

EXPLORING THE MAGICAL:
PILGRIMAGE AND THE ENCHANTMENT OF PLACE

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The Seattle School of Theology and Psychology

Symposium for Pilgrimage Studies

Williamsburg, VA

October 6-8, 2017

“The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization, and, above all, by the ‘disenchantment of the world.’ Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations.”¹

- Max Weber

“My sense of it is that the sacred is everywhere. And by that I mean we are surrounded by mystery, we are surrounded by beauty.”²

- Chaim Potok

Introduction

We may travel, and we may pilgrimage. At times, we can describe the differences in these experiences; at other times, we find ourselves surprised to find that what we thought was a vacation has turned into unexpected pilgrimage. Why?

This paper explores the concept of enchantment as a model for understanding the mystique of pilgrimage. We will look at the enchantment through social theorist Max Weber’s proposal that the world is now disenchanted. We will put that idea into conversation with theologian Patrick Sherry, who proposes that the world may not be disenchanted OR re-enchanted, but proposes a third view. We will hear from theologian David Brown, who introduces the idea that the sacred God may best be experienced in a physical place. And we will look at Episcopalian sister and pilgrim guide Cintra Pemberton, who will show us how intent and community impacts our pilgrimage. With these ideas in conversation, we will then explore how travel becomes enchanted, and therefore becomes pilgrimage.

Discussing enchantment helps us to notice wonder, reverence and delight and thereby to help us to discover the sacred in how and to where we travel. In an age that feels disenchanted,

¹ Gordon C. Wells, Peter Baehr, and Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: And Other Writings* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014).

² Chaim Potok and Daniel Walden, *Conversations with Chaim Potok* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001).

pilgrimage reminds us that travel can be sacred, place can be sacred, and both can be re-enchanted through mindful attention to how we travel and how we discover and participate in meaning-making encounters with the places and people with whom we journey.

Max Weber on Disenchantment

At the turn of the 20th century with the epigraph quote, social theorist Max Weber introduced the idea that the modern world had become disenchanting. He does this, essentially in passing, in his classic work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. It must be said that Weber is not writing about enchantment, but about modern capitalism and pragmatic work. Although this paper is not an analysis or critique of Weber, it is helpful to summarize him and some of his contemporary respondents in order to ground our conversation about the dynamics of enchantment.

Patrick Sherry on Max Weber

We will look at Weber through the lens of Theologian Patrick Sherry. Sherry introduces Max Weber's well-known quote about disenchantment noting "that the English term 'disenchantment' is a poor translation of the German 'entzauberung'"³, meaning something like "losing its magic." For Weber, this magic lived in the realm of superstition. Sherry notes that in English, "disenchantment" refers primarily to people and this is how we perceive it. People are disenchanting; the idea is similar to disillusionment. But in Weber's original German, "entzauberung" indicates a world that has lost its allure. Today we might say the world is *flat*, *lifeless* perhaps even *boring*. For Weber, the world has lost its superstitious veneer, and

³ Patrick Sherry, "Disenchantment, Re-Enchantment, and Enchantment," *Modern Theology* 25, no. 3 (2009): xx, doi:10.1111/j.1468-0025.2009.01533.x.

rationalism has won the day. We note also that Weber is not using enchantment, *entzauberung*, in a carefully defined or technical sense. It is a throwaway term, and the reader is assumed to understand that the world is – thankfully – disenchanted. Modern.

Weber uses the idea of disenchantment to describe two dynamics: First, he celebrates the victory of intellect and reason over a supernatural worldview. No magic. Second, Weber appreciates the loss of the sacramental life with its attendant sense of magic.

Therefore, for Weber, disenchantment does not carry our sense of disappointment, but is exactly the opposite. It does away with the spurious ideas of wonder and mystical experience in favor of cold, pure pragmatism.

With this summary of Weber's reference, Patrick Sherry introduces some conversation partners with Weber. As our culture is moving from modernism to postmodernism, several people have suggested models for re-enchantment of the disenchanted realms. Sherry briefly summarizes several writers' suggestions for how the disenchanted world may be re-enchantment. He then moves to his main point by suggesting "at least two fundamental questions. First, can one set about re-enchanting the world, just like that? And second, is the world disenchanted?"⁴

These two questions serve to challenge the fundamental assumption in Weber, and give Sherry's readers a glimpse into a different perspective of the sacred: namely, a broad view of sacramentality that discovers enchantment everywhere.

Sherry writes, in his introduction,

"My purpose in this article is to put Weber and these writers alongside each other, but then to undercut the discussion by discussing a third possibility: that the world may still be enchanted, for those who have eyes to see, and who have kept fresh

⁴ Sherry.

the responses of wonder, reverence and delight. Perhaps it never was really disenchanted!”⁵

Here, Sherry is saying that the question of how to re-enchant a disenchanted world is the wrong question. The world is still enchanted, but that enchantment is not obvious to the naked eye.

If Sherry is correct, then the discussion of enchantment is not about how the world became disenchanted, or how we might invite it to be re-enchanted again. If it is still enchanted, then the world has no obligation to unveil itself differently to us. The obligation, or invitation, is on us to live with wonder, reverence and delight.

David Brown on Sacrament, Enchantment and Place

British theologian David Brown explores the relationship between place and our sense of the sacred in the excellent book, *God and Enchantment of Place*. In it, he calls the people of the Christian Church back into engagement with God in the physical world through various expressions including art and social concern, but most specifically by encountering God in a place.

“There is too much of a mismatch between what the Church takes to be significant and the actual experience of the wider population. God is to be found in nature and gardens, in buildings and place, in music and bodies, in ways to which much attention was once given but is now largely lost.”⁶

Brown’s challenge hinges on a careful examination of the idea of *sacrament*. Sacrament in the Catholic Catechism is defined as ‘an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.’ Brown calls attention to the fact that sacrament is “in fact a borrowing from the wider

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ David Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3.

classical world, as is its nearest Greek equivalent... *mysterion*.”⁷ Mystery. Sacrament is, most broadly, the mystery that God encounters God’s creation. Brown explores some of the historical and contextual development of the idea of sacrament, which is beyond the scope of this paper. He concludes that “in effect ‘sacrament’ had come to mean any mysterious indwelling that anticipates or points to some greater reality.”⁸ Sacrament, in Brown’s expanded understanding and agreeing with Patrick Sherry, is the means by which God brings or shows meaning to life.

Rather than pursuing a theological or anthropological critique of the broadening of the doctrine of sacrament, let us consider the larger idea: that we humans notice and identify things which indicate deeper meaning to us. Whether considered psychologically or metaphysically, sometimes we have a deep sense of meaning. This is *enchantment*. An enchanted world carries deep meaning for us as humans.

Brown writes much of his book about this subject, and specifically about enchantment and place. “A unifying theme will be the enchantment of place, how situatedness might help in engendering a sense of divine presence.”⁹ For David Brown, place invites presence.

For Brown, God is encountered not in the mystery of some ethereal realm, but in a place. Within the landscape that surrounds us. His exploration of the broad sense of sacramentality shows us that the sacred can be encountered in various means, and perhaps is BEST encountered, in a place. If pilgrimage intentional spiritual travel, God may best be found on pilgrimage.

7 Brown, 25.

8 Brown, 26.

9 Brown, 24.

Soulfaring with Cintra Pemberton

Episcopalian Sister and pilgrim guide Cintra Pemberton deals with the issue of intention in her excellent book *Soulfaring: Celtic Pilgrimage Then and Now*.

“To go on pilgrimage in the late twentieth century is unquestionably, at one level, to be a tourist (i.e., one who travels around), but at a much deeper and more life-changing level, it is to travel in such a way that our relentlessness (or perhaps we might call it our wanderlust) is always searching for God, even as God is searching for us. On our pilgrimage, we are all soulfarers together. Each of us makes the conscious choice to seek the holy, which means responding to God’s invitation: Come and See.”¹⁰

Pemberton writes further about the intention of the soul-faring tourist and emphasizes the conscious choice of our seeking. For her, travel is non-seeking, but pilgrimage is relentless searching for and being found by God. She writes about the dual nature of this seeking and discovery, reminding us that sometimes travel becomes pilgrimage by our intentional seeking, and sometimes by the surprise encounter of a God who has been drawing us. In either aspect of seeking and finding, meaningful encounter happens. Enchantment happens.

What is Pilgrimage?

We return to our core question: What makes travel different from pilgrimage? Pilgrimage is a type or a superset of travel; it is travel with something more. It is travel which intentionally or unintentionally carries meaning and transformation and depth.

Given our brief synopsis of disenchantment, enchantment and re-enchantment, I propose that what makes pilgrimage different from travel is this: **Pilgrimage is travel that is enchanted.** One may consider whether travel is pilgrimage which has been disenchanting, but for our purposes we align with Patrick Sherry’s proposal that disenchantment and re-enchantment are

¹⁰ Cintra Pemberton, *Soulfaring: Celtic Pilgrimage Then and Now* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Pub, 1999), 12.

distractions from a world that is already enchanted. Therefore, travel is already enchanted, though perhaps that enchantment is not easily seen.

Phil Cousineau, Making Travel into Pilgrimage

Phil Cousineau's classic text on sacred travel is *The Art of Pilgrimage: The Seeker's Guide to Making Travel Sacred*. It is instructive in our pursuit to understand what pilgrimage truly is, and how it differs from the more pedestrian category of travel. Cousineau's first take at a definition of pilgrimage begins this way: "For millennia, this cry in the heart for embarking upon a meaningful journey has been answered by pilgrimage, a transformative journey to a sacred center."¹¹

We note three elements in Cousineau's definition: Transformative; journey and sacred. Cousineau identifies these as the core aspects of pilgrimage. It must first involve journey; we may have inner or outer or social transformation, but that is not pilgrimage. And we may journey without changing, as entertained or educated as we may be, but that is not pilgrimage. And we may travel and be changed by beauty or history or awe, but not to or by a sacred center. That too is not pilgrimage. Pilgrimage must contain those three elements: journey, transformation and sacred center.

Where do we see enchantment in this definition? Enchantment fuels the expectation that travel can be something more, and carries the meaning of that something more. Enchantment is the means by which travel is transformed into the sacramental.

¹¹ Phil Cousineau and Huston Smith, *The Art of the Pilgrimage: The Seeker's Guide to Making Travel Sacred*(San Francisco, CA: Conari, 2012).

How does this occur? Patrick Sherry calls our attention to wonder, reverence and delight to discover the already enchanted world around us. Phil Cousineau proposes that the ordinary can be transformed into the sacred, saying, “With a deepening of focus, keen preparation, attention to the path below our feet, and respect for the destination at hand, it is possible to transform even the most ordinary trip into a sacred journey, a pilgrimage.”¹²

How does this happen for Cousineau? He describes Five Excellent Practices which help travelers discover the sacred in their journey.

“...Here are five excellent practices for travelers on sacred journeys: Practice the arts of attention and listening. Practice renewing yourself every day. Practice meandering toward the center of every place. Practice the ritual of reading sacred texts. Practice gratitude and praise-singing.”¹³

Consider Cousineau’s 5 Excellent Practices and Sherry’s Three Responses.

Cousineau	Sherry
Attention and listening	Wonder
Renewing yourself every day	Reverence
Meandering toward the center of every place	Delight
Reading sacred texts	
Gratitude and praise-singing	

The practices from *The Art of Pilgrimage* overlap with Sherry’s practices of wonder, reverence and delight. They all teach travelers how to be mindful and present to the enchanted nature of what otherwise may appear only to be a vacation. Although Cousineau describes a transformation from ordinary to sacred, that transformation is in the traveler’s expectation, not in the nature of the journey itself. The world is already enchanted. Therefore, all travel is sacred, for those who have eyes to see. Cousineau concurs: “If we truly want to know the secret of soulful

¹² Cousineau.

¹³ Ibid.

travel, we need to believe that there is something sacred waiting to be discovered in virtually every journey.”¹⁴

The world is already enchanted. So is every journey that we take.

Pilgrimage: Living an Enchanted Spirituality

In conclusion, this paper provided an exploration of the notions of enchantment, disenchantment and re-enchantment as a way to understand the mystique of pilgrimage. Responding to Max Weber through Patrick Sherry, David Brown and Cintra Pemberton, we have seen models for unveiling the enchanted world by noticing wonder, reverence and delight and discovering the sacred in how and to where we travel.

Our world is already enchanted. So is every journey that we take. May we travel with the Five Excellent Practices of sacred travelers and the Three Expectations, and in so doing, discover mystery behind the mundane, the enchantment of our travel, and the sacred encounter of God.

¹⁴ Ibid.

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