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Wayfaring and Seafaring A Theological Reading of the “Mediterranean Journey”

Abstract

The article dwells upon the theme of the *journey* in the Mediterranean, the cradle of the three great monotheistic religions. Taking some paradigms for the journey from mythology, history and from Revelation, the physical journey is taken as a metaphor for the pilgrimage of life, an experience marked by maturation and conversion. This spiritual pilgrimage ultimately consists in the individual's search for the Divine.

Keywords

Journey, pilgrimage, Mediterranean Sea, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, John Paul II.

Ever since the first years of his pontificate, Blessed John Paul II was called *the pilgrim Pope*. The statistical information on his many apostolic journeys - what may be called *systematic pilgrimages* with a pastoral intention - to the four corners of the earth is indeed breathtaking. I take this aspect of the pastoral ministry of the great Polish Pontiff, beatified on 1st May 2011, as the cue to *a theological reading of the journey*. Ten years ago, on 25th September 2001, on his arrival at Zvartnotz International Airport, Yerevan, Armenia, John Paul II - turning to His Holiness Catholicos Karekin - stated: “Without your encouragement I would not now be here, *a pilgrim on a spiritual journey* to honour the extraordinary witness of Christian life borne by the Armenian Apostolic Church through so

many centuries”¹. A random search for “spiritual journey” on the Vatican Website gives 1490 references to excerpts from the Papal Magisterium, while a similar electronic search on the same site for “pilgrimage” gives 1920 references. Indeed, the *journey* is undoubtedly one of the characteristic features of any religion.

The theme which I am presenting in this article fascinates me tremendously. In the light of theological reflection on spirituality and culture in the context of the Mediterranean basin, it is appropriate to consider the *physical* journey, as a springboard to reflection on the *spiritual* journey. I have opted to reflect on the “Mediterranean journey”, and to take it as my starting point, because it is the context from which I write and the context where I teach Roman Catholic theology. I will be referring to the three great monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, although my focus will be on Christianity. Each of these three religions finds its genesis and its eventual diffusion in the lands bordering the Mediterranean Sea.

From the dawn of history, the Mediterranean Sea has been plied by seacraft of all kinds. It is well known that the Western part of the Mediterranean and the Pillars of Hercules (the Strait of Gibraltar) had been already reached by Phoenician vessels by the 8th century B.C. But this is only part of an enormous mosaic which depicts the history of the Mediterranean Sea and the lands which are graced, at other times ravished, by the continuous rhythm of its waves.

This article is divided into three parts: (1) Some initial reflections, mainly taken from history and profane literature, on the “Mediterranean journey”; (2) The concept of “journey” and “pilgrimage” within the Mediterranean context and its surrounding lands in relationship to Judaism, Christianity and Islam; and (3) Travel-paradigms taken from the sacred texts of the Judaeo-Christian Tradition, and their application to personal theological reflection on the “journey of life”.

1. Reflections from history and profane literature on the Mediterranean journey

The great French twentieth-century historian and expert on the Mediterranean, Fernand Braudel (1902-1985) says that there is no single Mediterranean Sea. There are many seas - indeed a “vast, complex expanse within which men operate. Life is conducted on the Mediterranean: people travel, fish, fight wars, and drown in its various contexts. And the sea is one with the plains and the

¹ John Paul II, Welcome Ceremony, Yerevan, Armenia, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2001/september/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20010925 (23 VI 2011).

islands. Life varies in the different Mediterranean regions for many reasons. Furthermore, the Mediterranean cannot be understood independently from what is exterior to it. Any rigid adherence to boundaries falsifies the situation"². Braudel's Mediterranean is a nexus of seas, but just as important, it is also the desert, the fertile plains, the meandering rivers and the mountains which surround it. It is in these geographical contexts that the three monotheistic religions - and their respective spiritual traditions - have grown and spread, even to other areas of the world.

The dawn of history and subsequent centuries are extremely very meagre in hard evidence regarding journeying. There is no documentary evidence (i.e. written documents) at all. Yet, it is certain that the Phoenicians - those remarkable travellers who were expert sailors - reached most of the Mediterranean. They even ventured outside the Pillars of Hercules, probably sailing southwards down the coast of Africa and reaching the coast of India, and northwards up to Cornwall, in Britain, in search of tin. The Maltese Islands were one of their important ports of call. They brought with them their gods and goddesses. They left hard evidence of their coming and going and their settling in Malta as witnessed in their burial sites, and also through the artefacts they left behind. Two exemplars of one such artefact - the *Cippus* - have made archaeological as well as philologic history. The Cippus is a highly important monument of Phoenician origin with a bilingual inscription on its base³.

² See F. Braudel, http://www.conservapedia.com/Fernand_Braudel (17 VI 2011).

³ Discovered in the seventeenth century, this cippus from Malta, a monument of Phoenician origin, is especially interesting for the bilingual inscription on its base recording a dedication to the Tyrian god Melqart by the brothers Abdosir and 'Osirshamar. The inscription allowed the great eighteenth-century scholar Fr. Jean-Jacques Barthélémy to take the first steps in deciphering Phoenician texts, thus laying the basis for the later development of Phoenician and Punic studies.

The Louvre's cippus is one of two dedicatory monuments in marble discovered in Malta by the Knights Hospitallers in the seventeenth century (the second being in the National Museum of Archaeology in Valetta, Malta). In 1782, Emmanuel de Rohan, Grand Master of the Order, presented it to Louis XVI. It was deposited at the Académie des Inscriptions et des Belles Lettres and then transferred to the Bibliothèque Mazarine between 1792 and 1796. In 1864, at the suggestion of the great orientalist Silvestre de Sacy, it was moved to the Louvre. The term *cippus* is used to designate a small column with or without capital, or sometimes a truncated column, serving as a milestone, a boundary marker, a funerary monument or, as here, an inscribed monument dedicated to a divinity. The two cippi at the Louvre and the Maltese Museum of Archaeology are unusual as they are constructed in two parts, the base being a rectangular block moulded at the top and the bottom with inscriptions in Greek and Phoenician on the front, similar in form to a votive altar. Both blocks support a pillar that may represent a *candelabrum*, whose lower part is decorated with acanthus leaves in shallow relief. The Louvre's piece is broken off at the top. It is especially notable for the bilingual inscription on the base, consisting of three lines in Greek and four in Phoenician.

The inhabitants of what would later be called Palestine and Canaan arrived by sea from Crete in those lands and eventually settled there. The *Peleshim* (the Sea Peoples) were great seafarers whom one will immediately recognize by their later and more common name, the Philistines, from where the geographical name *Palestine* is derived. This important migratory wave is normally identified by scholars as to coincide with the year 1200 B.C. Anthony Bonanno affirms that “the latter date coincides with a whole set of upheavals, resulting from the arrival and activity in the area of the Israelites and the ‘Sea Peoples’, which brought about radical changes in the geopolitical set-up of the eastern Mediterranean”⁴.

The early Greeks also were known to travel by sea, not only to the hundreds of islands in their vicinity in the Aegean Sea, but to distant places where they settled, taking with them their culture and way of life (e.g. Naples: founded in the 9th-8th century BC as a Greek colony, Naples is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. Originally named Παρθενόπη (*Parthenope*) and later Νεάπολις (*Neápolis* - English: *New City*), it was among the foremost cities of Magna Graecia, playing a key role in the merging of Greek culture into Roman society. The people of the great Egyptian civilization were known to travel by boat up and down the River Nile. This is clear from early Egyptian art and from their hieroglyphics.

The relations between Malta and the Phoenicians to which the two cippi testify are known to go back to the 8th century BC, but the inscription here suggests a date in the 2nd century BC, when the Maltese Islands were under Roman occupation.

The crucial bilingual inscription on the cippi is what makes these artifacts so important because it led to the unravelling of the Phoenician alphabet. The inscription on the Louvre cippus is mentioned for the first time in a letter from Canon Ignatius di Constanzo dated 1694, published in 1736 by the Hospitaller Knight of the Order of St John, Guyot de la Marne. It reads as follows: (in Phoenician) “To our lord Melqart, Lord of Tyre, dedicated by / your servant Abd’ Osir and his brother ‘Osirshamar / both sons of ‘Osirshamar, for he heard / their voice, may he bless them”; (in Greek) “Dionysos and Serapion the / sons of Serapion, Tyrenes / to Heracles the founder.” The text then reveals this to be a monument dedicated by Dionysos and Serapion, men of Tyre. Using this inscription, which contains 18 of the 22 letters of the Phoenician alphabet, Barthélémy was able to begin the deciphering of the language. He was thus able to read the first word *DNN* as “to our lord.” The notion that Heracles might correspond to Melqart, Lord of Tyre, led to the identification of further letters, while the names of the dedicators - sons of the same father in the Greek text - enabled him to find the latter in the Phoenician text. The paleographic table published by Barthélémy in 1764 lacked only the letters *tet* and *pe*. The study of the Phoenician inscription on the base of the Louvre cippus, discovered in Malta, may thus be regarded as the true foundation of Phoenician and Punic studies, at a time when the Phoenicians and their civilization were known only from their mentions in the Bible and in Greek texts. See <http://www.louvre.fr/llv/oeuvre> (18 VI 2011).

⁴ A. Bonanno, *Malta: Phoenician, Punic and Roman*, Malta 2005, Midsea Books, p. 16.

When we talk of contemporary waves of migration and the plight of migrants, today, many often fail to realize that this phenomenon has been taking place since the dawn of humanity. Peoples have always sought better pastures, better climates, and more prosperous regions. This has always been the case. Archaeological excavations have revealed migratory routes from what those early travellers left behind them when they left a particular place, what they left in the terrain while they journeyed, and what they eventually left in the place where they settled which would, obviously, include burial sites. Just as it is correct to describe man as *homo sapiens* or *homo religiosus* or *homo sociologicus*, we are just as correct to talk about *homo viator* - man the traveller, man on the move.

Another aspect of the journey in the Mediterranean Sea and in its surrounding lands is one with unhappy and tragic consequences. Journeys have been undertaken by armies on land and fleets at sea, ready for warfare. The Mediterranean basin has unfortunately been ravished by wars from time immemorial until very recent history. Journeys undertaken by belligerent armies would include those between the long-standing rivals, Sparta and Athens; the wars between the Greeks and the Persians; the Punic Wars between Rome and Carthage; the wars between Greece and Rome; the many violent expeditions leading to Roman supremacy; the invading hordes of barbarians some centuries later, especially from the early 5th century A.D.; the encroaching Muslim armies in Northern Africa, and soon after, the occupation of Spain, until the Frankish military and political leader Charles Martel stopped this northward Islamic expansion at the Battle of Tours (also called the Battle of Poitiers) in 732; the Crusades; the Fall of Constantinople in 1453; the continuous rivalry between the Knights Hospitaller of St John and the Ottomans; the Great Siege of Malta in 1565 and the more well-known Battle of Lepanto in 1571; the Egyptian expedition of Napoleon Bonaparte; the Second World War and the role played by military and food convoys across the Mediterranean; the Suez Crisis in 1956; the tinder-pots in the Balkans and the Arab-Israeli conflicts.

Another feature in this context of negative events leading to the loss of life or to the loss of personal freedom is piracy which we find on many occasions on the Mediterranean. None other than the young Julius Caesar himself was the victim

of piracy⁵. Pirates, corsairs of all creeds were active in the Mediterranean Sea until practically the early 19th century, as were the privateers⁶.

Profane literature - and here focus is made on that related to the Mediterranean and its surrounding peoples - is also interspersed with narratives about true or fictitious and mythological journeys. Some examples are given: Homer's *Odyssey* on the ten-long-year journey back to Ithaca after the Trojan War by Ulysses who reached an island by the name of Ogygia, where he was the guest and/or the captive of the nymph Calypso; Homer's earlier work, the *Iliad* on the long war between the Greeks and the Trojans; Virgil's *Aeneid* on the legendary journeys of Aeneas (a Trojan who travelled to Italy, where he became the ancestor of the Romans. It is composed of roughly 10,000 lines in dactylic hexameter. The first six of the poem's twelve books tell the story of Aeneas' wanderings from Troy to Italy, and the poem's second half tells of the Trojans' ultimately victorious war upon the Latins); Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*; and closer to our own times, the Journal of the Italian and Mediterranean tour of the Anglican John Henry Newman in 1833, an experience which will be revisited towards the end of this article. Other well-known Mediterranean travellers include Lord Byron and Sir Walter Scott; the Italian experiences of the poets Shelley and Keats, who both died in Italy, far from their British homeland, are also well known.

The concept of journey is a characteristic of the mythologies of Egypt, Greece and Rome - to mention the more familiar of the Mediterranean civilizations. In mythologies, one encounters the collective unconscious of different peoples. One example is cited: the story of Jason and the Argonauts is one of the most popular stories from Greek Mythology. It tells about the journey and the adventures of Jason to the Mythic land of the Golden Fleece. Jason was in his early twenties when he started his search for the Golden Fleece. Jason gathered a team of fifty

⁵ On the way across the Aegean Sea, Caesar was kidnapped by pirates and held prisoner. He maintained an attitude of superiority throughout his captivity. When the pirates thought to demand a ransom of twenty talents of silver, he insisted they ask for fifty. After the ransom was paid, Caesar raised a fleet, pursued and captured the pirates, and imprisoned them. He had them crucified on his own authority, as he had promised while in captivity - a promise the pirates had taken as a joke. As a sign of leniency, he first had their throats cut.

⁶ A privateer is a private person or ship authorized by a government by letters of *marque* to attack foreign shipping during wartime. Privateering was a way of mobilizing armed ships and sailors without having to spend public money or commit naval officers. They were of great benefit to a smaller naval power or one facing an enemy dependent on trade: they disrupted commerce and pressured the enemy to deploy warships to protect merchant trade against commerce raiders. The cost was borne by investors hoping to profit from prize money earned from captured cargo and vessels. The proceeds would be distributed among the privateer's investors, officers and crew. It has been argued that privateering was a less destructive and wasteful form of warfare, because the goal was to capture ships rather than to sink them.

people and started his voyage on a ship called 'Argo'. Together they were known as the 'Argonauts'. Later on, as the voyage moved further afield, the team increased to about a hundred people. One of the famous heroes on this ship was Hercules. It is said that Jason's journey through the Black Sea to the land of Colchis was one of the earliest longest voyages of its times.

2. The concept of "journey" and "pilgrimage" within the Mediterranean context and its surrounding lands in relationship to Judaism, Christianity and Islam

In this section, we will enter more deeply into the theme of this article, namely the spiritual dimension of the journey. Here, focus will be made on the nature of those journeys undertaken for religious-spiritual reasons within Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

The Jews, too, like their Phoenician neighbours, spread far and wide across the Mediterranean basin. A numerous Jewish community was present in Alexandria (from its foundation in the 4th century B.C.)⁷, as well as in other parts of North Africa, as also in cosmopolitan cities such as Rome and Corinth. Groups of Jews from around the Mediterranean were known to travel to the land of their forefathers for the important religious festivities in the Jewish calendar. The Hebrew Scriptures inform us of the participation of these Jews from the diaspora at the annual feasts of the Passover, Pentecost and the Tabernacles (Tents). However, in this context, one is not to overlook the local Jews, i.e. the members of the People

⁷ The history of the Jews of Alexandria dates from the foundation of the city by Alexander the Great, 332 B.C., at which they were present (Josephus Flavius, *Contra Apionem*, II, 4; *Antiquitates Judaicae*, XIX, 5, § 2). From the very beginning their numbers seem to have been considerable; at all events, they formed a very large percentage of the population under the successors of Alexander. A separate sector of the city was assigned to them by the first Ptolemies, so that they might not be hindered in the observance of their laws by continual contact with the pagan population (*Bellum Judaicum*, II, 18, § 7). The site of this ancient Jewish quarter - the existence of which is testified to also by the geographer Strabo (*Antiquitates Judaicae*, XIV, 7, § 2) - can be fixed with relative accuracy; for Apion derisively refers to the Jews as a people living on a harbourless shore; whereupon Josephus retorts that this is a very excellent situation; for, as a consequence, they resided in the vicinity of the Royal Palace (*Contra Apionem*, II, 4). The palace was built on the spit of land called Lochias, and the harbour was in proximity to it, west of Lochias. Therefore the Jews must have inhabited that part of the city that extended eastward from the palace. Moreover, the whole city was divided into five districts, which were named after the first five letters of the Greek alphabet. Of these five districts, two were denominated Jewish districts, because the majority of their inhabitants were Jews (Philo, *Adversus Flaccum*, § 8; ed. Mangey, II, 525). From this, a clear idea of the strength of the Jewish population in Alexandria may be formed. See <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com> (18 VI 2011).

of God who lived in what is popularly called the Holy Land. Most naturally, their geographical proximity to the Holy City of Jerusalem made it much easier for them to undertake a journey which was far less strenuous than the journeys from distant lands carried out by their relatives who had emigrated for one reason or another. Richard J. Clifford, Professor of the Old Testament at the Weston School of Theology (Cambridge, Massachusetts) explains that “the feasts are pilgrimage feasts to the shrine (Hebrew *hag*, like the Islamic *hajj*)”⁸. This was affirmed before him by the renowned biblical scholar Roland de Vaux, author of *Ancient Israel* (London/New York 1963, p.484-506). Clifford mentions the three feasts of the Unleavened Bread (Hebrew *mazzot*), Pentecost (“the fiftieth day”, corresponding to the wheat harvest), and the feast of Tents (*sukkot*), “commemorating the tents of the wilderness period... It was celebrated in autumn at the end of the year”⁹. The Book of Deuteronomy stipulates participation in the pilgrimage feasts: “Three times a year all your menfolk must appear before the Lord your God in the place chosen by him: at the feast of Unleavened Bread, at the feast of Weeks, at the feast of Shelters” (16:16). Joseph Blenkinsopp, professor of Biblical Studies at the University of Notre Dame (Indiana) asserts that “the move from a central to a sole sanctuary [arose] from the need to eliminate centres of Canaanite cult”¹⁰.

A number of Psalms (120-134), often referred to as the *Graduals* or the *Songs of Ascents*, offer us a precise testimony of that deep spiritual, emotional experience which the Jews felt on seeing their beloved city of Jerusalem from afar, and, above all, the Temple gleaming in the sunlight. Some particularly emotive verses serve to illustrate the point: “I rejoiced that they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord’. At last our feet are standing at your gates, Jerusalem!” (Ps 122:1-2); “Come, bless the Lord, all you who serve the Lord, serving in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God!” (Ps 134:1).

It was not too long after the birth of the Church that Christians began journeying. That remarkable inspired book - the *Acts of the Apostles* - provides us with the narratives of the wayfaring and the seafaring of the first followers of Jesus Christ who, in the first place - in contrast to the sedentary rabbis - was an *itinerant preacher* in Galilee, Samaria and Judaea. *Acts* describes the spread of the Christians after they were forced to leave Jerusalem on account of a raging persecution against them. Furthermore, we read about the important city of

⁸ R. Clifford, *Exodus*, in: R. Brown, J. Fitzmyer, R. Murphy (eds.), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (hereafter *NJBC*), London 1990, Geoffrey Chapman, 3:43.

⁹ *Ibid.* With regard to the three feasts, see John J. Castellet - Aelred Cody, *Religious Institutions of Israel*, in: *NJBC* 76:122-140.

¹⁰ J. Blenkinsopp, *Deuteronomy*, in: *NJBC* 6:33. See also *ibid.*, 6:36.

Antioch, then the third most important city in the Roman Empire, which became a centre from which Christian missionaries departed to Asia Minor, Mesopotamia and other places like the island of Cyprus. The intensive missionary journeys undertaken by Paul of Tarsus are described in detail in *Acts*, as well as in his *Letters* to the various early Christian communities of the second half of the first century. Moreover, Christian discipleship is described as *the Way* in the *Acts of the Apostles*.

A paper on a theological reading of the "Mediterranean journey" is bound to include a brief reference to that detailed account we find in *Acts 27-28* of the long journey of St Paul to Rome, the fierce storm which brought the shipwrecked apostle to the shores of the island of *Melita* (Malta), and his subsequent account of the last leg of the journey to Rome. This is an extremely detailed narrative which describes the departure from a Cretan port, and the exciting battle between the all-devouring tempest and the Roman grain vessel with 276 men on board.

To a number of scholars, it seems highly probable that the intention of the author of *Luke-Acts* was this: the Good News which is first mentioned in Luke 1 regarding the first news of the future birth of the Messiah to the Virgin Mary, and his subsequent birth in Bethlehem and the Good News to all men of good will, is followed by the interesting family tree in *Luke* - in contrast to that we find in *Matthew 1* - where Jesus Christ is depicted not only as a son of Abraham (and thus of the Jewish nation) but *a son of Adam* (and thus, indeed, a member of humanity); the proclamation of his Good News was first restricted to Galilee and Judaea, but soon after his death and resurrection, this spread out, "starting from Jerusalem", and then, as we have seen, from Antioch into Asia Minor and Greece, and then to a faraway unknown island whose inhabitants spoke neither Latin nor Greek. The journey of the Good News to the ends of the earth is thus being underlined through the narrative of *Acts 27-28*.

The *Third Letter of John* refers to hospitality offered to those on an evangelizing mission: "My dear friend, you have done loyal work in helping these brothers, even though they were strangers to you. They are a proof to the whole Church of your love and it would be a kindness if you could help them on their journey as God would approve. It was entirely for the sake of the name that they set out, without depending on the non-believers for anything: it is our duty to welcome people of this sort and contribute our share to their work for the truth" (3 Jn 5-8). Even the *Letter to the Hebrews* affirms: "Continue to love each other like brothers, and remember always to welcome strangers" (13:1-2).

Later on, Christians undertook long journeys not only for missionary purposes of evangelization but with the precise aim of visiting holy places: the important

experience of *pilgrimage* is principally a spiritual one. In their book *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (New York 1978, Columbia University Press), Victor Turner and Edith Turner “focus on a sense of pilgrimage as a journey to a place that is somehow geographically or at least spiritually distant from the everyday lives of the traveller”¹¹. From early times, pilgrims undertook long and challenging journeys to places such as Jerusalem (Calvary and the Holy Sepulchre), Rome (the tomb of the Apostle Peter on Vatican Hill, and the tomb of the Apostle Paul on the road to Ostia), and the shrines of the martyrs¹², where these great witnesses of the faith shed their blood or where they were buried, and later on to places like Santiago de Compostela.

A month prior to his memorable first apostolic visit to Poland, Blessed John Paul II, wrote an Apostolic Letter, *Rutilans Agmen*, on the ninth centenary of the martyrdom of St Stanislaus. In that early text of his pontificate, he affirms: “The places connected with the life and death of Saint Stanislaus are the object of religious veneration. There is a very special devotion to the Saint in the cathedral in Krakow, which is built on the ‘Wavel’ hill and where his tomb stands, as well as in the church in the village of ‘Rupella’ and in his native village of Szczepanow, which is now in the diocese of Tarnów. His relics are the object of veneration, especially his head which to this day shows clear traces of the deadly blows inflicted nine centuries ago. *Every year the inhabitants of the royal city and devout pilgrims from the whole of Poland flock to honour these relics of the head with a solemn procession through the streets of Krakow*”¹³.

One of the most remarkable extant pilgrimage accounts is the *Peregrinatio Egeriae* which describes in great detail the pilgrimage of a fourth-century woman, perhaps a consecrated virgin, to the Holy Places in Jerusalem. Her account is also called the *Itinerarium Egeriae* or *Peregrinatio ad Loca Sancta (Pilgrimage to the Holy Lands)*. Egeria or Aetheria (often called Sylvia) was a Gallic woman who made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land about 381–384. She wrote an account of her journey in a long letter to a circle of women at home which survives in fragmentary form in a later copy. This may have been, according to Marcia Ford,

¹¹ S. Coleman, *Pilgrimage as Field: Space, Time and Text*, in: R. Hämäläinen, H. Pesonen, M. Rakhhal, T. Sakaranaho (eds.), *Pilgrimage of Life. Studies in Honour of Professor René Gothoni*, Helsinki 2010, The Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters and the Dept of the Study of Religions, University of Helsinki, p. 117.

¹² See H. Scerri, *Koinonia, Diakonia and Martyria. Interrelated Themes in Patristic Sacramental Theology as Expounded by Adalbert-G. Hamman*, Malta 1999, Foundation for Theological Studies, p. 226-227, 278-280.

¹³ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Rutilans Agmen* (8 May 1979), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_08051979 (7 VII 2011).

in *Traditions of the Ancients*¹⁴, the first formal writing by a woman in Western European Culture. Egeria's record of her travels to the Holy Land also provides a late fourth-century account of liturgical worship in Palestine. The liturgical year was in its incipient stages at the time of her visit. This is invaluable because the development of liturgical worship (e.g. Lent, Palm or Passion Sunday) reached universal practice in the fourth century. Egeria provides a first-hand account of practices and implementation of liturgical seasons as they existed at the time of her visit. This detailed and insightful snapshot comes before the universal acceptance of a December 25 celebration of the nativity of Jesus; this is very early and very helpful in cataloguing the development of annual liturgical Christian worship.

Another important aspect to be mentioned, in this context, is the customary route taken by Christian pilgrims on their way to Rome, Jerusalem and Santiago de Compostela. Certain of these *viae* are well-documented in ancient and mediaeval sources, and, indeed, some of them are still - in whole or partly - used by contemporary pilgrims. Some examples illustrate this point: the *Via Francigena* - an ancient road between Rome and Canterbury, passing through England, France, Switzerland and Italy. In mediaeval times it was an important road and pilgrimage route. To pilgrims headed south, it was the *Via Romea*; to those headed north, the *Via Francigena*. The *Via Francigena* was the major medieval pilgrimage route to Rome from the north; even today pilgrims travel this route, but in far fewer numbers than the *Way of St James (Camino de Santiago)*.

The *Way of St James* has existed for over a thousand years. It was one of the most important Christian pilgrimages during mediaeval times, together with Rome and Jerusalem, and a pilgrimage route on which a plenary indulgence could be earned. The route to Santiago de Compostela was a Roman trade route, nicknamed the *Milky Way* by travellers, as it followed the *Milky Way* to the Atlantic Ocean. The Christian origin of the pilgrimage has been well-documented throughout the centuries. The scallop, which resembles the setting sun, may have been a symbol used in pre-Christian Celtic rituals of the area. The *Way of St. James* may have originated as a pre-Christian Celtic death journey towards the setting sun, terminating at the "End of the World" (*Finisterra*) on the "Coast of Death" (*Costa da Morte*) and the "Sea of Darkness" (that is, the Abyss of Death, the *Mare Tenebrosum*, Latin for the Atlantic Ocean, itself named after the dying civilization of Atlantis).

The coastal route along the eastern Mediterranean was known as the *Way of the Sea*, or in Latin, the *Via Maris*. The road was a main trade route connecting Egypt

¹⁴ See M. Ford, *Traditions of the Ancients: Vintage Faith Practices for the 21st Century*, Nashville, Tennessee 2006, Broadman & Holman, p. 4.

with Anatolia and Mesopotamia. There were two branches, one near the coast and one inland, in the area of the Philistine Plain. These came together at Aphek and only a single branch continued through the Sharon Plain, around the swamp area, through the Aruna Pass to Megiddo. This provides a clue as to why Megiddo was a significant fortification in Solomon's day. It was an important route for travel and trade. The Via Maris cuts across the Jezreel Valley, through the hills of Lower Galilee, skirts the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and heads northeast to Damascus from Hazor.

Most naturally, Islam recalls the flight of the prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina, in the year 622, the *Hegira*. In September 622, warned of a plot to assassinate him, Muhammad secretly slipped out of Mecca with Abu Bakr. However, two *hadiths* (a saying, act or tacit approval, validly or invalidly, ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad) conclude that Abu Bakr was among the first who migrated to Medina, before the migration of Muhammad. Muhammad and his followers emigrated to the city of Yathrib, 320 kilometres north of Mecca, in several steps. Yathrib was soon renamed *Madinat un-Nabi*, literally "the City of the Prophet", but *un-Nabi* was soon dropped, so its popular name is Medina, meaning "the city". The Muslim year during which the Hijra occurred was designated the first year of the Islamic Calendar by Umar in 638 or 17 AH (*anno hegirae* = "in the year of the hijra").

One of the characteristic features of Islam is the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, the *Hajj*. It is the largest pilgrimage in the world, and is the fifth pillar of Islam, a religious duty that must be carried out at least once by every able-bodied Muslim who can afford to do so. The Hajj is a demonstration of the solidarity of the Muslim people, and their submission to God. Nearly every year, this pilgrimage is in the news for unfortunate reasons. Tragic accidents are known to strike the enormous crowds which flock to Mecca from all parts of the Muslim world. It could be because of worshippers being trampled upon, or a bridge collapsing, or for other totally unexpected causes.

3. Travel-paradigms taken from the sacred texts of the Judaeo-Christian Tradition, and their application to personal reflection on the "journey of life"

The final part of the article will focus upon texts from the Judaeo-Christian Tradition, that is, the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. In the former, there are several detailed narratives which focus upon particular journeys. I will

mention some examples only: the journey of Abraham from Ur of the Chaldeans to the land promised to him by God (in *Genesis*); the great milestone in the history of the People of God which narrates their delivery from Egyptian bondage and their subsequent entry into the land "flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:8.17; 13,5); the journeys of the prophets Elijah and Elisha in the *Books of the Kings*; the journeys of Tobias in the Book of *Tobit*. There are, of course, many others. With regard to the New Testament, some examples have already been mentioned, in particular the journeys associated with the initial missionary activity of the Church.

Brother John of Taizé affirms that "the image of the journey as a key to the Bible has one great advantage: its dynamic, open-ended character. In addition to corresponding well to the mentality of our time, it enables us to grasp the progressive quality of God's self-revelation, and the dimension of risk, adventure, which is so fundamental to the life of faith. Pilgrimage as understood here is not the movement *toward* faith, conceived of as a static mentality, but on the contrary an aspect of believing itself – as for Abraham, the journey and the risk only begin when one says yes to God's call and sets out on the road of the promise"¹⁵.

For the purposes of this final part of this article, focus will be made on a particular Gospel pericope, that of the disciples of Emmaus¹⁶ who are encountered only once in Luke's Gospel while they were travelling. The narrative is found in the 24th chapter of this Gospel - the Gospel characterized by an emphasis on the mercy of God, the *quotidienneté*¹⁷ of God's invitation to salvation to all and the diffusion of the Good News starting from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. This particular narrative - one of many in the Judaeo-Christian Tradition, and in particular in the New Testament - has been chosen because it can be considered to be an epitome of all spiritual journeys. It is a journey marked by a radical transformation after the encounter of two discouraged disciples with the Risen Christ.

The purpose of these reflections is not an exegetical one. The narrative will not be read from the point of view of the scriptural science of exegesis, but chiefly from the angle of missionary spirituality. Why is this dimension being highlighted? It is because the Mediterranean Sea - around which Judaism, Christianity and Islam

¹⁵ Brother John of Taizé, *The Pilgrim God. A Biblical Journey*, Portland, Oregon 1985, Pastoral Press, p. 3-4.

¹⁶ See J. Dupuis, *Who Do You Say I am? Introduction to Christology*, Maryknoll, New York 1994, Orbis Books, p. 53-55.

¹⁷ See H. Scerri, *Quotidienneté in the Writings of Adalbert-G. Hamman (1910-2000): The Existential Concern of a Twentieth-century Patristic Scholar*, in: F. Young, M. Edwards, P. Parvis (eds.), *Studia Patristica 40, Papers presented at the Fourteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 2003*, Leuven – Paris – Dudley/MA 2006, Peeters, p. 331-336.

have been born as privileged expressions of man's relationship with the Divine - has witnessed the growth of these three religions through impressive waves of missionary activity. This was even more remarkable in the case of Christianity and Islam. Missionaries of these faiths embarked on journeys of spiritual conversion, although at times these journeys were unfortunately accompanied by political conquest and physical violence.

The two disciples were overwhelmed by a sinking feeling of sadness. Everything seemed to be collapsing around them. The excruciating death of their beloved Master was to them the sudden end of the hope he had so powerfully instilled in their thirsting hearts. Their Master's death was a great humiliation. Everything around them came crashing down on that terrible Friday afternoon. It had indeed been a shattering experience, especially for that small circle of intimate friends who shared his life and vision. Thus, with sadness wafting about in their minds and enveloping their hearts, they decided to leave the Holy City. Why not return to the countryside where they belonged? And so they did. They trudged on and on. The road to Emmaus was not short. It was something like 12 km long. The two men mumbled and grumbled about the terrible fate of their Master. Although they knew the road to their home village so well, the journey seemed never-ending. It seemed they had shackles on their aching feet. They hardly realized that someone was following them closely.

Specific parts of the text are being referred to enable the reader to enter into the shoes (or the sandals!) of Cleopas and the other disciple. The Lucan text is an incisive one. Luke, whom Tradition has often considered to have been a painter besides being a doctor, is a master story-teller. The vivid colours in the details of the text serve to induce the listener or the reader to empathize with the two disciples, and to experience the same feelings which had wrecked their former enthusiasm.

Heads down, their hearts swimming in a sea of gloom, they failed to notice the man walking in their shadow. They did not recognize the man... What took place as they plodded on was an outpouring of grief. They expressed their previous expectations about the Messiah... The stranger, a man of compassion and empathy, proved to be a real companion to the other two. As it had been throughout his life, he was yet once more being true to his mission... The unending journey to Emmaus seemed to lapse into timelessness. They hardly realized that they had reached their destination. The stranger's mysterious and enlightening presence shook their predicament to its very foundations. Time had flown ... or had they experienced the timelessness of the Eternal Word who had just spoken to them?

We can understand the type of spiritual journey those two men were experiencing. In a crisis situation, they opted out of the Jerusalem community.

Overcome by delusion, they thought it would be better to forget their former positive experiences with Jesus of Nazareth. Their journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus is one marked by pessimism, self-centredness and self-pity. One is struck by the radical transformation which they were to experience. Stopping at an inn, the two men instinctively invited the stranger to share their frugal meal. Their hearts had already experienced an initial transformation. They felt they had to be welcoming... Their hearts of stone were already becoming hearts of flesh. Their hearts began beating fast when they saw him take the bread, break it and bless it. Their hearts beat even faster, as they unsuccessfully tried to embrace him. He had vanished before them. Reflecting on this encounter, the English theologian and author Nicholas Lash, of the University of Cambridge, writes that "at the end of the road, the context is one of hospitality: they invite the stranger in. He is the guest; they are his hosts. At least, this would have been so, in the old language. What they discover, when they are at table, is that it is they, in fact, who are the guests, recipients of hospitality, and that it is he who is the host"¹⁸. As Lash provocatively affirms, the two disciples have learnt *to speak a new language*. As soon as they recognise their Risen Master, they begin to grasp a new reality, his new presence which transcends space and time. The contrast between the emotional-spiritual experiences of the two journeys is highlighted, inviting the reader of Luke 24 to re-live the essentials of this gospel pericope.

Overpowered by joy, the two disciples rushed out of the inn and ran to the road, while they shouted: "Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?" (Lk 24:32)". Brother John of Taizé introduces an innovative concept or divine title, that of *the pilgrim God*. In the text by Luke we have seen the Risen Christ who could have done things otherwise, and yet who decides *to be a travelling companion* to those two dejected men. In other words, borrowing Brother John's words, we are faced with *an itinerant God* who encounters human beings, opening for them, and others through them, a future full of promise¹⁹.

One observes a turning-point in the narrative. After their eyes - *the eyes of faith* - were opened when they encountered their Risen Master, they became changed men. They re-embark on a journey - a journey which is physically similar to the previous one, though in reverse, but spiritually very diverse. They felt it was their duty not to lose any precious time, and to return once more to the Jerusalem fold. Off they set, back to Jerusalem! Forgetting they had just made that painful journey... putting aside all their previous fears... although it

¹⁸ N. Lash, *Theology for Pilgrims*, London 2008, Darton, Longman & Todd, p. 166.

¹⁹ See Brother John of Taizé, *The Pilgrim God*, p. 14-15.

was dark and dangerous to travel... they ran and and ran with amazing speed. Though the paving stones their feet stepped upon were the same ones they had trudged upon a couple of hours earlier, the journey was remarkably different. From the passive meandering of pessimism they now rushed forth with active torrents of optimism. The narrative of Luke 24 is considered to be one of the best paradigms of all spiritual journeys. We have seen the different emotional states the disciples were in. Those two physical journeys are an icon of that internal journey of the individual who is searching for the Divine. It is within this context that we can look at wayfaring and seafaring as a metaphor of the spiritual journey.

Earlier in this article, reference was made to the Mediterranean journey embarked upon by John Henry Newman. On his return journey, somewhere at sea, off the coast of Sardinia, probably when becalmed in the Straights of Bonifacio, on 16th June 1833, Newman expressed his interior state in three brief stanzas. One of the chief contemporary Newman experts, Roderick Strange, states that “for many years congregations have delighted in singing ‘Lead, Kindly Light’, largely oblivious of its origins. To know its source, the relief and gratitude which inspired it, is to recognise instantly its intense personal character for Newman”²⁰.

In this poem, *The Pillar of the Cloud*, one is struck by the theme of the journey. Newman’s long journey, far from home, is a metaphor of that deep interior spiritual struggle he was experiencing. Strange affirms that the poem “captured poignantly his experience of the kindly light which had guided him through darkness when he was far from home: one step was enough; it acknowledged the wilfulness which once had loved to see and choose its own path, but now no longer; it professed hope in the power that would continue to guide him over rough countryside of every kind - moor and fen, crag and torrent - till the night was gone”²¹. This is the complete text of the poem:

“Lead, Kindly Light, amidst th’ encircling gloom
 Lead Thou me on!
 The night is dark, and I am far from home --
 Lead Thou me on!
 Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
 The distant scene - one step enough for me.

²⁰ R. Strange, *John Henry Newman. A Mind Alive*, London 2010, Darton, Longman & Todd, p. 113-114.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

I was not ever thus, nor pray'd that Thou
Shouldst lead me on.
I loved to choose and see my path, but now
Lead Thou me on!
I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,
Pride ruled my will: remember not past years.

So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still
Will lead me on,
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone;
And with the morn those angel faces smile
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile"²².

The image of life as a journey was also brought up, many centuries earlier, by Gregory the Great in some of his letters. For example, in his letter of July 593 to Priscus, a patrician from the East, the bishop of Rome writes: "As a traveler walks now over level ground, and now over uneven ground, so certainly do we, while we remain in this life, now meet prosperity and now adversity, and finally they succeed one another in alternate periods of time, and with each in succession they become confused"²³. Almost five years later, in June 598, Gregory makes a passing comment on life as a journey in his letter to the patrician, Rusticiana. He affirms: "May almighty God, who sees your bodily weakness and pilgrimage, comfort you always with his grace"²⁴. Through the tone of the letter, one observes the pastoral solicitude which is present in the heart and the life of Gregory the Great who was always keen to accompany everyone on his or her life journey. He is even more direct and incisive in his letter to Aurelius (July 599) when he adopts the metaphor of life as a journey: "For our present life is like a journey overseas, and when someone longs for his own country, the place of his travel abroad is a torment, even if it seems to be pleasant"²⁵. A month later, Pope Gregory replied to a letter sent to him by Reccared, king of the Goths, thanking him for the offerings sent with a number of abbots from Spain for the poor in Rome. Having the stormy

²² J.H. Newman, *Verses on Various Occasions*, London - New York - Bombay 1903, Longmans, Green and Co., revised 2002, p. 156-157.

²³ Gregory the Great, *Book 3, Letter 51*, in: J.R.C. Martyn (ed.), *The Letters of Gregory the Great*, I, Toronto 2004, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, p. 269.

²⁴ Gregory the Great, *Book 8, Letter 22*, in: J. R.C. Martyn (ed.), *The Letters of Gregory the Great*, II, Toronto 2004, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, p. 518.

²⁵ Gregory the Great, *Book 9, Letter 218*, in: *ibid.*, p. 682.

journey of Paul to Melita at the back of his mind, Gregory applies the imagery of Acts 27,20-44 to affirm that “the ship of his heart stood firm in the waves of the sea”²⁶. Writing, in September 600, to Palladius, a priest of Mount Sinai, Gregory again resorts to the image of the pilgrimage and applies it to life. He asks the priest to intercede before God on his behalf, “because in this pilgrimage of my life evils are surrounding me, and many of them”²⁷.

It is appropriate, in an article in a new scientific journal dedicated to the memory of Blessed John Paul II, to refer to one of his homilies during his first pastoral visit as Pope to his native Poland, in particular when he celebrated the Eucharist at the Shrine of the Holy Cross, at Mogiła. The theme of pilgrimage is brought up by the Polish Pope in the introduction of his homily: “Here I am again in front of this Cross, where I have so often come *as a pilgrim*, in front of the Cross that has remained as the most precious relic of our Redeemer for all of us. When, close to Krakow, Nowa Huta was springing up, an enormous industrial complex and a new city, a new Krakow, it may not have been noticed that *it was springing up beside this Cross*, this relic that we have inherited with the ancient Cistercian abbey from the time of the Piasts. It was the year 1222, the time of Prince Leszek Bialy, the time of Bishop Ivo Odrowaz, the period before the canonization of Saint Stanislaus. At that time, on the third centenary of our Baptism, the Cistercian abbey was founded here and the relic of the Holy Cross was then brought, and has been for centuries *the goal of pilgrimages* from the Krakow area, from Kielce to the north, from Tarnów to the east, and from Silesia to the west”²⁸.

Conclusion

This article has sought to explore the theme of the journey, in particular the “Mediterranean journey”. Journeys normally have a point of departure and a destination. In this paper, journeys of all kinds have been referred to. In the course of this paper, I have referred to a different sort of journey, one inspired by one’s faith or the quest for the Transcendent - the pilgrimage. Nicholas Lash writes: “Many roads meet at places of pilgrimage. People come from different directions, with different agendas, different dreams, different histories. [...] Like

²⁶ Gregory the Great, *Book 9, Letter 229b*, in: *ibid.*, p. 701.

²⁷ Gregory the Great, *Book 11, Letter 1*, in: J. R. C. Martyn (ed.), *The Letters of Gregory the Great*, III, Toronto 2004, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, p. 736.

²⁸ John Paul II, Homily during Mass at the Shrine of the Holy Cross, Mogiła, Poland (9 June 1979), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790609 (5 VII 2011).

all holy places, places of pilgrimage are microcosmic. What is to be found there is not less than everything: *ourselves, our heart's rest, homecoming in God*²⁹. Well, journeys of all kinds - whether for profane reasons, whether for the sake of curiosity, whether for interior or spiritual reasons - entail a passage, an exodus, a movement from a familiar place to, perhaps, an unfamiliar one; journeys entail leaving the safety and comfort of one's home and embarking on a path which may be tortuous, full of perils and uncertain.

This article has referred to the three monotheistic religions which grew around the Mediterranean Sea. It was a living, vibrant faith which inspired individuals to embark upon missionary journeys, pilgrimages and, unfortunately, crusades. Proverbially, we have often exclaimed that faith has moved mountains. If it has moved mountains, it has certainly also moved believers – the believer who inspired by his creed seeks to embrace eternal values. Values are ideals which like stars we cannot reach with our hands, but which serve to guide us, as the stars, in particular the Northern Pole star, guided the Phoenician seafarers (mentioned at the start of this article) in the Mediterranean, and beyond the Pillars of Hercules and further afield. Faith guides the believer. The believer journeys and prays. The believer prays and experiences enthusiasm. Experiencing enthusiasm, the believer undergoes personal transformation. Ongoing transformation makes the believer a more authentic person. And yet, far from remaining in stagnant waters, the believer remains on a journey. The faith experience of the believer is an ongoing journey. An authentic faith experience is never stagnant.

I reiterate that faith possesses this core dimension - the "journey dimension": *a journey of purification and maturation* from Jerusalem to Emmaus, and from Emmaus back to Jerusalem; *a journey of conversion* from Jerusalem to Damascus. It is the faith of the humble pilgrim who, against all odds, trudges on, "O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent", while continuing to ask existential questions and while seeking the Transcendent. It is the faith of the believer who continues searching for answers, the faith which leads to personal purification and maturity. It is that contagious faith which enflames the hearts of others. The journey - whether "Mediterranean", or belonging elsewhere to any other region of the globe - becomes the epitome and the metaphor of the quest for the Divine and the searching self.

²⁹ N. Lash, *Theology for Pilgrims*, op. cit., p. 167.

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