

CHAPTER FOUR

Retreat, Holy Places and Pilgrimage

After an extensive review of the existing literature to decide amongst other aims the research gap and subsequent literature study, a scarcity of literature on holy places, pilgrimage, and especially retreat became available. I made optimum use of the sources available however; I had to rely on the empiric journey itself to provide most of the data discussed in chapter four.

4.1 Retreat

4.1.1 An Overview

My observation and experience is that the pressure, challenges, and opportunities in full time professional ministry multiplied the last twenty years, but the demands and expectations placed on ministry have grown exponentially. Job (1993:11-12) came to the conclusion after research done on pastors and professional religious workers, that many had experienced disillusionment, depression and disappointment not only because of high workloads but also because of the contradiction between their value system, world view, expectations and those of the environment they work in. He also discovered that the care for the soul or *inner sanctuary* has often relegated in the process to second or last place. In my own ministry over the years my activist stance and a strong task-orientated unbalanced way of life, took its toll. At one stage, I realised an ongoing interior emptiness, compassion fatigue and a spiritual poverty. I went for spiritual direction to amongst others an Anglican priest. He and others recommended from their own experience and the practice in their tradition that regular retreats, personal as well as group retreats could be one effective way of creating space and time to receive Gods' healing for

brokenness, Gods' presence for emptiness, and Gods' companionship for loneliness and Gods' enabling strength for ministry. There developed in me with time and especially during the period of burnout and aridness, awareness, a desire to experience retreat, to withdraw at times for a day weekend or more and to be more open to the mystery of God and to rest passively in his love, to sit at the feet of Jesus. It has since become more and more part of my walk with God. The disciples of Jesus were engaged in a demanding and compassionate work, which was in the forefront of human need, and from which there was little respite. Jesus knew this and said to them "come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while" (Mark 6:31). Athletes withdraw from an easy routine into long hours of training before actually entering the contest. The archer withdraws the bowstring in order to thrust the arrow to its mark. Nature retreats into winter, and afterwards bursts out with the new leaves and blossoms of spring. The *rhythm of retreat and return* is woven into the fabric of life itself. The believer may take off from the market place into the *desert* or mountain to deepen his or her life of prayer, or to rest from struggles and stresses of daily life. This process became a period of physical, mental and spiritual renewal for many pilgrims as this research study has indeed shown.

To speak of retreat in a competitive world that emphasizes risk, strength, action, attack and getting in before one's opponent, may suggest for many weakness, passivity and running away. The religious world in the West is no less worldly in this respect, and the frenetic activity which accompanies much of evangelism, church administration and religious service had for many years neither time nor place for retreat (cf Magee 1978:7). There has been a turning of the tide, perhaps as a corrective to all this and as a reaction to the reductionism in Christian theology for example a disassociate tendency in Dutch Reformed spirituality and the devaluation of the life of prayer (cf Ramon 1987:7). Retreats provide an opportunity for

pilgrims to immerse themselves, twenty four hours, forty eight hours or a week or longer, in the atmosphere and language of life lived in depth and prayer, being embraced by the divine mystery and moving deeper into God. God is the quest, seeking union with him, to be alone with him and silent before him (Steere 1967:100). Retreat facilitates a way of going beyond mere knowledge about God and religious truths to the experience of God and truth. There seems to be a growing yearning amongst research participants for a greater deeper meaning in life, for something beyond material success and scientific achievement, for example for the spiritual. This inner advance or journey to the *inner mountain* seems to be gaining momentum and taking place in not only the hearts of pilgrims but in more and more monasteries and retreat centres over the globe, visited by pilgrims.

Retreat provides an opportunity for the research participants for inward reflection. Being part of an adventure involves risk, the risk of giving up things for example defences, fears, and idols or dropping of pretences and unlocking doors that may lead to fullness of life. Many experienced it as a *pilgrimage*, a journey. They left the known environment of work and home arriving at a retreat centre (the *unknown*). The retreat facilitated a fresh view of God, self, others, and the world. For some it was as if years of their lives were lived or interpreted or recentred in only one weekend. The silence, the solitude, the times of community provided impetus for being available to God with heart and mind open to the interior promptings of the Holy Spirit.

It is difficult to define the process or experience of a retreat, the best definition may evolve by personally going on a retreat and by listening to the experience of other pilgrims. Two words commonly used to describe time out from ordinary routine could be helpful in defining the concept of retreat. The first; *vacation* indicates an open and empty space, an arena of

silence and stillness for God to work, a vacating of oneself from the ordinary and legitimate pursuits of work and other distraction in order to spend more focused or quality time in Gods' presence. The second; *holiday* indicates that such time spent does not happen in a negative vacuum but more within sanctifying or redeeming of time. The days spent may become "holy days" moving deeper inwards and into Gods' presence and loving embrace (Magee 1978:10-11; cf Ramon 1987:14-16). Retreat became a time apart (eight hours , twenty four hours, a week, two weeks or longer) from the usual business, circumstances or environment of retreatants/pilgrims, during which to engage in practices or disciplines that facilitated a deep interchange between and communion with God, oneself and fellow pilgrims on retreat.

An essential perspective, looking back on the retreats planned and conducted as part of the research narrative, is that which one cannot plan, organize, programme or control. It is difficult to put into words but I refer to the aspect of *Mystery*, the unpredictable, or the unseen. It serves as reminder that retreat and retreatants ought to be given the freedom during the retreat to just be there (being-with-God and not so much protocol, prescriptions, and boundaries). It is the expectation that the Spirit of God could work creatively during retreat and in unique unexpected ways. The when and how of it is not for a spiritual director or retreatant to prescribe or to be always aware of consciously. At times during retreats Gods' presence manifested as a deep awareness of the fullness of the present moment or as a new calling to add real value to people when returning home. Then the sight of flowers and a tree in the quiet of the morning or a smile from another retreatant that reaches deep within or a new appreciation for life, God or family as well as a new commitment to it. My first monastic retreat illustrates this aspect of retreat. It was a two-day personal retreat to St Benedict's House in Rosettenville Johannesburg in 1996. I became part of the monastic rhythm of the daily Prayer Office in

the chapel silence, work and eating with the Anglican community of sisters who permanently live there. Their was ample time available to spent alone in the room, or in the garden, alone in the chapel or at times with the members of the community, and for reflection, reading, journaling. At one stage, the Holy Spirit and the presence of God took hold and began such deep and interior teaching that shook me very deeply and had profound implications afterwards for ministry, spirituality, and myself. I reflectively wrote down what I heard, felt, and experienced. Looking back on that first retreat experience, it opened a new dimension by God in my heart. It was a step towards a new kind of *pilgrimage* narrative and *inner journey* that would lead me more and more to the monastic way of retreat and eventually doing the research on the subject.

4.1.2 Types of Retreat

4.1.2.1 Conducted Retreat

A spiritual director gives address, lead meditations and may decide to be available for interviews, counselling or confessions. People on the retreat could be members of a church congregation or a group of people where the participants do not know one another at the outset of the retreat. A conducted retreat may have a central theme and more than one leader and may include periods of silence, sharing, solitude and of community.

4.1.2.2 Un-conducted Retreat

The retreatants could eat or worship together but there is also freedom for those who wish to spend more time alone. Help or guidance could be available via a brother or sister but usually the emphasis is more on prayerful silence and meditation for example the retreats I participated in at St. Benedict's house in Rosettenville. The sister were available for spiritual direction, I shared with them my reason for coming and there was

no pressure on me to be part of their prayer offices in the chapel three times a day, I could eat in silence or with them at their table.

4.1.2.3 Individually Directed Retreat

It may last a day or week or even a month mostly in silence with a director available when needed for example at Sediba at Hartbeespoortdam.

Sometimes it will take the form of a one-to-one relationship according to the needs of the retreatant on a daily basis with a spiritual director. In other instances, most of the time would be spent alone in silence, optional prayer times in the chapel and sharing with the spiritual director on the premises.

4.1.2.4 Vocational Retreat

A group of people with the same occupation for example pastors of the Dutch Reformed church will gather for the deepening of their interior life and meditating on their calling, life in a congregation and relationship with God, family and others. Business people or other occupations could retreat together for a day or weekend meditating, being in silence, and sharing with one another their experience of God, occupation and possible new horizons of personal, spiritual growth and power.

4.1.2.5 Dialogue Retreat

The aim or atmosphere of such a retreat will be to provide enough time and scope during the retreat for silent dialogue with God, especially listening to his presence and voice and in the process facilitating an opening up towards fellow retreatants in the form of group discussion and sharing. Magee (1967:64) says:

In retreat we are first forced into outward silence so that the habitual show of merely conventional togetherness may be broken. At first, we are embarrassed by the glances and gestures of

others. But gradually, we begin to realise that they and we are becoming more and more present to one another, that a new level of dialogue is emerging, a level of which we never dreamed in our talkative superficial sociability.

The empirical data show that during retreat, pilgrims may become more and more open to the *eternal Presence* and this in turn heightens all the other sensibilities. For example in the silent dialogue with God, the door to others opens up. We have experienced this as a team of pastors (my colleagues and I) on retreat in 2004 and in 1999 as a group of fourteen pastors of the same diocese as well as in 2005 as the leadership team of the congregation (church board). In the presence of God and in silence we discovered new dimensions of God, self and each other and the mystery and wonder of God, self and the other. The retreat place, the silence, meditations, and prayers provided a *healing*, transparent atmosphere of truth and honesty, awareness of God and self and fellow retreatants in an authentic way. In the meeting of one another, being there as you are and the others as they are, and in the presence of God, the sharing deepened and the light each received from God shone forth so much more brilliantly and in a healing way as we shared emotions and insights with one another.

4.1.2.6 The Creative or Arts Retreat

The focus of such a retreat would be on the creative artistic process and imagination whether poetry, dancing, theatre or drama, sculpture and painting. During the retreat, the unity of the spiritual, creative and material will be emphasized clearing the way or opening the doors for the miracle of Gods' creative artistic presence amidst the retreatants (Steere 1967:84). Other elements that could enhance the whole experience may be silence, contemplation, and personal soul searching, for example to

gather resources and to ponder on God and nature and creation. Informality, authenticity, exercising of the senses, music, space and touch, colour, sounds could further stimulate the artistic flow. However, most of the retreat's focus which will last preferably a weekend or longer would be on the "creating process" itself and therefore the venue and necessary materials are very important. The climax of the retreat process could be the presenting of the art works created during a special silent and contemplative worship service setting where the presence of God and his creative and artistic powers may be shared and celebrated.

Although I have implemented some aspects of creativity and art into retreat at times for example body awareness, posture, walk in a labyrinth, drawing, spiritual journaling, liturgical dance and poetry, I have not yet ventured into the conducting of an Arts retreat. There could well be a real need for such a venture, probably also among young adults. Elements of art and artistic creativity during a monastic retreat to celebrate the creative powers of God, the art of nature and creation, the gift of creativity in man/woman as co-creators could be experienced in a humble and deep way whilst being on holy ground in the presence of God. This could be an aspect relevant for future research.

4.1.2.7 Private Retreat

The retreatant plans his or her own pattern for the time. Usually one is most of the time in silence, solitude and in scripture. A place in nature, monastic house, or at a retreat centre could be appropriate. At Taizé, there are usually pilgrims that would arrive for a week, at times sharing in the Divine Office and Eucharist but who would maintain complete silence and solitude outside the Divine Office in the church of reconciliation and not sharing in any other group activities at all.

4.1.2.8 Quiet One Day Retreat

One day is set aside for prayer, study, meditation, and reflection. I have conducted a couple of these type retreats for example at Stigmatine house in Pretoria-North and at Leopard Lodge near Hartbeespoort Dam. I found this type of retreat to be practical for people who do not have the time because of very busy schedules to attend a weekend or longer retreat.

First time retreatants were exposed to elements of monastic retreat in a slower gentler way and many times this provided the inspiration or preparation to be part of a longer retreat on another occasion.

4.1.2.9 Classical Retreat

Nearly all of the monastic retreats I have experienced as pilgrim as well as all of those I have directed the discipline of silence has been used rather extensively. The monasteries visited incorporated many long periods of silence with usually some time provided to share with others, to sing, or to pray together. In monasteries, silence is cherished and all pilgrims are invited to move into it. A combination of silence and talking were used in the retreats I have planned and led, always with more emphasis on silence. When the retreatants were mostly first-time pilgrims on a monastic type of retreat cherishing silence, solitude and listening and unceasing prayer, more time was spent during the first part of the weekend for orientation. Some teaching on monasticism or elements of monastic retreat was given and time for questions. More and longer periods of silence were introduced as the retreat progressed. The study showed that silence for many, especially in the beginning of the retreat, was difficult to cope with. For those introduced to silence for shorter periods for example during half day or one-day retreats before, it was much less threatening or less uncomfortable.

4.1.2.10 Ecumenical Retreat

It is possible to discuss and practice ecumenism in the ethereal realms of official dialogues, decisions of denominational synods or councils and of theological accords. However, I agree with Brother Roger (1988:12-14) of Taizé that the first manifestations of ecumenism were in the domain not of theology or doctrine but of spirituality and worship. The Taizé ecumenical community of priests (brothers) where thousands of pilgrims visit is ecumenical. They as well as the pilgrims from all over the world represent Evangelical, Catholic and Orthodox Church traditions. The unity in diversity was a meaningful and enriching experience for the pilgrims interviewed. The name of the church or chapel/cathedral, “Church of Reconciliation” confirms not only the vertical relationship with God but also the horizontal ecumenical dimension. The basis and vital core of the ecumenical experience on the Taizé hill is not dogma, creed or theology, but prayer as communion with God the Source of Life who is the source of communion between human beings. The heartbeat of the ecumenical retreat experience is the common prayer (Divine Office) three times a day in the church of reconciliation that includes the ecumenical brothers of the community (Protestant and Catholic) with the thousands of young adults and the not so young. Together in at least ten different languages, prayer is practiced within a liturgy of Psalms that are sung, Scripture readings, litanies of intercession and a long period of silence. After the liturgical part of the service, worship continues by way of simple meditative chants consisting of a few words from Scripture repeated repeatedly. This type of common prayer, meditative and accessible to all, brings together people of a great variety of background, races, cultures, spiritualities, and age groups.

Retreatants I met and interviewed at Taizé and my own experience, show a diversity of people transfigured into a multicoloured unity by singing, listening to passages from the Gospel, praying and being silent together in

Gods' presence. I interviewed Unitarian Universalists, Reformed and Catholic theologians, non-religious and non-denominational people, very religious and committed to their church Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox Christians. I met people there more for a holiday or out of curiosity, God-seekers and "New-Age" spiritualities. The common prayer or Divine Office provided a source to drink from and the opportunity to be drawn out of isolation into celebration of unity despite diversity. Brother John of Taize (1988:12-14) describes it as "the true miracle of prayer is more inward: little by little the person who prays is drawn into that other world, taken hold of by God...being transfigured by his transforming presence so that they begin to view others differently". Another example of ecumenical retreat is the Lutheran, Anglican, Roman Catholic and Orthodox retreat committee in Los Angeles who developed over the years a joint retreat experience with two focal points namely communal prayer (silence, contemplation) and sessions of group sharing on the spiritual journey and formation. For example the spiritual director or retreat master (each year alternately from another denomination) would first share his experience with the whole group and afterwards gathering in small groups, integrating the four ecclesial communities, each would have the opportunity to share his/her own journey of faith. In the beginning, the yearly retreats were for ordained clergy only, but later lay people were also included (Br.John 1988:27-29).

The cross fertilization of insights and emphasis of the representatives of the different church traditions (Evangelical warmth, zeal, enthusiasm, personal redemption experience, Catholic sacramental mystical life and the church that sanctifies, and Eastern orthodoxy liturgy drenched with heavenly ritual and symbol) together for retreat, added value to the whole retreat experience of the pilgrims interviewed. Also identified was a similar depth of desire to find and experience God or moving deeper into his presence regardless of tradition or denomination.

4.1.3 Pastoral Care and Retreat

Pastoral care, counselling, and spirituality are interwoven. *Pastoral counselling* is the experience of telling stories within a constructive framework for example in a congregational/parish setting or during a weekend retreat. Furthermore it is the systematic, constructive attention to the ways that individuals story their lives in order to develop new, more fulfilling stories (re-storying) by connecting the present story to an implicit story that may lie behind it (cf Capps 1998:viii, 10-11). *Spirituality* is a person's religious experience or to be in the presence of God, a life of faith in interior submission to God and pervading all motivation and behaviour, functioning according to Keating (2003:147) as a catalyst that may integrate, direct and unify all one's activity. Pastoral care or counselling is a process of listening and "searching with people for a way in which to experience (or story/re-story) their situation in the presence of God (Heitink 1993:35).

Henri Nouwen linked pastoral care and spirituality within the contexts of personal self-exploration of weakness/wounded ness as well as remembrance in a experiential, subjective, intuitive and personal way (Gillepsie 2002:117, see Dreyer 2003:718). Nouwen's (1979:81) invitation as *wounded healer* to fellow pilgrims is into the story/ies of his personal pilgrimage, inviting them to learn from it. He (1979:81) puts it as follows:

Since it is the task of the minister (pastor) to make visible the first vestiges of liberation for others, he (she) must bind his (her) own wounds carefully in anticipation of the moment when he (she) will be needed. The pastoral caregiver is called to be the wounded healer, the one who must look after his (her) own wounds but at the

same time be prepared to heal the wounds of others.

Nouwen further explores the connection between pastoral counselling and spirituality within the context of remembrance where the caregiver with profound spirituality as way of living in the Spirit, becomes and is perceived as the living reminder (healing, guiding and sustaining) of Jesus. The story of personal human suffering and the story of the suffering of Jesus are connected and people's wounds may remind them of the need for healing or wholeness that will be met by grace (Dreyer 2003:721). Building on memories can unmask the illusion of present comfort and remind people of the story of God in order to have hope for the future (Nouwen 1977:73).

The illusion that there could be idealistic, escapist, quick fix methods to lead people into easy *wholesale wholeness* is rampant everywhere. De Waal (1989:23) is convinced there is no "perfect healing" and that each human being carries their own wounds, anguishes and own difficulties in relationships. It is more a question of learning to live day by day with this state of reality and not in a state of illusion of perfectionism. The monastic way, for example rule of St. Benedict provides a health generating way because it reminds people to look at pain honestly and invites them to open up their hearts to Gods' unconditional ever-embracing love. Gods' love can stimulate pilgrims forward on the path of healing, transformation, and new life. Monastic spirituality and the monastic narrative is a reminder that people are not alone with their stories of anguish and pain but part of a compassionate community of wounded healers reaching out to comfort them.

White (1993:35) stresses that in a postmodern context both minister (pastoral caregiver) and the one in need should dialogically seek

together for authentic stories, expressing own convictions not in a directive coercive way, but guidance with enough room for the other to come to an unique understanding of his/her life in Gods' presence. People's lives are shaped by the meaning that they ascribe to their experience and by the language practices and cultural practices of self that these lives are recruited into. The challenge then is that (during retreat and in post modern research also) these stories should be listened to, accepted and respected and together a new story or new reality could develop together in a process of re-contextualization). It is a listening process characterized by compassion without judgement, pride or resentment, a suffering with, sharing in and feeling the hardships of others by going where it hurts, sharing in the brokenness, fear, confusion and anguish of fellow pilgrims (Nouwen 1983:15-16, 41). Compassion represents the essence of Christian life and of a retreat.

For retreat to take place within an atmosphere of healing, guidance or remembering asks for an integration of spirituality and pastoral care in the lives of the spiritual director (pastoral caregiver) and the retreatants. Solitude may provide a way for caregiver (spiritual director) and retreatant to understand and articulate their inner world. Having an encounter being alone with the Alone, listening can bring pilgrims closer, deeper into the healing presence of God. Many retreatants experienced the prayer of tears in these times of solitude, the tonality of consciousness changes during meditation and thoughts, breathing, heartbeat, metabolism, brain waves, blood pressure change also. During the phases of solitude coupled with silence, meditation, and an encounter with God, some pilgrims (Nouwen 1981:13-14; cf Müller 1996:32-37) experienced deep insight into inner "demons" and pain. De Waal (1989:21) states, "We all stand in need of healing, we are all seeking wholeness." Inner conflicts and contradictions should be attended to lest they torn people apart and inflict wounds on others.

Solitude during a retreat is for Nouwen (1990:25) the “furnace of transformation.” It is a refinement of illusions of the false self and compulsions of the world. It is in the holy place of solitude that ministry (caring) and spirituality embrace and the new woman or the new man can emerge.

A retreat has the potential of a constructive framework for people to share their stories with God (in solitude), with the spiritual director and with the community. The research narrative shows that the atmosphere and environment of a monastic retreat, facilitated story interpretation and new understandings of the story. The person leading the retreat as spiritual director is also caregiver or counsellor who is available for the pilgrims on the retreat. The experience of retreatants has been that the periods of silence and solitude made them more receptive and open for listening, sharing, and direction. This made personal spiritual counselling more natural and possible. People are invited to share their stories and the caregiver provides more than assurance, compassion and listening but according to Capps (1998:10-11) interprets also, see things in the story the storyteller does not see, and may offer some suggestions or advice if necessary. The spiritual director or caregiver reflects on how we story our lives (their own as well as those who come for assistance). Capps (see 1998:53-170) describes three different ways of storying, or way of being evolving: *inspirationally* (challenges are overcome, growing stronger in the process), *paradoxically* (dilemmas of life, finding graceful ways out of or through it) and *miraculously* (occurring of miracles, expecting it and contributing to its realization). The caregiver could prove helpful within this context of story types and the preferred story world of those that seek help. He/she can use either the power of suggestion, or the untying of paradoxical knots or discernment of the exceptions (Capps 1998:14, 15).

Regarding the spiritual director's involvement with the stories and pastoral care of pilgrims during retreat, two paths are usually followed : Pastoral or personal interaction with retreatants are avoided as much as possible believing that the pilgrim can get further if left alone in the silence where the Divine Therapist does the only lasting work. Pastoral care and interaction with pilgrims are valued highly, having personal interviews inviting them to come for assistance or sharing their stories. Monasteries visited, tend to follow the first path although for example at Taize, the welcome letter at least communicated that a brother is available after common prayer if needed by a pilgrim. The retreatants response regarding this aspect differed. The fact that someone was available was enough for most of them. The decision of the spiritual director in discerning where the emphasis ought to be will depend on the needs of the pilgrims, the elements, structure, and character of the retreat.

Small group discussions during retreat provided a constructive context, a circle of love and acceptance in which to listen to and to share stories with one another. In such groups, the pilgrims experienced at times with others that the very feeling that has seemed to them most personal, private and hence incomprehensible by others, has turned out to be an expression for which there were resonance and resemblance in many of the others. In the words of Carl Rogers (1961:26): "what is most personal is most general", there comes the revelation that what is most unique and personal in each one during a retreat, when it were shared or expressed with the group or another individual, spoke most deeply to others. Thus when listening to another person telling his/her story, people are listening to their own stories.

4.2 Pilgrimage

4.2.1 An Overview

Between nineteen eighty three and nineteen ninety three the number of pilgrimages, for example to Santiago de Compostela in Spain increased by three thousand five hundred percent; from two thousand pilgrims to seventy thousand per year (Malloy 1998:2-25). The concept pilgrimage in the broad sense of the word refers primarily to a person “on the way to,” a passing guest travelling towards new horizons, who undertakes a personal adventure to a holy spot or for that person a sacred place.

Pilgrimage, making one’s way to holy places, is an ascetic practice that may be helpful for the Christian to find salvation or experience deepening of faith through the difficulties and devotions of a temporary exile and by coming in contact with the divine, obtaining grace at the pilgrimage site or offering gratitude there (Br. John 1984:382-393).

There is a spirit of community that is integral part of pilgrimage. It is identifying with something bigger than the individual, sharing a bond with others, journeying on the same path of aches, pains, and triumphs. Yet the pilgrim is also utterly alone because the journey is not only to a physical place with others but into the individual’s soul. Pilgrimage is not only for the religious but the whole phenomenon tends to hold up a mirror to what is sacred for a specific time or age. The pilgrim is therefore no ordinary traveller and his/her map is in the heart (Time 2004:31). Pilgrimage is a communal rite of passage through space, home and away from home, a journey to a sacred place. It can serve as metaphor for the inner journey to the inner mountain. Some undertake it because of religious motives and others simply as a *moving out* that contrasts with the habitual staying at home (Skar 1985:89; cf Morinis 1981:282).

Turner (see 1972:234-245) explains the experience of a pilgrimage based on the classic three-stage form of rite of passage for example:

- The *separation* phase starts with the journey to a centre or place out there. The journey is not so much through a threshold that marks a change in the individual's social status as with initiation rites, but more a leaving behind of the usual routine and habits. A religious believer of any culture may at times look beyond the local church, shrine, or temple, feel the call of some distant holy place or sacred site renowned for miracles or the renewal of faith, and resolve to journey there.
- The *liminality-communitas* stage refers to the journey itself, the sojourn to the shrine or sacred spot and the encounter with the sacred there. It is characterised by an awareness of temporary release from social ties and order. Even secular tourists may be at heart pilgrims who want to switch worlds and may even experience transcendence in the situation of liminality whilst in a different country or environment that is special to them. The outward journey may thus become a way of *external mysticism*. Pilgrims with a mystical or monastic approach on the other hand, make an inward sacred journey or *interior spiritual pilgrimage*. Nevertheless, pilgrims, mystics and tourists alike are freed for a period from the nets of social structure. This middle stage of a pilgrimage is further marked by a strong sense of *communitas* or community channelled by the beliefs, values and norms of the religious tradition as well as a preference for simplicity in dress and behaviour, a sense of ordeal and by reflection on the basic meaning of one's religion. Once started the pilgrimage may become quite democratic, rich in its own symbolism and in *communitas* and as such potentially subversive from a social structural point of view.

- The *aggregation* phase is the return, the homecoming with the potential of new blessings to be shared or new perspectives gained, or regeneration experienced, as for example the homecoming after a study tour-pilgrimage to Taize, Assisi and La Pierre Quie Vire or the pilgrims going back to everyday life after a conducted weekend retreat.

Pilgrimage therefore is a dynamic process, a fluid and ever-changing phenomenon, sometimes spontaneous or initially unstructured or structured and may be outside the bounds of religious orthodoxy. It is primarily a popular rite of passage as a venture into religious, spiritual, or even secular experience and could be but not always a transition into a higher or *regenerative* status.

The hermits of the eleventh and twelfth centuries undertook numerous pilgrimages. The monasteries of that era seemingly failed to attract or keep the hermits, as they perceived monasteries as too lax in observance and discipline, too worldly, living too comfortable, and not doing enough to live according to the precepts of the gospel. The pilgrimages of the new hermits were much less limited in scope than conventional pilgrimage. The main objective was not so much the visit of shrines but emphasizing the principle of renunciation. The pilgrims would leave their families, friends, and homeland to become exiles in foreign regions. The intention of the self-imposed banishment was to mirror the fate of humanity in exile from the kingdom of heaven. The wandering pilgrim had the potential as means for atonement of past sins, an opportunity for officially beginning a new way of life and a chance for reorientation and reflection after visiting holy places and religious men. Their main aim was to relive the life of the apostles, to revive the model of the early church and to recreate a way of life they felt existing monasticism had obliterated and forgotten. They also emulated the desert monks of the third and fourth centuries and found inspiration in the patristic literature. At St Mary's in York, a group left the

abbey so that they could amend their lives according to the rule of St. Benedict. They wanted therefore to keep rules, which had preserved, or which would preserve the early Christian practices as faithfully as possible (Leyser 1983:21-28). They had at their disposal a vast body of literature as source of inspiration and a guide to actual observances. Their period of pilgrimage into the desert or to other sacred places provided a time of preparation and training in a way of life to serve the Lord thereafter for all time. This movement differs from that of St. Francis and his followers in the following century in that Francis never in the beginning intended to write a rule.

There have been critical studies of pilgrimage since the time they started. In the year 379 Gregory of Nyssa (in Schaff & Wace 1892:382-383) wrote a letter based on his experience of going to Jerusalem, a letter which has been ever since an embarrassment to supporters of pilgrimage. He stated that the gospels were silent on pilgrimage, and that immorality is encouraged by pilgrimages because of free mixing of sexes but his main criticism was theological. He and so would many after him, emphasized that the relationship with God and with others is what is central to Christianity. Pilgrimages; according to Lewis (1992:388-394) are undertaken to places held sacred and particular places should not be of any importance to Christians, therefore it is far better to stay home. He also states that a change of place does not affect any drawing nearer to God.

The experience of the pilgrims met on the research journey in France and Italy for retreat was just the opposite. Many felt that the venue or the specific monastery did enhance the spiritual search or to draw closer to God. There is a tendency in Scripture for God to choose places to reveal himself in a special or more dramatic way for example Jerusalem or Bethlehem or the desert. One of the reasons I visited Israel a few years

ago with a group of pilgrims was not so much to meet God in Bethlehem or in the garden tomb of Jesus. God is a God of all places, active in his children and in his world. However, I did experience God there and in later years during monastic retreats in a different, special, sometimes more profound way in the monasteries visited. My experience and that of some of the pilgrims I interviewed were that it was not only an edifying exercise in piety but also a reflection upon the essence of life and the relationship with God. For some pilgrims it was an experience of renewal of the desire to walk in the steps of the pilgrim-God, to follow Jesus on the pilgrimage of life and to be of greater service to others, especially those that suffer.

Although there are critical voices on the pilgrimage to "sacred" places as special places where one may move deeper into the presence of God, it must be remembered that Christianity started in a particular place and do have a theological significant history which highlights a wide variety of places. The history of Christianity reveals places where events of Christian significance occurred. Examples are: The Egyptian desert (Mount Colzim where St. Anthony spent years in solitude) as the cradle of monasticism as well as the lives of many dedicated mystics and fathers, Canterbury as place of martyrdom, Rome as place of past persecution and present papal authority, Assisi as heartland of St. Francis where his call to simplicity and identification with the sufferings of Christ may be pondered and also perhaps the *inappropriateness* of the exquisite beautiful and great expensive church built to honour the little, poor simple follower of Christ.

The focus on specific places could also be viewed within the context of significant events or experiences for example an individual or group may have a significant experience of God or and encounter with God and his people in places which may collect many kinds of associations and be special or sacred to those involved for example on the Taize hill. It could be a specific retreat centre, cathedral, garden, mountain, or monastery. The purpose of going to a specific place is to know and experience God

deeply or drawing closer to God. The challenge is (and recommendable) for the pilgrim to return home to implement this greater understanding or significant experience back home. The pilgrimage then to sacred places may have the paradoxical effect of enabling pilgrims after the pilgrimage to be more profoundly at home than before the pilgrimage, culminating in a new way of life.

4.2.2 Pilgrimage in Judaeo-Christian tradition

The story of Abraham as a corporate personality (De Fraine 1963:117), is the narrative of how a then unknown God entered Abraham's life (Gen 12:1-4) marking the beginning of a long pilgrimage. The pilgrim-existence-towards, affirms that to believe in God is to walk with God or to experience an existence-with-God (Gen 5:24; 6:9; 48:15). In this call and the road (pilgrimage) that was thus taken, Israel saw not only an event in her earliest history, but also a basic characteristic of her whole existence before God (Von Rad 1972:159). Taken from a community of nations and never really rooted in Canaan, being even a "stranger" or pilgrim underway there (Lev 25:23; Ps 39:12), Israel perceived the call as being led on a special road to a special place. The plan and goal of this pilgrimage lay completely in the hand of God. With this new relationship came the promise of blessings or a new life described in images of a country or land and an offspring. The pilgrim existence implies also faith in God manifested as a break with the known, to leave and to risk journeying with God as pilgrim-God not linked or confined to a particular place.

Abraham becomes in this story a model of obedient venturing on pilgrimage with God. Von Rad (1972:161) stresses that to leave home and break ancestral bonds was to expect of ancient people almost the impossible.

The story of the Exodus is another pilgrimage story where the pilgrim-God loyal to his people (Kaiser 1979:103) comes down to deliver his people

who were oppressed and wounded (Ex 3:7-8). To go on a pilgrimage even at first through a desert, signifies leaving both the hardships and the situation of slavery in order to find true freedom by walking with God. This freedom is not necessarily easy to achieve. It may lead into and through trials and wilderness; it has the potential to become a place of extreme intimacy between man and his/her God. It is accompanied with the promise of salvation and blessings (Westermann 1981:147). Deuteronomy exhorts the faithful to retain their pilgrim-hearts, even when settling in the land promised to their fathers and mothers (Deut 8:2-6; 11-16) and to remember the Source of Life's (Craigie 1981:185) miraculous provision and sustenance. Later in the darkest moment of the history of Israel, following the exile to Babylon, the prophets opened new perspectives of a new and even greater Exodus (Is 43:16) and Pilgrimage back to Jerusalem with Mount Zion becoming the classic image of Israel's restoration (Clements 1978:145). The referral to Jerusalem (Zion), the royal house, the Temple and the City underlines Gods' concrete presence in the midst of his people. The term *new-Exodus* applies not only to the nation (Is 60-62), but also to the rebuilding of the holy City where God will reside in his House and the son of David reign as a peace-loving king (Westermann 1969:353, 356-357).

The Torah and the Prophets lay the foundations of the pilgrim-faith. Jesus for his part became not only the pilgrim in an external sense as the one who has nowhere to lay his head (Luke 9:58). The essence of his pilgrim identity is revealed in his servant hood and suffering on the journey to Jerusalem. He knew what rejection and homelessness meant and his followers ought to be ready for the same experience (Marshall 1978:410). Jesus is the Pilgrim par excellence who travels constantly to and fro between Nazareth in Galilee, Judea with Bethlehem the city of David, and Jerusalem with its Temple. In Matthew's story the family follows the whole journey of its ancestors with the descent into Egypt (Matt 2:14) and the

return to the land of Israel (Matt 2:20). Moses lived as young man in Egypt, fled to Midian and then called back to lead the people of God out of Egypt (Ex 4:22, 23). Jesus, representative of the “true” Israel is kept safe in Egypt just as Moses was kept safe and is called to out of Egypt to return to Israel (Nielsen 1978:50, 51).

The pilgrimages that Jesus undertook to commemorate the Passover, the Festival of Weeks and the Festival of Booths, brought him into conflict with the religious leaders in Jerusalem. The *communal connectivity* (*Liminality-Communitas*) of Jesus’ pilgrimages was not with the autocratic regime and ideological church structures, but with those socially marginalized from Jerusalem in the outlying villages of Bethany and Bethphage. They were prostitutes, lepers, and handicapped as well as people representing the non-elitist masses. (see Frick 1977:28-45; cf Meeks 1983:80). The communal connection of these relations became a political power as the pilgrims moved to Jerusalem (Sandrett-Leathermann 1999:319). Jesus and his disciples dramatically reconfigured the power structures of church and politics in Jerusalem. In addition, according to Job and Schawchuck (1983:391), built on Walter Brueggeman Christology (1978), this reconfiguration was accomplished not as an expected revolution with swords but during a pilgrimage ritual and with the Cross.

As pilgrim with no fixed abode in this world, Jesus is more than a new Moses or a new Abraham. He is also the pilgrim-God who comes into the world to “fight” for marginalized people and invites them to come after him leaving, departing from the old way of life. He speaks and charts Gods’ path in the heart of people’s history and their hearts. He is the pilgrim or human being who heard the divine Word of God and shaped his whole existence to it. The pilgrimage ends and culminates when the risen and exalted Christ becomes the Way (Jn 14:6) to the Father and to humankind (Br. John 1984:380-393). The Gospels describe the Christian as a follower

of Christ, someone who listens to Christ's message and call and risks everything in order to follow him on the journey. Although Christians remain in the world they have been transformed with the homeland now in heaven and citizens of another Kingdom (Col 1:13) living as strangers and pilgrims in this world (one Pet 2:11). Christ brought his people out of the dark and dismal realm of false ideas and ideological ideals into a new land or Kingdom characterized by clearer vision and specific expectations (Hendriksen 1979:63; Greijdanus nd:46).

The question remains however if an authentic pilgrimage theology can be consonant/reconciled with the aspirations and experience of human beings in a modern materialistic world. Pilgrimage is an invitation and a challenge to detachment, to be constantly *on the move* together with the pilgrim-God and fellow-pilgrims, nourishing, nurturing, evoking alternative perception and consciousness than the dominant consciousness and perception of culture and society.

4.2.3 A Classification of Pilgrimages

Turner (1978:180-200) provides a typology for examining pilgrimage:

- *Archaic* pilgrimage originates in very ancient times and usually little or nothing is known of their foundation. The Huichol Indians of Mexico retain a complex symbolic code while others contain layer upon layer of the customs and symbols of later religion. Examples of syncretism occurred at Mecca and Jerusalem in the Middle East, at Izamal in Mexico and Canterbury in England.
- *Prototypical* pilgrimage is established by a founder of a religion, by his or her first disciples or by important evangelists of the faith. Visions, miracles, and the swarm of fervent pilgrims who pray and make acts of devotion mark the foundation. Then when the impulse for *communitas*

begins to grow, a strong feedback system develops which in turn increases the popularity of the system. A pilgrimage tradition develops with holy books about the founder, a shrine is built, and an ecclesiastical structure develops. Examples are Jerusalem and Rome as prototypical for Christianity, Jerusalem for Judaism, Mecca for Islam, Bodh Gaya and Sarnath for Buddhism, Banaras, and Mount Kailas for Hinduism.

- *High-period* pilgrimage is characterised by elaborate shrines, crowded by symbols and relics with ample place to stay and markets nearby. An example of such popular pilgrimages to the tombs of holy persons is that of Francis of Assisi and his shrine at Mount Subiaco and the double basilica complex built on his remains. Pilgrims have visited and are still visiting the tomb and the relics in a special hall as centre of their devotion in thousands every day. The eleventh to the fourteenth century saw a dramatic increase in the number of centres of pilgrimage and a boom in relics.

Modern pilgrimages seem to be growing in popularity in Europe, the United States, and the East (Buddhist shrines) after a decrease in the popularity of pilgrimage in the period of modernity. The growth is accompanied with high devotional tones and many adherents for example pilgrimage to Taize in France, Assisi in Italy and Camino de Santiago in Spain. More and more young people from different traditions are taking part in these pilgrimages giving it a universal and ecumenical character.

4.2.4 Pilgrimage today

Pilgrimage takes the form of journeying to sacred places as an act of religious devotion, as part of a spiritual experience or as a secular pilgrimage. The term pilgrimage is increasingly used metaphorically to describe the *spiritual journeys* of Christian individuals and groups on their

way to God or the secular journeys of people to experience peace in nature or a *new age* type of spiritual encounter at places where the auras or magnetic fields of the earth are more concentrated. Davies (1988:176) explains that the popularity of actual journeys to many different places is partially due to increased leisure and better transport facilities and that almost any sequence of events, however random, can be spiritualised as a pilgrimage. Modern pilgrims travel by automobile and airplane and pilgrimage centres publish books, newsletters, pamphlets and have their own websites.

Neither faith nor pilgrimage seems dead in Europe or the Middle East. There are religious pilgrims going to Mecca as faithful Muslims, Christians who travelling to Asissi and Taize and Jerusalem and El Camino de Santiago (Santiago de Compostela) in Spain. However, in a postmodern age, the spiritual impulse could manifest itself also in a cycling, mountain climbing adventure, or the quiet contemplation in a beautiful garden. Mass worship could take place in a football- or rugby stadium. The world has changed and so has pilgrimage and the whole phenomenon of pilgrimage tends to hold up a mirror of what is sacred for the times. Today's secular or non-religious pilgrimages have a ritualistic quality that makes them part of the ancient religious traditions as search for blessing and enrichment where body, mind and spirit comes together in an individual quest. Part of the pilgrimage is the spirit of community that comes from identifying with something bigger than yourself (see Time 2004:34). The pilgrim may set out alone but shares a bond with others who journey on the same path as great companionship develops on the road. Talking to religious pilgrims at Taize especially young people, reflected a thirst for communion with God and with fellow pilgrims, a hunger for freedom from religious and ideological power-structures and blind conformism and for radical authentic commitment for example symbolized in the full time authentic monastery way of life of the brothers.

4.3 Holy Places, Pilgrimage, and Retreat

Retreat in monastic-mystic tradition is primarily a journey deeper into God, into his presence. God is omnipresent and present in his followers through the Holy Spirit. He is wherever he calls you and wherever you call upon him. Pentecost accentuates that God does not dwell in holy places made with hands, but in the hearts of his people, the temple of God. However, in the bible whenever God gave new, epoch making revelation, it was usually in the context of wilderness, desert, mountain, and retreat. The geographical setting often reflected the interior solitude. In certain instances the revelation or touch of God came in the desert or under the stars with Abraham or the mystery of a struggle with a wrestling Jacob, sometimes a burning bush as with Moses and sometimes in the domestic environment with a women named Mary sitting quietly and attentive alone at Jesus' feet. Retreat experienced by pilgrims as a pilgrimage were not for them in the first place a long and arduous journey of merit to find the far away, transcendent God who separates himself from people, but rather a journey and celebration of love and faith to the glory of God who has revealed himself to us in Christ. This does not take away the fact that many pilgrims do value certain places as significant where God has especially manifested his presence or places which have been over centuries saturated by prayer and worship.

The monastic retreat experience is to feel and know in one's heart and mind, the reality of God's loving presence. To go on retreat should not mean to run away from a world where God is not present to a place where he is present. In the words of Brother Ramon (1987:125), "he is the God whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere." Nevertheless, to go on retreat could become an invitation to enter into a place or a dimension of stillness, solitude, and prayer. This place is in the heart or in a monastery, garden, retreat centre, or chapel reading and meditating on the word of God, the Eucharist offered and received and the

interior dwelling of God is continually experienced within the inmost of the heart. The research narrative contains the witness of pilgrims on life giving and life enriching moments at places to which they pilgrimage to retreat. The experience of the researcher and pilgrims interviewed are that the holy land, monasteries, cathedrals, retreat centres, mountains that visited over the years exuberated power, holiness, silence and the mysteries of God. To be able to add personal prayers, solitude and silence to those of the community or pilgrims who have visited over the years, can become a special spiritual experience. Every monastery, friary and retreat house encountered, had its own story as place of prayer, love and community. Pilgrims went there perceiving and experiencing it as places hallowed by prayer, sacrament and the community of the saints, where the word of God is recited, read, lived throughout the day and night. These places filled with God and his people were for many powerful transforming contexts within which to pilgrimage for a retreat.

The *desert*, to which the early mystics (fourth and fifth century BCE) retreated to, became a metaphor in monastic spirituality for silence, solitude, and unceasing prayer and of the spiritual hunger and thirst for God and communion with him. To retreat to the desert were for them also an escape from a tempting conformity to the world to a way of life that can prevent the world from shaping man and woman in its image and enhance life in the Spirit (Merton 1960:3; cf Nouwen 1990:15; 91-94). Against the background of and within the atmosphere of monastic spirituality, a relevant question would be if man and woman is able to live an authentic holistic spiritual life without a *desert experience* or elements of desert spirituality in a dehumanized, deluded and denatured world. The desert metaphor may provide a mindset or setting to move away from what is pretty to what is beautiful, from the superficial to the profound, from hectic programmed ministry to being consciously in the presence of God who ministers, from mere existence to abundant meaningful relationships. The

desert has the potential to evoke in people a latent capacity for initiative, exploration, and evaluation interrupting the ordinary sometimes conventional, routine piety pattern of life (cf Steere 1967:95). Retreat as desert experience proved helpful to retreatants to become quiet, alert, more perceptive, recollected, and reflective. In the process, certain issues of life became clearer and reality more recognizable and unambiguous. It opened windows to the mysterious, mighty, sovereign God and his very real presence.