each other better and create a fraternity.

Freedom of speech and prayer: the rosary, Scripture and penance

One of the pilgrims mentioned the situation when, during a meal with other pilgrims, he was asked why he set off. When he answered that he was going for religious reasons, there was silence at the table and then the young Italian, having 'overcome the barrier of shame' told how important it was for him to receive the pilgrims' blessing. This situation shows that the Camino is a space in which people who do not touch upon religious topics on a daily basis feel brave enough to speak about their personal experiences in this area. The statements of many pilgrims confirm this special character of the Camino.

For many respondents of different ages, both individual and group prayer of the rosary played an important role during the journey. For a 20-year-old pilgrim, who first travelled along the Camino trail from his home town in Poland, the prayer of the rosary (he recited all parts every day) was a source of consolation and strength

in the hardships and adversities of the road. However, a pilgrim of retirement age remembered a situation in which pilgrims from other countries, when they saw the rosary in his hands, encouraged by his example, also took out their own rosary from their pockets. A nearly sixty-year-old woman described her prayer of the rosary as a very personal daily conversation with God.

Some of the pilgrims also reached for Scripture during their journey. A group of four students who declared themselves as believers mentioned that during the Camino they met many people, both believers and non-believers. They found that the conversation with them often led towards themes of God and faith. They pointed this out as the difference between the Camino and hiking, where conversations usually have a different character. On the way on Sunday they tried to attend Mass, which was usually held in Portuguese and Spanish. They found Mass readings in applications on their phones.

Among religious practices, pilgrims also mentioned penance and fasting. One of them told about his experience when during his pilgrimage he received a difficult intention, which he called humanly hopeless. After a few days he decided to fast every Friday with bread and water. Other pilgrims talked about consciously limiting themselves regarding alcohol or coffee consumption, or using a mobile phone or the Internet. One of the pilgrims directly declared that he was going all the way to do his penance, which made him feel a spiritual improvement. Every hardship or inconvenience he encountered on his way, he tried to accept in the spirit of penance and this helped him to persevere in the most difficult experience that was for him sleeping in multi-person rooms, where the spirit was difficult to bear. Other young pilgrims called themselves 'pilgrims of penance' because, wandering together without sufficient funds, they asked local people for bread and water. On the other hand, one pilgrim, who declared himself a non-believer during the conversation, stated that he understood pilgrimage as a penitential act in terms of rehabilitation. He admitted that it was precisely this that prompted him to embark on this path in order to find harmony, order and meaning in his hectic life.

On the other hand, the pilgrim who came barefoot admitted that someone asked him if this was his penance

during the journey, but he just wanted to see if he could walk through the mountains barefoot because he liked to walk like that, which had nothing to do with religion.

Religious freedom in terms of symbols: the relics of St James and the embrace of the Apostle's figure in Santiago Cathedral

Many pilgrims emphasised the uniqueness of the fact that the goal of the journey was the shrine of St. James the Apostle. They also felt the presence and support of St. James during the journey and pointed out the difference between the way leading to the Apostle's tomb in Santiago as their destination and the further way to Finister or Muxia. An important discovery for one of the respondents was that he left home for the Camino on St. James' Day. Another person carried their intentions all the way, which he had to leave at the Apostle's tomb. One of the pilgrims even compared reaching the tomb of St. James to touching God; another claimed that embracing

the figure seems to him to be a kind of superstition, and only prayer at the tomb had value. One of the young people said that:

I always treated the Camino as a pilgrimage to the tomb of St. James. And here we came and met a lot of people: from Asia, Jews... and these people went the same way. It was a shock to us. Now I'm not surprised anymore. We talked to them and for them it was a journey into each other more. Thinking about your life.

Many of the respondents emphasised the value of experiencing the Way as being equal in importance or even more valuable than actually getting to Santiago. Among the pilgrims, there are those who know very little about the figure of the Apostle, and they went on the Camino for other reasons. Sometimes it is only during the journey that they learn more about St. James and the history and tradition of the Camino.

Table 2: Sample Statements by the Pilgrims

Quote	Theme
<i>Of course, I had some intentions and always tried to attend Mass there, but you know that sometimes it is difficult at Camino, [laughter] that it is not as obvious as in Poland, that the church will always be open.</i>	Freedom of worship
<i>Being a priest, I also had the items needed for Mass. And somewhere to preach God's Word, too, but as far as other things are concerned, I have tried to reduce unnecessary things as far as possible.</i>	Freedom of worship
<i>So when someone found out that I was a priest, they often had some brief questions too. Some people were surprised that they had also met a young priest, because from France or Spain, for example, a large group of these pilgrims had rather had the opportunity to experience meeting with older priests.</i>	Freedom of worship
<i>Being, for example, a priest, somewhere for a church here in Western Europe, as is sometimes the case, as there are fewer of these priests, as it is not obvious that every church is open, that on Sundays, every church also has a Mass or the possibility of even celebrating Mass.</i>	Freedom of worship
<i>And suddenly, we want to celebrate Mass in Fisterra, we actually started to celebrate Mass there on that cliff, on those rocks, and it was blowing in such a way that it was just breaking off, and suddenly, my friend was just holding all those things, because they were just flying and so on, and we started, for example, I do not know, we are at an act of penance, I am looking down there, people from above, we chose a place so that some people would not be there, it was not a Sunday, because there was a terrible crowd. I look down from above, somewhere from a wall like this, I do not know, a guy takes a picture of us a few dozen metres higher, and suddenly I look, oh... The guy we slept with that last night before Fisterra. So, we call out to him, go ahead, go ahead, because he wanted to come to Mass.</i>	Freedom of worship
<i>Of course, at the end of this Mass for pilgrims, as we arrived last year, and this one, at the end of this pilgrimage Mass, it is also so... I, too, as a priest, blessed people</i>	Freedom of worship
<i>Today, for example, two ladies who were at Mass and they came, we met them when we entered Ferrol, and it turned out that they had come there, this year they did not go, but they came, and when we talked to them there by the sea, I finally made a cross on their forehead. Today, when they saw me, I was shocked, because I was walking in a civilian dress and they were shocked today that I was at the altar. And he says - bless us.</i>	Freedom of worship

Table 2 (cont.): Sample Statements by the Pilgrims Surveyed	
Quote	Theme
<i>There is a prayer there to James and there is a prayer to begin the pilgrimage. Last year and this year, we did something to ourselves that we said this prayer at the beginning of the pilgrimage, handing over the backpack as a bag, the trekking sticks as a stick, so we did it at the beginning. And we also said this prayer to Jacob every morning before we left. I think that was also important.</i>	Freedom of worship and Religious freedom in terms of symbols
<i>Among the three of us a nice deep conversation and a prayer lived together—both the Mass and the breviary prayer. Also, the texts that appeared somewhere there and the words of God for the next day, which fit in perfectly with what was happening to us.</i>	Freedom of speech and prayer
<i>When I got another piece of information that someone remembers, prays, it was so high up. Despite the tiredness.</i>	Freedom of speech and prayer
<i>Not only when it is beautiful and when I am next door, when it may be, let us say, an advantage for someone, but when I am not there, when I need spiritual support, prayer, help.</i>	Freedom of speech and prayer
<i>It was valuable to me to embrace everyone's prayer in some kind of individual way by giving it to the Lord God somewhere, and by the way, such nice interesting thoughts were coming up somewhere.</i>	Freedom of speech and prayer
<i>I was also able to devote much more time to them by praying at a distance from them, but I would also like to make sure that I meet them at least for a moment when I return.</i>	Freedom of speech and prayer
<i>Going on a pilgrimage, I can talk somewhere, pray, talk to God or not.</i>	Freedom of speech and prayer
<i>Especially somewhere, such a prayer also during the day, such as the rosary through Mary, and, of course, also prayers related to Mercy, the Chaplet of Divine Mercy and so on... All this also makes this space so sensitive to the spiritual presence of God.</i>	Freedom of speech and prayer
<i>And certainly, the conversation between people on the mountain trail and on the Camino trail. On Camino we met a lot of believers, a lot of non-believers, but somewhere it always came down to God, to faith and so on. On these mountain trails it is unlikely to meet this, rather the subjects are quite different. So surely the conversations between people attending these trails are quite different.</i>	Freedom of speech and prayer
<i>And now it is a question of whether you open yourself up to that road, whether you open yourself up to the grace that comes from that road, that can be pulled out, that teaches you different things, or whether you just walk away because you want to lose weight.</i>	Freedom of speech and prayer
<i>So, such conversations, well, it is also a good time to go and pray in such silence, so it is also...</i>	Freedom of speech and prayer
<i>So, it certainly makes a fundamental difference that I am bringing in these different things to rethink them first and foremost.</i>	Freedom of speech and prayer
<i>Then to James. But, yes, the moment when you can go in there and pray at his grave, that is indeed what I think is most important.</i>	Religious freedom in terms of symbols
<i>I am aware that my goal is to reach the sanctuary, the holy place, where there are ... are the relics of the Apostle, and this is one of the most important ones, because he was one of the three whom the Lord Jesus always chose with himself, so this awareness, also here at the entrance...</i>	Religious freedom in terms of symbols
<i>The way always calms me down very much, it was good to get to the tomb of St. James, because that was the goal, but there was also a way. The whole secret of the pilgrimage to Santiago, this is the way.</i>	Religious freedom in terms of symbols
<i>I was carrying various things and had to leave them at St. James' tomb. And this was done.</i>	Religious freedom in terms of symbols
<i>The awareness that Santiago, as the tomb of Jacob and his reliquary, is not the only, most important goal. As in almost all descriptions, comments, that not the goal, but the way itself is the goal. And I am aware of that. It is more about experiencing this way than about entering Santiago.</i>	Religious freedom in terms of symbols
<i>And so, reaching Jacob's tomb is a bit like touching God. Well, as if I were closer to God, it is also a spiritual experience.</i>	Religious freedom in terms of symbols

Discussion and Conclusions

In the experience of pilgrims, it is important to be aware of the sense of freedom. They are aware that they act freely, that they can perform a certain action and are not forced to do it. It is an experience of the kind that I want, and do not have to, which is given to them in the course of experiencing a personal action, called free and conscious because the very concept of freedom (gr. *eleuthería*, latin *libertas*, *liberum arbitrium*) presupposes the self-determination of personal (conscious) action (Franck, 2019; Belmonte, 2019).

The results of the study indicate that the Camino pilgrimage is linked to the experience of religious freedom by pilgrims to a greater extent than in their daily lives. Pilgrims emphasise both the aspect of freedom in religious practices, such as participation in a pilgrim's blessing rite, holy Mass or prayer of the rosary, as well as discussions on religious issues. Camino is described by the pilgrims as a meeting place of spaces of different religions and cultures in a climate of dialogue and mutual respect. The study also confirms the thesis that the Camino experience is different from a typical tourist experience. It also shows the potential of Camino in terms of religious freedom experienced by pilgrims, thanks to which some of them can find harmony, order and meaning in their own lives on Camino. The results show that the study of religious freedom on the positive side opens up a discussion on the potential of Camino and its possibilities for supporting pilgrims in many dimensions.

The manifestations of religious freedom among Polish pilgrims presented in the study are also confirmed by the following still relevant words spoken by Archbishop Julián Barrio Barrio of Santiago de Compostela during the International Congress in Santiago de Compostela about the anthropology of the Christian faith and about a Christian God, different from pagan or Greek deities, who is always with us.

Human freedom in the Christian faith is undeniable. Pilgrim is a homo viator, homo peregrinus, who has received the freedom to become what he wants. The Camino's journey is opening up to the mystery, to infinity, to God (Matuszewska-Sulima, 2018).

The Archbishop also emphasised the question of witnessing to faith, which is what thousands of pilgrims

coming to Santiago de Compostela have been looking for and still are looking for with humility and repentance. On another occasion, Julián Barrio Barrio stated that the pilgrim who walks the path of James is seeking exactly that spiritual element in which lies the true genesis of anthropology and the truth about the human being (Matuszewska-Sulima, 2018). Therefore, although Polish pilgrims were investigated, these issues remain universal. However, further research among pilgrims of other nationalities could reveal potential and interesting voices in this discussion. The study of other rituals on the Camino (e.g. 'leaving a stone' at Cruz de Ferro) could be another reference to the topic of religious freedom that has been raised.

From the perspective of living in postmodern times, between two extremes: fear of freedom and the absolutisation of freedom, the dean of Santiago Perez López Cathedral drew attention to representatives of the young generations, who are distinguished by great indifference and religious relativism. Religious values have been replaced and crippled by other daily interests, while religious indifference is caused, among other things, by a focus on professional matters, happiness and power, money and consumption. Thus, we can observe the disappearance of the Christian identity caused by a distance from faith, sacramental practices, Christian morals and religious institutions. In this situation, pilgrimage in its diverse forms and acceptance, is a space that brings to light the religious and popular piety.

We know [said Perez López] that we are in the midst of a deep crisis that has turned into a crisis of God. Schematically we could say: religion yes, but God no (Matuszewska-Sulima, 2018:48-49).

The Camino de Santiago, on the other hand, is a space fundamentally different from that which dominates the secularised postmodern world. Pilgrims' escapism to Camino is understood as a desire to break away from everyday life, is a creative process of transformation that creates something new (Seryczyńska, 2019). This statement is confirmed by the words of the pilgrims themselves:

Camino de Santiago

is a way to God, but above all a way to ourselves. From Camino the better returns, and in Santiago the old man dies and a new one is born (Mróz et al., 2014:122).

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