

The Sociology of Religion – El Camino de Santiago: A Case Study of the Sacred

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Introduction

“Where we had thought to travel outward, we will come to the center of our own existence. And where we had thought to be alone, we will be with all the world.”¹

One day in class, I overheard two students talking about their religious affiliation. The young man said, “I’m Catholic” and the girl questioned, “You’re not a Christian?” He told her, “Catholics are Christians.” Although that conversation happened over seven years ago, and was the reason for my participation in Alan Fox’s first DTI seminar about Islam, things have not changed much. Granted, my teaching placement has changed since then from middle school English Language Learners (ELLs) to high school students of all ability levels and backgrounds, however, one thing remains constant – the lack of knowledge around the subject of religion – my own and that of my students. At a loss, over the past few years, I have gone no further in my sociology class than showing a short PowerPoint from the textbook resources. As I still feel uncertain about teaching what is usually considered a controversial subject such as religion, last year I turned to Oprah Winfrey’s series entitled Belief. Focusing on one theme or topic in each of the seven episodes, the program uses vignettes of people of various religious faiths enabling one to see the commonalities amongst religions. Needless to say, I needed help! I did notice though that students were riveted by the personal stories and fascinated by what they did not know before – the commonalities they shared with religions they had not even known about.

Rationale

Through my involvement with DTI/YNI, I have produced multiple units to date to use with my dual-enrollment Sociology course. From the seminar readings, research, and my participation in *Comparative Religions*, I will have another one. This opportunity allows me to read about, research, and discuss topics that are a part of the sociology curriculum. I am very excited about this unit, in particular, as the focus is on the famous pilgrimage known as El Camino de Santiago. I have had an interest in El Camino – also known as The Way – for many years, heightened by the stories of a few friends who have recently made the trek. I too feel compelled to make this pilgrimage one day myself, more so after completing research for this unit. In meeting my students’ needs of learning about religion through a sociological lens, I will also be able to research about El Camino to meet my own goal of walking it. El Camino has served as a pilgrimage for many around the world – for Catholics as well as others.

Our seminar started off by each of us reading Eliade’s The Sacred and the Profane. Eliade considers a pilgrimage a sacred act. He describes it as “reactualized sacred events from mythical origins”. If one participates in a pilgrimage it is meant to have the person step out – get out of ordinary time into sacred time. He purports that individuals need to enter the sacred time since it is what makes the ordinary meaningful. I believe I will start the unit out explaining about my time in the Peace Corps and what it has meant to me

personally and professionally – demonstrating the “sacredness” of my service. This transformative experience changed the trajectory of my life – who I would marry, career path, as well as my thought processes regarding our world and others. Through the use of photos, stories, and facts, students will be able to better understand my return trips and how they serve as personal pilgrimages to this sacred space and time in my life. This profound experience of serving in the Peace Corps and returning to its location, comes back to Cousineau’s quote. Although I believed I would be “traveling outward” to get to know other areas of the world, I came to know my own self, “the center of my own existence”.

This curriculum unit is divided into three parts: (1) the sociology of religion (2) the idea of a pilgrimage and how it relates to the sociological concepts and principles of religion including a focus on multiple pilgrimages from various religions – analyzing their commonalities and differences, and (3) a case study of El Camino. The use of a case study helps to meet the Sociology Standards, but to also address the History/Social Studies Common Core Standard for Key Ideas and Details: *Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.* Students will read and listen to personal accounts of people’s time on El Camino as well as the history of how it came to be considered sacred.

School Setting

Conrad Schools of Science (CSS) is a science/biotechnology magnet school serving almost 1300 students in grades 6 – 12. It is considered an urban school, situated on the outskirts of the most populated city in the state of Delaware, Wilmington, which is well known for its’ violence rates. At the high school level, students can choose to focus on a variety of learning “*strands*” such as biotechnology, physical therapy/athletic healthcare, biomedical science, animal science, and computer science. Our high school is the only one in the state that is not a vocational-technology school to offer a Delaware Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program.

Additionally, a variety of Advanced Placement (AP) courses are offered as well as multiple courses that are in conjunction with our local community college and university. I am the teacher of one of these courses, *Sociology*. This is the seventh year that I am teaching this dual-enrollment course in which students (usually seniors) are enrolled at the local community college and receive credit from that institution upon successful completion of the course they have with me on the high school campus. Moreover, it is a *distance-learning course* in that some of my students are at my school while others are at two sister schools in our district. Via cameras and technology, the course happens real-time – at the three different locations – same teacher (me!), curriculum, activities, etc. This situation continues to prove challenging for me. I struggle with supporting students who are not in the same room with me. Monthly, I go to the other two locations and hold “office hours” to meet with the students so that they can see me face-to-face. Additionally, three times a year we come together as a whole group for field experiences.

Learning Objectives

There are a number of Delaware Technical Community College Wide Core Course (CCC) Performance Objectives that I follow as I plan my units of instruction. In this unit I will be using the two of them: (1) *Relate sociological concepts, principles, and process to daily life*, and (2) *analyze personal reactions to sociological concepts, principles, and processes*. In doing so students will explain how a pilgrimage is related to the sociological concepts of religion, illustrate the connection of sacred and profane to a pilgrimage according to the sociological definition of religion, and assess their own understandings and reactions to the meaning of what is sacred and profane as well as relate their own personal examples to what they have learned. That being written – as previously stated – I initially felt an uneasiness regarding my own lack of knowledge and understanding of the subject. All the reading that I have done has made me think more deeply about what I believe, think, and understand. Some of these readings have pushed me in my own thinking as well as created even more questions to which I am still searching for answers. Perhaps my walking will help me to find these answers. I believe relaying this information to my students will enable them to see that educating themselves can lead to a better understanding of concepts and people and a better quality of life.

Enduring Understanding the big ideas of the unit, are taken from the Core Concepts of our textbook's chapter on Religion. Students will understand that all religions have at least three essential characteristics: beliefs about the sacred and the profane, rituals, and a community of worshipers, and the variety of religious experiences is endless, because people play a fundamental role in determining what is sacred and how they should act in its presence. These understandings lead to Essential Questions that guide students throughout the unit within each lesson. These questions are those that students will investigate through their reading and viewing of a variety of sources. They include: (1) What is religion and what are its essential characteristics? (2) In regard to religion, what is the difference between the sacred and the profane? Who determines what is sacred and profane? What is the relationship between the two? And (3) What is a pilgrimage and what are the reasons for participating on one? A variety of texts (both for reading and viewing) will be used in this unit. From the comprehension of these texts, students will develop an understanding of the sociological understanding of religion. Students will closely read a number of texts including those of famous sociologists as well as personal accounts of people who have made pilgrimages – some assigned as a common reading among all class members while others will be by choice. Students will analyze and synthesize these to answer the Guiding Questions while engaging in conversations that will also assist them in practicing their active listening skills as well as developing their personal reactions/responses to important topics – sociology subjects – such as religion.

Content Objectives

The Sociology of Religion

“If religion has given birth to all that is essential in society, it is because the idea of society is the soul of religion.”²

Within the discipline of sociology, religion's overarching definition is generally something like “a social institution of beliefs and practices based on recognizing the

sacred.”³ Although this may seem pretty clear, students will come to see how it is muddied by different sociologists’ viewpoints. Sociologists are ruled by the assumption that there are no false religions. In their studies of the subject matter, they are guided by the scientific method. This means that they are required “to study only observable and verifiable phenomena.”⁴ However, studying what cannot be seen is still part of the discipline. Sociologists look towards studying “the social aspects of religion, which includes the characteristics common to all religions (Beyer 2007), the functions and dysfunctions of religion, the conflicts within and between religious groups, and the ways religion shapes behavior and understanding of the world and beyond.”⁵

One thing sociologists do agree on is the difficulty in defining the concept of religion. Their conceptions of the topic are expressed through their theoretical viewpoints. Max Weber assumed that the cultural needs of society drove religion; that religion is at the core of society, believing it to be the most important social institution. He defined it as “Religion encompasses those human responses that give meaning to the ultimate and inescapable problems of existence – birth, death, illness again, injustice, tragedy and suffering (Abercrombie and Turner 1978).”⁶ However, since religions over time had a “rich and seemingly endless variety of responses to these problems”⁷ he thought it seemed impossible to capture the “essence of religion”.⁸ For example,

“A health expert might suggest that if Indians would eat beef, the problem of hunger and malnutrition might be lessened. But the very idea of cow-slaughter is revolting to most Hindus and would probably be rejected outright. So even though cow-slaughter may seem economically rational or logical, values and ideas (in this case, the idea that the cow is sacred) definitely influence the making of certain decisions. It is our beliefs and values which helps to shape our behaviour.”⁹

Karl Marx thought that religion serves a purpose in the morals, values, and beliefs of a society. His focus comprises one of three sociological perspectives – Conflict. In our sociology course we begin the year studying the three sociological perspectives: Functionalist, Conflict, and Symbolic Interactionist. Throughout the remainder of the year, with each sociological concept we focus on such as family, education, and formal organizations, amongst others, we refer back to these the perspectives to be able to explain how they are understood. In the conflict perspective, Marx focused on the ideas of social class, social inequality and the plight of the working class. He described this as an alienation; a powerlessness of the people. He purported that religion helps to make workers accept their current situation of insubordination. It was – in fact – a way to control the masses. Marx claimed that humans should be guided by reason but that religion concealed the truth; that followers were misguided and held on to a false hope that in turn, aided in this alienation process.

Peter L. Berger defined religion as “the establishment, through human activity, of an all-embracing sacred order, that is, of a sacred cosmos that will be capable of maintaining itself in the ever-present face of chaos.”¹⁰ To break this down a bit, he defined *nomos* as the society’s worldview, meaning all knowledge about how things are and *ethos*, meaning

all its values and ways of living. Nomos is produced through the socialization process. From birth on parents, family members, schools, etc. persuade individuals that what they have been taught (although it could be different) is unchangeable. In fact, it is so engrained that it is taken for granted. Issues arise when individuals come across others whose nomos is different than theirs as well as the fact that individuals and environments are constantly changing. Lastly, when one encounters experiences that are “different” such as dreams or encounters with death, a cognitive dissonance occurs. According to Berger, a societal fear is that an anomy (lacking nomos) will occur. Religion comes into play in that nomos is rooted in the cosmos – the universe – “a mirror image of the nature or pattern of the cosmos.”¹¹ Religion comes into play in that it has symbols that support this mirror image idea. The symbols are sacred, expressing this most important value in life – order.

Another prominent sociologist, Emile Durkheim, also believed that it was difficult to define religion. Although he writes about religion providing faith and ideas about God, he does note that within a definition of religion, one should not include a reference to God, as there are some religions that do not require a god. For Durkheim, religion is founded in our basic categories of understanding. These include “time, space, number, cause, substance, and personality” which are tied to objective reality. “Our primary categories of understanding come into existence through the way we distribute ourselves in time and space; they reflect our gatherings and rituals.” According to him, religion “provides faith and ideas about God” and a cosmology, “a systematic understanding of the origin, structure, and space-time relationships of the universe.”¹² This would equate with the Functionalist Perspective. Functions of religion include: (1) being able to provide answers to questions about ultimate meaning – that there is a plan for all that occurs; (2) emotional comfort – people can find a purpose to all things; (3) social solidarity or sense of community; (4) religion provides guidelines for everyday life so that people know how to behave – what to do and not do. This bleeds into the fabric of a society through social control. Lastly, (5) social change is a purpose of religion – things such as the civil rights movement in the 1960s was lead by religious leaders.¹³ Durkheim believed that religions were true to the fact that each one has its own ways of addressing “problems of human existence.”¹⁴ Of course, there are also dysfunctions. In religion these include it as being a justification for persecution and war/terrorism. Throughout history, religion has been used in persecuting others – One of which is the Spanish Inquisition from 1100s – 1880s in which the Roman Catholic Church tortured accused heretics. In our own country, we saw this in 1693 during the Salem Witch Trials in which 21 women were accused of being witches and executed.

Durkheim also thought that sociologists needed to keep themselves/their own biases¹⁵ out of the equation, “ridding themselves of all preconceived notions of what religion should be”¹⁶, remembering that no religions are false. Durkheim stated that religion was “a system of shared rituals and beliefs about the sacred that bind together a community of worshippers.”¹⁷ According to him, there are three essential components to a religion: beliefs about the sacred and the profane, rituals, and a community of worshippers.¹⁸ This information is what is included in our textbook and supports sociology’s Symbolic Interactionist theory. In which these symbols provide an identity and create social solidarity amongst the group members. Symbols are ways of communicating. Rituals do the same, feeling of closeness with God and unity with one another. Symbols and rituals

stem from beliefs. “Religious beliefs include not only values (what is considered good and desirable in life – how we ought to live) but also a cosmology, a unified picture of the world. For example, the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim belief that there is only one God, the creator of the universe, who is concerned about the actions of humans and who will hold us accountable for what we do, is a cosmology. It presents a unifying picture of the universe.”¹⁹

Sacred and Profane

One of the core ideas about religion within the discipline of sociology is the distinction between the sacred and the profane. The sacred “includes everything that is regarded as extraordinary and that inspires in believers deep and absorbing sentiments of awe, respect, mystery, and reverence. These sentiments motivate people to safeguard what is sacred from contamination or defilement.”²⁰ Items that are sacred include “objects (such as chalices, scriptures, and statues), living creatures (such as cows, elephants, and birds), elements of nature (such as rocks, mountains, trees, the sea, the sun), places (such as churches, mosques, synagogues, and birthplaces of religions or their founders), days that commemorate holy events, abstract forces (such as spirits), key figures (Abraham, Jesus Christ, the Buddha, Moses, Muhammad, Zarathustra, and Nanak), states of consciousness (such as wisdom and oneness with nature), past events (such as the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus, the escape of Hebrews from Egypt, and the birthplace of Buddha), ceremonies (such as baptism, marriage, and burial), and other activities (holy wars, just wars, confession, fasting, and pilgrimages).”²¹ The idea of what is sacred changes over time. Durkheim stresses that the idea of these things being sacred comes from people – the meaning and emotion they give to said object, ceremony, or place. People become outraged when others do not show the awe/respect which they believe should be given. This reminds me of when I visited the Sistine Chapel in Vatican City. The guards spent the entire time trying to quiet down people. To me, it was more annoying than the murmuring of the people observing this wonder. However, it is a great example of the awe that should be expressed while observing something so sacred and the dismay or outrage when it is not.

At the opposite of sacred is the profane, which is, defined as anything that is “not considered sacred, including things opposed to the sacred (such as the unholy, the irreverent, and the blasphemous) and that stand apart from the sacred (such as the ordinary, the commonplace, the unconsecrated, and the bodily) (Ebersole 1967).”²² For students to better understand this concept, examples can be used such as checking email, walking to class, and doing homework, among others so that they will be able to comprehend that their daily tasks are those that are profane versus – for example – their graduation, which could be considered a sacred event – one out of the ordinary. In this manner, students will be able to better comprehend that profane are the “routine aspects of our day-to-day existence.”²³

Rituals

One definition of ritual is “rules that govern how people must behave in the presence of the sacred to achieve an acceptable state of being.”²⁴ These ‘rules’ dictate what one should do, how one should behave in the face of the sacred. These formal ceremonial

activities can include what participants should wear and what they should say, chant, pray, or sing. They can be simple (for example, close your eyes to pray) or more complex (such as days of fasting before participating in a prayer). Although they are usually completed in a sacred space, there are other rituals that dictate ways to live, “codes of conduct aimed at governing the performance of everyday activities, such as sleeping, walking, eating, defecating, washing, and dealing with members of the opposite sex.”²⁵ The purpose of rituals includes such things as: purifying the body or soul, commemorating an important person or event, or transforming profane items into sacred ones. The most important component of a ritual is that the community of worshippers shares it.²⁶

Community of Worshippers

Lastly, Durkheim used the term church to define a community of worshippers. These “members” have the same beliefs regarding what is sacred and profane, act the same way in the presence of what is sacred, and come together to reaffirm their beliefs on agreed upon times/and places.

The Pilgrimage as a Sacred Act

A pilgrimage is a sacred act – beginning with its purpose – in that it is not of the ordinary. Purposes for a pilgrimage may vary, but the basic concept is similar among many religions. “What unites the different forms of pilgrimage is intensity of intention, the soul’s desire to respond to return to the center, whether it portends ecstasy or agony. What makes a pilgrimage sacred is the longing behind the journey.”²⁷ As Alan Fox wrote, “In other words, to lean more about ourselves.” In this unit, we will focus on understanding the act of a pilgrimage as sacred. To begin, after learning about the role of religion in a society as dictated by the discipline of sociology as well as what declares something as profane or sacred, students will then be exposed to pilgrimages across religions. I believe this will help them to better understand the core principle in that this sacred journey is found amongst multiple religions.

One of the most known pilgrimages is that of the Islamic faith, Hajj. Muslims follow the Five Pillars, which are demonstrative of how Muslims should lead their lives – how their beliefs should be put into action. One of the pillars, Hajj, is a pilgrimage to Mecca to visit the Ka’ba and is required of all Muslims who are able. All Muslims hope that they will travel to Mecca once in their lives to visit the Ka’ba, a place of worship legendarily built by Ibrahim and his son, Isma’il and restored by Muhammad to worship Allah.²⁸ This pilgrimage takes place during the twelfth month of the Islamic lunar year and consists of a sequence of events, a rite of passage that takes one month to complete. If one is unable to go for health concerns, one must do his best to send someone else.²⁹ An example of this is seen in the “Autobiography of Malcolm X” in which his sister, Ella, helped him with the finances to go to Mecca. He had brought her into Islam, and through her real estate sales she had been saving to go on Hajj. Yet, at the time, she believed it was more important for Malcolm X to go. His transformation due to the pilgrimage was expressed in a letter to his assistants back in Harlem:

"Never have I witnessed such sincere hospitality and

overwhelming spirit of true brotherhood as is practiced by people of all colors and races here in this ancient Holy Land, the home of Abraham, Muhammad and all the other Prophets of the Holy Scriptures. For the past week, I have been utterly speechless and spellbound by the graciousness I see displayed all around me by people of all colors.

"You may be shocked by these words coming from me. But on this pilgrimage, what I have seen, and experienced, has forced me to rearrange much of my thought-patterns previously held, and to toss aside some of my previous conclusions. This was not too difficult for me. Despite my firm convictions, I have always been a man who tries to face facts, and to accept the reality of life as new experience and new knowledge unfolds it. I have always kept an open mind, which is necessary to the flexibility that must go hand in hand with every form of intelligent search for truth."

"During the past eleven days here in the Muslim world, I have eaten from the same plate, drunk from the same glass, and slept on the same rug - while praying to the same God - with fellow Muslims, whose eyes were the bluest of blue, whose hair was the blondest of blond, and whose skin was the whitest of white. And in the words and in the deeds of the white Muslims, I felt the same sincerity that I felt among the black African Muslims of Nigeria, Sudan and Ghana."

"We were truly all the same (brothers) - because their belief in one God had removed the white from their minds, the white from their behavior, and the white from their attitude."

This sacred practice has multiple steps that are dictated by what is known to be sacred. Once within the "forbidden zone"(haram) that surrounds Mecca, pilgrims must be clothed in plain white wraps called ihram, which marks their transition to the sacred space as well as demonstrate their equality – between each other – before Allah. This pilgrimage process entails circling the Ka’ba seven times, praying at the Station of Abraham, praying two cycles of prostrations, drinking from the spring of Zamzam, standing before the Mount of Mercy, celebrating the Feast of Sacrifice, casting stones at one of the three pillars indicating the repudiation of the temptations of Satan, cutting hair, circling the Ka’ba seven times again, and running seven times between the hills Safa and Marwa demonstrating Hagar’s frantic search for water. The specific acts at specific sites indicate the sacredness of this pilgrimage.

People of Islam are not the only people who take journeys of faith. Those of the Hindu faith may participate in what is known as Yatra (going out). Theirs depends more on how much money one has as to how far he might journey. The goals are the sources and confluences of major rivers. The most famous of all – The Ganges River. Pilgrims search for blessings or forgiveness in their journeys.³⁰ According to textual scholars, the earliest reference to a Hindu pilgrimage is in the Rigveda (c. 1500 bce), in which the

“wanderer” is praised. Numerous later texts, including the epic *Mahabharata* (c. 300 bce–300 ce) and several of the mythological Puranas (c. 300–750 ce), elaborate on the capacities of particular sacred sites to grant boons, such as health, wealth, progeny, and deliverance after death.”³¹

Buddhists may take a pilgrimage whenever it feels right and also on special occasions although it is usually “a once-a-lifetime undertaking.”³² The purpose takes on many spiritual reasons including getting through difficult times to healing serious illnesses.³³ Many times places of pilgrimage are those associated with important events in Buddha’s life as it was under his advisement to help one gain “purification of the mind” by demonstrating reverence/deep respect:³⁴ Some of these include his birthplace (Lumbini Grove), the location of his Enlightenment (Bodh Gaya), first teaching (Sarnath), and his place of death (Kusinara).³⁵ The pilgrimage is a “soulful journey” that will be rigorous. According to a Buddhist priest, the purpose “ ‘is to improve yourself by enduring and overcoming difficulties.’ ”³⁶ There are two parts to the journey (1) based on the four bases of success: “desire-to-do (chanda), mind (citta), effort (viriya) and knowledge (vimansa).”³⁷ This first part speaks to the intention/devotion to the pilgrimage – to prepare for the journey by learning about – knowing what the importance is of each location/shrine. The second part of the pilgrimage is that it is an act of renunciation – to let go of luxury and to embrace discomfort with patience and loving-kindness. Reverence, gratitude, and devotion should be constant companions while on the pilgrimage as well as help to bring joyful memories to mind afterwards.

Why Take a Pilgrimage

“To set out on a pilgrimage is to throw down a challenge to everyday life.”³⁸ This quote reminds me of the idea of the division between sacred and ordinary. To embark on a pilgrimage means that one is searching to experience the sacred. Pilgrimages are undertaken for various reasons, such as, for instance, a religious obligation, to prove one’s faith, to find answers to questions, to pay homage to someone else, or to reaffirm beliefs, among others.”³⁹ A “...pilgrimage, a transformative journey to a sacred center, it calls for a journey to a holy site associated with gods, saints, or heroes, or to a natural setting imbued with spiritual power, or to a revered temple to seek counsel. To people the world over, pilgrimage is a spiritual exercise, an act of devotion to find a source of healing or even to perform a penance. Always, it is a journey of risk and renewal. For a journey without challenge has no meaning; one without purpose has no soul.”⁴⁰

The word pilgrim is defined as “a person who journeys, especially a long distance, especially to some sacred place as an act of religious devotion.”⁴¹ The Latin translation, *peligrinus*, means a “Foreigner or wayfarer, the journey of a person who travels to a shrine or holy place.”⁴² “This pilgrim is a wayfarer who longs to endure a difficult journey to reach the sacred center of his or her world, a place made holy by a saint, hero, or god.”⁴³ I am fortunate in that one of my long-time friends, Edris Goolsby Harrell, is a pilgrim. Last summer she and her daughter walked El Camino. Since then I have been able to hear her speak about her experience in a public forum. More recently, I was able to speak with her on a one-to-one basis in which I asked her about the stages of a pilgrimage. I have embedded her comments here with Cousineau’s information.

“The pilgrim’s motives have always been manifold; to pay homage, to fulfill a vow or obligation, to do penance, to be rejuvenated spiritually, or to feel the release of catharsis. The journeys all begin in a restive state, in deep disturbance. Something vital was missing in life.”⁴⁴ Whatever the reason for the pilgrimage, “what unites the different forms of pilgrimage is intensity of intention, the soul’s desire to respond to return to the center, whether it portends ecstasy or agony. What makes a pilgrimage sacred is the longing behind the journey.”⁴⁵ This is referred to as the first step, *the calling*. It is sometimes in the “form of a feeling or some vague yearning, that summons expresses a fundamental human desire: finding meaning in an overscheduled world somehow requires leaving behind our daily obligations.”⁴⁶ “What is the urge, the impulse, the notion, the idea that leads to the call for us to move at all costs to the central axis of each of our different worlds, the cosmic center, the source of all we believe in?”⁴⁷ Edris stated that her calling did not feel religious. However, it was strong. She remembers being in Seville, Spain with her family on vacation. She said that one of the caminos begins there, the Via de Plata. She said, “I saw a shell on the cathedral and it was like a light bulb. It was a physical sensation with an intensity that was a drive.” Edris describes it as intense – something that had to be done now – “If I wait it will be too late. I might not be able to do it. I had to do it.” During this step, one usually dedicates time in which one prepares himself for the pilgrimage. This preparation time includes the opportunity to determine an itinerary – destination route, transport, and housing along the way. Additionally, one should hopefully prepare their body such as starting a walking plan – training for the long walk. Preparing your pack – determining what should and should not be included is vital to one’s pilgrimage. Much of what I have read states that the pack should not weigh more than 10% of one’s weight. Lastly, preparation of your soul is meant to clarify your purpose (variety/ “walk with God”, exercise, milestone); pray your preparation; daily focus.⁴⁸ Edris and her daughter walked as much as they could, trying to train beforehand. I loved viewing the Facebook posts of them trying out different trails and her daughter determining which backpack she would use for the journey. Additionally, the photos of all the items that would go into the backpack are indicative of the importance of preparing one’s pack.

The second step is referred to as *the Separation*. The “pilgrimage, by its very nature, undoes certainty. It rejects the safe and familiar. It asserts that one is freer when one frees oneself from daily obligations of family, work, and community, but also the obligations of science, reason, and technology.”⁴⁹ Edris thought that this step was challenging for her. She says that it hit her about one week before leaving, that “people were going to live their lives – girlfriends were going to the beach, Will (her son) was doing some cool things, loss of income – this was a price that I was going to pay.” While on the pilgrimage, at first she found herself trying to fill in the time to feel productive. For her this meant when reaching the day’s destination to explore the town, be with other pilgrims, anything to avoid boredom.

The third step, *the Journey*, “is the pain of the journey itself. In almost every place, the travelers develop blisters, hunger, and diarrhea. This personal sacrifice enhances the experience; it also elevates the sense of community one develops along the way.”⁵⁰ The *Threshold* is defined as a crossing over as the end or a boundary or “the point at which a physiological or psychological effect begins to be produced.”⁵¹ There was physical pain in Edris’s journey. First, she had some difficulty with her knee including stabbing pain.

The heat was unbearable at times. She says that it was uncomfortable. She tried to get into a zone in which there was “automaticity of my legs.” She specifically remembers her *threshold*. Her knee brace had not been working well and causing even more pain. At one town she met up with a very knowledgeable pharmacist who was able to fit her with a better brace, give her extra strength anti-inflammatory cream (Voltadore), and a high dose of ibuprofen. Additionally, although it was painful and she cried out for most of it, she had her legs massaged. This turning point was the moment that she remembers her massive pain stopped. She stated that one thing she learned is that “as soon as your body sends you a message you have to listen to it.”

The fourth step, *the Contemplation* indicates “Some pilgrimages go the direct route, right to the center of the holy of holies, directly to the heart of the matter. Others take a more indirect route, circling around the outside of the sacred place, transforming the physical journey into a spiritual path of contemplation.” Edris and her daughter both had a “drive to do the entire thing, to have a pure experience.” She thought that her journey was very much aligned with what they say about El Camino, “the first part is physical; the second part mental; and the third part in Galicia is full of “awe and wonder.” There is a “fluidity and ease, gorgeous views, a sense of community – connections with others.”

The fifth step, *the Encounter* is “...the sighting...the climax of the journey, the moment when the traveler attempts to slide through a thin membrane in the universe and return to the Garden of Origin, where humans lived in concert with the Creator.”⁵² When reflecting on this stage, Edris described herself as very emotional on the morning of the last day of her pilgrimage. She felt a “loss – the journey was coming to an end.” She would miss “the rhythm of the day, the lack of stress and demand.” However, when they arrived at the cathedral, the emotionality went away. She felt “happy and relieved that they had completed it, the whole thing; that we were successful.” Afterwards, as they were walking around she stated that she felt “joyful running into pilgrims we had known.”

The sixth and final step of the pilgrimage is *the Completion and Return*. At the culmination of the journey, the pilgrim returns home only to discover that meaning they sought lies in the familiar of one's own world.⁵³ “Camino actually starts when you finish. The lessons learned come after we are done.” Edris started off by stating this when I asked her about the *Completion and Return* component of a pilgrimage. She said that she is constantly looking back on the experience and notices a different way of looking at it. When I heard her speak before, she talked about the challenge of the mud they faced one day on the Camino. She said she didn't understand the significance until she returned home. Edris told me that she doesn't like conflict and tries to avoid it at all costs. She said that conflict was symbolized by mud. “Sometimes you have to walk through it or you'll never get to go on the Camino. You are stuck if you don't. You have to be uncomfortable, it will be hard, but you will get through it. When you do, you have the beauty of the Camino.”

Case Study: The Camino de Santiago

“ *This ‘ees your trip, your life, your adventure,*” he said. *‘Do not make the trip for anyone else. Make ‘eet for yourself. If you walk with a new friend and they walk too fast, say goodbye. Let them go. This is your trip. Your Camino is for you.’*”⁵⁴

This ancient pilgrimage route has been one used for centuries and is the oldest in Europe with people having journeyed over it for more than 1,000 years. It is actually a combination of routes, many of Roman origin. These routes have been used by pilgrims to arrive in Santiago de Compostela since the 11th century and became quite the organized approach by early 12th century. “The various *caminos* are based on other historical pilgrimage roads to Santiago. The *camino ingles* (English way) led British pilgrims arriving by sea at La Coruna south to Santiago, the *camino portugues* (Portuguese way) brought pilgrims north, and the *via de la plata* (silver way) was used pilgrims from the south and center of the peninsula to join the *camino frances* (French/Frankish way) at Astorga.”⁵⁵

After Jesus’s resurrection, St. James the Greater, one of Jesus’s twelve apostles, traveled through the Iberian Peninsula all the way to Galicia to evangelize - to spread Christian teachings in an area of Celtic influence. In 44A.D. when he returned to the Holy Land, King Herod, who feared that he might gain too much influence and power, beheaded him. There are different versions of who took or stole his body after his beheading – angels or disciples. It was “placed it in a sarcophagus of marble, and transported it to the Iberian Peninsula via a small ship. When the ship sank, his body washed to shore where it was covered and preserved by scallop shells.” This symbol is still important today as it represents the multiple pilgrim routes all coming together to become one at the Santiago cathedral. It also symbolizes the completion of the pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint James the Apostle at Santiago de Compostela. Nowadays, pilgrims receive these scallop shells at the beginning of their journey, when they sign in displaying them on their bags for others to see and know their pilgrim status. Later, St. James’s body was buried in a non-descript tomb. Afterwards, some 800 years later, in the ninth century, a shepherd named Pelayo was drawn to a certain field by a stars shining/flashing in the sky (the meaning of the word *compostela*). A bishop, Teodomorio, was notified of this event and initiated an investigation into what was believed to be found was the body and relics of St. James found at the site. King Alfonso II declared St. James to be the patron saint of the region and built a chapel on the site that eventually became the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela.”⁵⁶ Support came from the church in which a network of hospitals, bridges, inns, and roads, amongst other supports were founded for the pilgrims who walked the way to reaching Saint James. Today, one still finds a network of these accommodations and support for pilgrims along the way.

The pilgrimage has served as a symbol for all of humanity based on a long tradition with special historical importance. In the past, the pilgrimage allowed for people to pass borders of very distinct areas. The pilgrim card which allowed them to do so was what was considered a “*carta de libertad*”, a “free card” to pass across these borders. Nowadays, a Pilgrim Passport (*Credencial*) is given to each individual at the beginning of the journey. This “passport” attests to one’s status as a pilgrim. It allows for travelers to stay at facilities specific for the use of pilgrims only. Additionally, it is stamped at the end of each day’s journey – the location of where one stops to eat or rest – serving as proof of accomplishment to receive the Certificate of completion (*Compostela*) at the end

of the journey. To be eligible, one must complete at least the following: walk the last 100 kilometers (62 miles) or bicycle at least the last 200 kilometers. Numbers continue to rise – in 1986 about 2500 received the certificate as compared to 278,000 in 2016.⁵⁷

This is partly due to the resurgence of the Camino in the 1980s. Most attribute this to television (getting the word out), Pope John Paul II talking about it as well as the 1989 World Youth Day 1989 held in Santiago. In 1987, the Council of Europe proclaimed the route of Santiago de Compostela the first European Cultural Itinerary that enabled for economic resources to be put into the “caminos” to support the growing number of pilgrims. In 1993 it was the very first pathway in the world to be added to the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Although most of this information here is historical and factual, I did want to include two highlights from my conversation with Edris – of making this journey which, I believe, relates back to the rising numbers of those who do walk the Camino. Edris stated that she appreciated the idea of “life being so simple – the rhythm of the day – to eat, sleep, drink, walk and talk. That was really lovely to fill my days so simply.” The second highlight for her was the “connection with other pilgrims, the automatic connection of the experience.” She said it was a life lesson for her in that she realized that “we know physically we need to exercise – it’s good for the body. It’s the same mentally, we need connections with other people.” Hearing her words, I am again reminded of my Peace Corps experience. What I experienced, the sacred, was in part, the connection with others, a common bond of a unique time which transformed us.

Strategies

Documentaries

There are many advantages to using media in the classroom. One is that a visual can help to pique students’ interest and maintain it in a topic. Nowadays, thanks to the Internet and their smartphones, students have access to a variety of visuals at any moment of the day. At times it seems as if there is a competition in the classroom. How can instruction measure up to Snap Chat, Twitter, or Instagram? I believe it can through the use of media in a constructive manner. An important fact is that it aids students in making connections to difficult concepts. Most students may not have seen many documentaries outside of school. It’s a different type of story telling, not like the blockbuster movies they are more likely to have seen. My hope is that these documentaries – because they focus on insights into people’s lives’ - will maintain student interest. As previously stated, I noticed this happening when we viewed some of the Oprah Belief episodes. Students were entranced by observing others’ lives. Since many documentaries are relatively short, they can highlight “complex ideas in a short time period, provoke discussion, an assessment of one’s values, and an assessment of self.”⁵⁸ Additionally, these help to bring in real world events and connect them to the in-depth sociological theories students have more trouble analyzing and comprehending. In doing so, students can see that it maybe easier than they thought to bridge the textbook to the real world! I think, maybe most importantly, that media – in particular, documentaries – help students to see beyond themselves.

Socratic Seminar

I have noticed that my students tend to talk before thinking and are more interested in hearing themselves than their fellow classmates. Being able to think critically about a text before discussing it and then listening to others are important skills necessary for academic success and the life-long ability to understand better another person's viewpoint. The weight of the conversation is left to the participants – in this case the students. They must critically look at and read the texts before coming to class and be prepared with questions and comments they would like to focus on. This is vital to the conversation's success. I want them to experience what it is to be in college in a small seminar-type atmosphere. Additionally, I believe if they are made responsible for this it will help them to better comprehend the content of the text that they are expected to master. While students are well armed with evidence from the texts that they have read or viewed, it is also important at this point, that they begin to employ the active listening strategies as well.

Activities

Sacred and Profane

After reviewing the textbook information about what is considered the profane and what is the sacred, students will participate in an activity that is two-fold – (1) a “warm up” and (2) a small group concept application. In the first part of this activity is a warm-up based on Bob Greene's work.⁵⁹ Students will “imagine that a particular object has become sacred. For example, a baseball bat is a profane object but if it were Babe Ruth's bat, it would mean it is enshrined in the Baseball Hall of Fame. It will never be used again, thus taking on some of the characteristics of a sacred object.”⁶⁰ Greene offers a variety of questions for students to consider, including: “What other objects might fall into that category? Do objects only become sacred because humans give them meaning? Could we make an object sacred? For instance, have the class imagine that everything written on the chalkboard or overhead is sacred text. How might society be altered if many of us believed that object to be sacred?”⁶¹ After this, students will read a blog entry by Janis Prince Inniss entitled, A Durkheimian Christmas.⁶² It describes the difference between the profane – such as a gift-wrapping service - and the sacred – such as a church group offering free wrapping services a few days before Christmas calling attention to “the sacred nature of God's love.”⁶³ Afterwards, students will work in small groups to discuss the meaning of the blog entry as well as come up with additional examples of the sacred and profane. This should be easier after the introduction and blog entry discussion.

Sacred Journeys

Students will be introduced to the term pilgrimage as a sacred act through various primary sources about pilgrimages as well as viewing the documentary, Sacred Journeys with Bruce Feiler. The film depicts six historic pilgrimages: Lourdes, France; Shikoku in southern Japan; Mecca; the Ganges River in India; Yoruba Festival in Nigeria; and Jerusalem. Fourteen pilgrims' and their journeys are highlighted in this film. Students will look for textual evidence in support of the six stages of a pilgrimage as well as the

sacred and the profane for one or two of the pilgrims. A video guide will be provided for students. This will assist students in organizing their textual evidence. In on-line Discussion Posts, students will compare and contrast their “pilgrim (s)” with others in their assigned group to determine the commonalities and differences of each pilgrim’s experience.

Case Study: El Camino de Santiago de Compostela

Students will learn about the history of El Camino by viewing the film, The Way of Saint James. Afterwards, in a Socratic Seminar format, students will discuss the depiction of the sacred. I believe this will be interesting because it will take them from the historical beginning of this pilgrimage to today. Then, students will view a film of their choice grouping up to do so. These five films include: Camino de Santiago Documentary Film - The Way; Tres en el Camino; I’ll Push You; Walking the Camino: Six Ways to Santiago; and Footprints: The Path of Your Life. All of these films are documentaries that follow pilgrims and their journeys. In small groups based on the personal choice of their film, they will discuss what has been learned in the religion unit – especially on the topic of pilgrimage. Using this information, students will create a group film advertisement through the religious lens of the sacred and the profane of the El Camino pilgrimage.

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Appendix

There are a number of Delaware Technical Community College Wide Core Course (CCC) Performance Objectives that I follow as I plan my units of instruction. In this unit I will be using the two of them: (1) *Relate sociological concepts, principles, and process to daily life*, and (2) *analyze personal reactions to sociological concepts, principles, and processes*. In doing so students will explain how a pilgrimage is related to the sociological concepts of religion, illustrate the connection of sacred and profane to a pilgrimage according to the sociological definition of religion, and assess their own understandings and reactions to the meaning of what is sacred and profane as well as relate their own personal examples to what they have learned.

This curriculum unit is divided into three parts: (1) the sociology of religion (2) the idea of a pilgrimage and how it relates to the sociological concepts and principles of religion including a focus on multiple pilgrimages from various religions – analyzing their commonalities and differences, and (3) a case study of El Camino. The use of a case study helps to meet the Sociology Standards, but to also address the History/Social Studies Common Core Standard for Key Ideas and Details: *Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole*. Students will read and listen to personal accounts of people's time on El Camino as well as the history of how it came to be considered sacred.

Notes

¹ Phil Cousineau, *The Art of Pilgrimage: The Seeker's Guide to Making Travel Sacred*, 127.

² <chrome-extension://bpmcpldpdmajfigpchkicefoigmkfalx/views/app.html> (accessed on December 18, 2017).

³ <https://study.com/academy/lesson/religion-key-concepts-and-definitions.html> (accessed October 12, 2017).

⁴ Joan Ferrante, *Sociology: A Global Perspective*, 297.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid, 298.

⁷ Ibid.

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- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ <http://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/sociology/sociology-of-religion-max-weber/43751> (accessed on October 20, 2017).
- ¹⁰ Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 51.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² *The Modern Agenda*, 80.
- ¹³ James N. Henslin, *Essentials of Sociology: A Down-to-Earth Approach*, 399.
- ¹⁴ Ferrante, 298.
- ¹⁵ *The Modern Agenda*, 79.
- ¹⁶ Ferrante, 298.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ James N. Henslin, *Essentials of Sociology: A Down-to-Earth Approach*, 400.
- ²⁰ Ferrante, 298.
- ²¹ Ibid, 299.
- ²² Ibid, 301.
- ²³ <https://study.com/academy/lesson/religion-key-concepts-and-definitions.html> (accessed October 12, 2017).
- ²⁴ Ferrante, 301.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Phil Cousineau, *The Art of Pilgrimage: The Seeker's Guide to Making Travel Sacred*, 15.
- ²⁸ Usborne Book of World Religions, 40.
- ²⁹ Fox Lecture, September 19, 2011.
- ³⁰ The Handy Religion Answer Book, 298.
- ³¹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hinduism/Pilgrimage> (accessed October 25, 2017).
- ³² Mental Aspects of a Pilgrimage.
- ³³ *The Handy Religion Answer Book*, 359.
- ³⁴ *Mental Aspects of a Pilgrimage*.
- ³⁵ *Usborne Book of World Religions*, 29.
- ³⁶ Phil Cousineau, *The Art of Pilgrimage: The Seeker's Guide to Making Travel Sacred*, xxix.
- ³⁷ *Mental Aspects of a Pilgrimage*
- ³⁸ Phil Cousineau, *The Art of Pilgrimage: The Seeker's Guide to Making Travel Sacred*, (Forward/Huston Smith), ix.
- ³⁹ Ibid, xxiv.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid, xxv.
- ⁴¹ <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/pilgrim> (accessed on October 15, 2017).
- ⁴² Phil Cousineau, *The Art of Pilgrimage: The Seeker's Guide to Making Travel Sacred*, 13.
- ⁴³ Phil Cousineau, *The Art of Pilgrimage: The Seeker's Guide to Making Travel Sacred*, (Forward/Huston Smith), 14.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid, 15.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.
- ⁴⁶ <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/sacredjourneys/content/pilgrimage/> (accessed December 14, 2017).

⁴⁷ Phil Cousineau, *The Art of Pilgrimage: The Seeker's Guide to Making Travel Sacred*, (Forward/Huston Smith), 54.

⁴⁸ <http://sheridanvoysey.com/020-how-to-prepare-for-a-pilgrimage-podcast/> (accessed December 9, 2017).

⁴⁹ <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/sacredjourneys/content/pilgrimage/> (accessed December 9, 2017).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/threshold> (accessed December 9, 2017).

⁵² <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/sacredjourneys/content/pilgrimage/> (accessed December 14, 2017).

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Kurt Koontz, *A Million Steps*, 3.

⁵⁵ Nancy Louise Frey, *Pilgrim Stories On and Off the Road to Santiago: Journeys Along an Ancient Way in Modern Spain*, 5.

⁵⁶ Kootz *A Million Steps*, 24

⁵⁷ <https://www.followthecamino.com/blog/camino-de-santiago-pilgrim-statistics-2016> (accessed January 6, 2018).

⁵⁸ <https://serc.carleton.edu/econ/media/why.html> (accessed December 14, 2017).

⁵⁹

<http://www.asanet.org/sites/default/files/savvy/introsociology/Documents/ActivitiesForExploringReligionBobGreene.html> (accessed December 14, 2017).

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² <http://www.everydaysociologyblog.com/2012/01/a-durkheimian-christmas.html> (accessed December 14, 2017).

⁶³ Ibid.