

# Review of: "Spirituality of Pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago: Existential Questions and the Meaning of Life"

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This is a very interesting and helpful approach to understanding how contemporary, Westernized people engage in and benefit from religious rituals. Brunec grounds her analysis in established sociological research on the contemporary search for meaning rooted in the transcendent. The paper begins by constructing a coherent and convincing perspective on why secular, Western humanity still seeks to find meaning in the transcendent despite how their societies have, to a large degree, marginalized religious praxis as unnecessary and archaic. She shows how rites of passage could awaken or deepen the process of posing and reflecting on existential questions.

She then proceeds to examine how the Camino pilgrimage serves as one such ritual that allows contemporary Western persons to encounter, to some degree, the transcendent and/or are prompted to experience the presencing world as bearing meaning beyond the mundane workaday world. She does this by analyzing published accounts of pilgrims. By analyzing their descriptions of their experiences, she shows how their sense of time, space, and human existence has been deepened by their experience. This is what the essay succeeds in.

I believe this essay could be developed more to explore what the fundamental experience of the pilgrims is. What is the experience of the existential and transcendent for contemporary, Western humanity when they engage in communal religious experiences as individuals who are mainly secular--or do not live intimately with a sense of the transcendent? In other words, what do these religious experiences, extracted from their original contexts and appropriated for individual, contemporary persons, awaken in these people? Is it a religious experience? Is it an opening to the transcendent? Is it a break from the workaday, mundane world to encounter a more authentic way of being? If these questions are explored, the essay could benefit the reader even more.

The question the author poses is very important as the world's Westernized populations seek meaning by appropriating traditional modes of opening to the Holy. What are these acts of seeking and appropriating realizing in their so-called pilgrims and seekers? And how are they transforming the rituals themselves?