1 Pilgrimages and Peace-building on the Global Stage

Ian S. McIntosh*
Indiana University Purdue–University Indianapolis (IUPUI), Indiana, USA

Introduction

The idea that pilgrimages generate the least violent gatherings that humanity has designed for itself inspired the central question of an internet-based live-to-air class that I delivered at Gaza University from 2012 to 2014. In a world in conflict over race, religion and finite resources, I asked students whether there was a place for pilgrimage in the peace-builder's toolkit. While acknowledging that many pilgrimages have a political dimension and that political leaders can manipulate pilgrims in ways detrimental to peace, I asked my students whether certain categories of pilgrimages could help address deep-seated conflict, historical injustice and social inequality, all of which are prevalent on the global stage today. While the links between pilgrimage and personal healing have been explored in the literature, those between pilgrimage and peace-building have often been ignored. This chapter presents a survey of pilgrimages in which peace is specifically mentioned as a desired outcome or where the greater common good is prioritized. It focuses on world religions, inter-faith pilgrimages, civil and cultural religion pilgrimages in North America, pilgrimages to sites of conscience, and green pilgrimages. A largely unspoken theme of sacred journeys is imagining a better world, one in which the view from the mountaintop shows humans united in a shared celebration of justice and freedom for all. Can pilgrimages help break down barriers and facilitate communication across lines of division? Can the experience of camaraderie in these sacred journeys translate into peaceful action beyond the trail? Rather than examining the specific impacts for peace-building in the highlighted pilgrimages, the goal is to lay a foundation for future research. Indeed, the upward global trend in numbers in both secular and sacred journeys worldwide provides scholars with an unparalleled opportunity for critically evaluating the significance and impact of pilgrimages in the interests of peace-building.

Inter-faith Pilgrimages

My interest in exploring pilgrimages and peace-building emerged from internet-based peace work with Palestinian students between 2012 and 2014 (McIntosh and Alfaleet, 2014). This collaboration between Indiana University and Gaza University students was centred on the use of visioning as a tool for peace-building. The task of students at both institutions was to envision a peaceful and prosperous future for the Middle East and to identify the practical steps necessary

* Address for correspondence: imcintos@iupui.edu

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for its realization. The obstacles are very considerable and many of the Palestinian students held out little hope for achieving such an outcome. The Israeli blockade of Gaza, repression by their own elected Hamas government, environmental woes and so on have contributed to widespread apathy and despair in the Gaza Strip.

In one series of classes on tourism and development, however, I shared a series of inspirational stories about inter-faith pilgrimages that stirred enthusiastic discussion. Examples included the walking pilgrimages of joy in India, such as the Sufi Ajmer pilgrimage and the Hindu Wari pilgrimage, where the unifying principles are love and inclusion. In both cases, caste is set aside and pilgrims of various faiths walk together as equals. In the Wari pilgrimage, for example, upper caste Hindu pilgrims acknowledge the 'untouchables' in their midst by singing not about their companions' perceived impure occupations but about the purity of their souls (Karve, 1962).

Believing that a key to peace and coexistence lay with such journeys, I explored in more detail with the class the phenomenon of inter-faith pilgrimage. Examples were considered of how people in multiple settings were successfully looking beyond the narrow confines of their own cultures, nationalities and religions, and embarking upon a common sacred journey even though they had very different ideas as to the journey's ultimate significance. The message was clear: it did not matter if the person walking alongside was of the same faith or could even speak the same language; what mattered was that they were 'parallel' travellers on life's journey and could learn from one another.

The annual overnight climb to the top of Adam's Peak (Sri Pada) in Sri Lanka exemplifies this ideal. Until the 1960s, tens of thousands of pilgrims of different faiths would travel together, at their own pace, worshipping in their own style, on their way to the sacred mountaintop (Figs 1.1 and 1.2). Here, members of different faith groups recognized in their own ways a natural rock formation in the shape of a foot. Muslims saw it as belonging to Adam.[1] For Buddhists it belonged to the Buddha. Hindus regarded it as the footprint of Shiva. Catholics believed that it was the mark of the early pioneering South Asian missionary, St Thomas (De Silva 2016).[2]

Another important variation on this theme is the Sabarimala pilgrimage in southern India where the Hindu deity Lord Ayyappan inspires the devout to undertake a walking pilgrimage through the dense forests of Kerala. The message

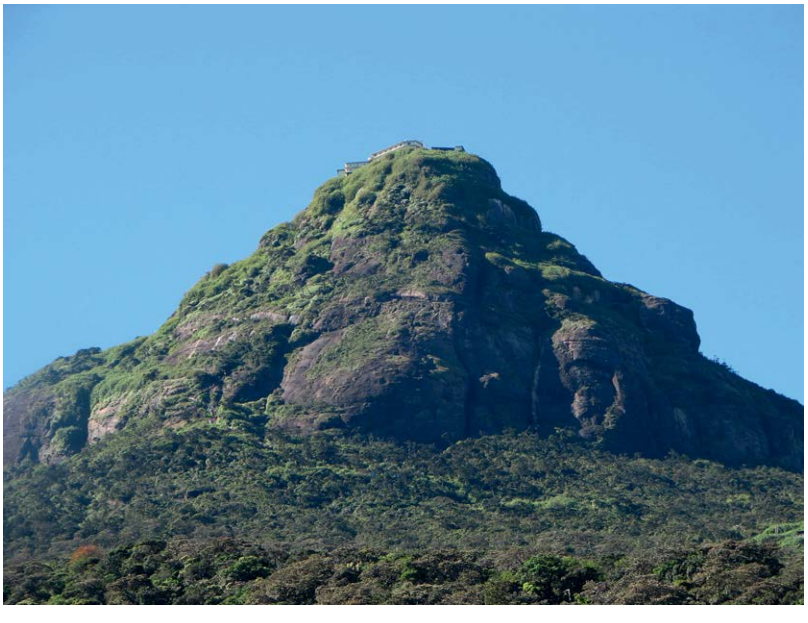

Fig. 1.1. Adam's Peak (Sri Pada); at one time the world's foremost inter-faith pilgrimage destination.

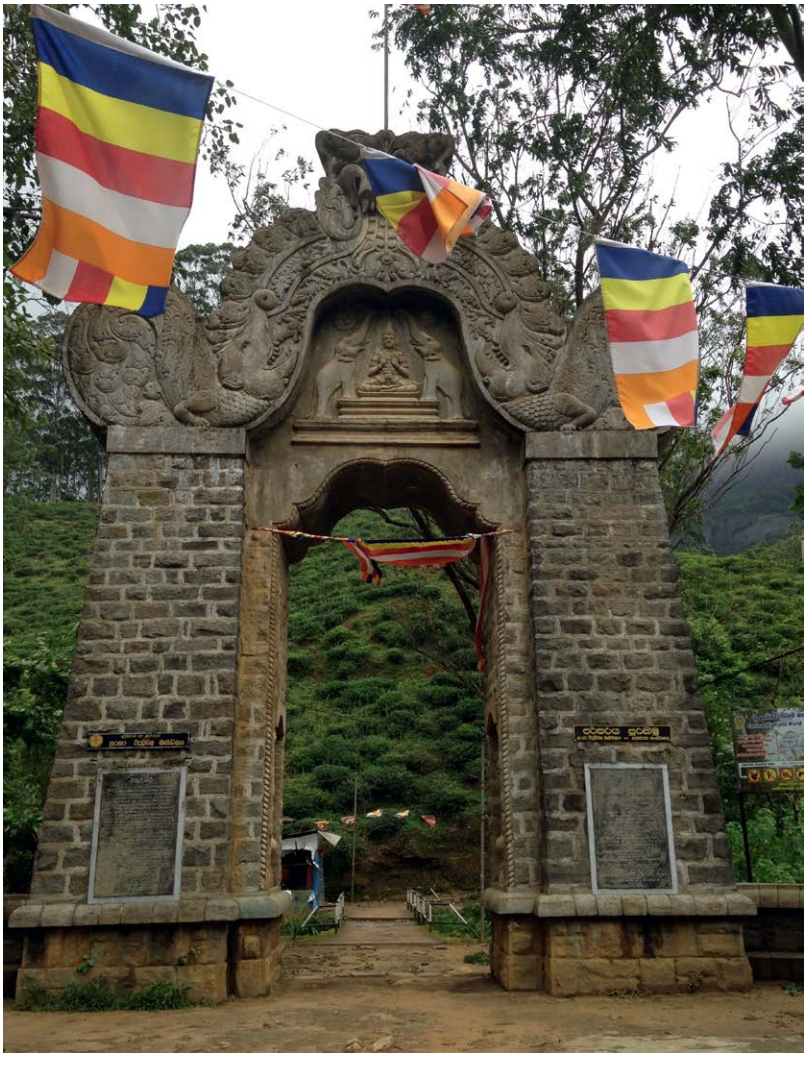

Fig. 1.2. At the foot of the pilgrimage route to Adam's Peak, Sri Lanka. © 2016 M. Shobhana Xavier. Photo used with permission.

of elders, in the form of sacred narratives handed down over many generations, is that the pilgrims undertaking this journey will respect and honour their Muslim, Christian and forest dwelling Adavasi (tribal) neighbours both during and after the pilgrimage. This acknowledgement has Hindu pilgrims performing rituals in a mosque dedicated to Vavar Swami at the entrance to Lord Ayyappan's temple (Khan, 2013, p. 84). Pilgrims recognize the devoted service of Vavar Swami in fighting alongside Lord Ayyappan in a primordial battle against the forces of evil. At the termination of the pilgrimage, Hindu pilgrims will also worship in St Andrew's Basilica in Arthunkal to honour the Christian martyr St Sebastian, who is said to be a brother of Lord Ayyappan. These narratives are very convoluted, but they send a powerful message to pilgrims about inter-faith unity. In the evening at Sabarimala, for example, Catholic lullabies are played over the public address system to ensure that the Hindu deity will sleep well.

Regardless of caste or religion, all males are invited to participate in the sacred journey to

Sabarimala and, regardless of their religion, will be referred to as 'Swami'.

In a region of India noted for its religious and cultural diversity, the contribution of the Sabarimala pilgrimage in promoting social harmony should not be underestimated (see Osella and Osella, 2003, p. 731).

It is often said that people of the same faith, even within the same family, may not be worshipping the same God even when together with their heads bowed in prayer. For some, the stature of God is without limit. He/she is all-encompassing, filling the entire field of the believer's vision. For others, however, God is infinitely smaller or somewhere in between, playing a significantly lesser role in their lives. Likewise, for some, God's form is that of a human being; for others, God is without specific physical attributes. To some people, God is personal and all-forgiving; for others, God is distant and indifferent to the fate of human beings. But at certain points in the calendar year, all – both the faithful and those of a lesser conviction – assemble as one. Regardless of their personal beliefs, they pray to a deity that is barely recognizable to their fellows.

The inter-faith pilgrimage known as the Camino de Santiago de Compostela, ranked third in the order of Christendom's sacred journeys (after Jerusalem and Rome), speaks to this variation on the theme of inter-faith pilgrimages. Today there may be as many non-believers as believers on the 800-km trail and, for many, this pilgrimage is best understood as 'walking therapy'. For some, the Camino represents an unprecedented opportunity to reach out and learn from others, to be healed and to grow in the spirit of *communitas*, defined by Victor Turner (1973, p. 193) as that unstructured community of pilgrims in which all are equal. The road unites people with widely varying histories and motivations and there is a common desire to understand and to share the experience with others (Van der Beek, 2015, p. 46). Greenia (2014a, p. 21) says that during the Camino there is a surrender of individualization as pilgrims become repositories of a common sacred memory. In so doing, the camaraderie that they experience creates the opportunity for a moral convergence that produces unaccustomed tranquillity and trust among strangers. Greenia says: 'It is like improvisational theatre among strangers gesturing insistently for others to join in with their best selves'.[3]

The many stories on inter-faith pilgrimage that I shared with my Gaza students inspired a thorough investigation of the potential of such journeys for peace-building, both in the Middle East and beyond. This chapter will highlight the pilgrimages that we discussed in class, and also other pilgrimages. The next section reflects on the history and significance of pilgrimage in the light of Theodore Parker's notion of the arc of the moral universe ultimately bending towards justice (Parker, 2017). Can the act of pilgrimage, when considered on a global scale, be a strategy for linking diverse peoples in pursuit of the greater common good, defined here as what is beneficial for all or most members of the human family? Following this, I introduce various pilgrimages in which peace-building is afforded priority. The survey begins with an overview of the wish for peace as documented in pilgrimages in the major world religions. Then civil and cultural religion pilgrimages in the USA are reviewed, and I ask if there is an element of peace-building even in overtly nationalistic pilgrimages, like those associated with the Gettysburg Civil War Battlefield, the Lincoln Memorial or the National Archives in Washington DC. Finally, the peace dimension of journeys to sites of conscience, and of green pilgrimages where Mother Earth is the object of veneration, is considered.

Pilgrimage: A Conventional View and a Challenge

In a world sharply divided by religious differences, and where the lines of the 'clash of civilizations' are becoming ever more clearly demarcated, the potential of pilgrimage for the promotion of tolerance, understanding and compassion certainly warrants a deeper investigation. Indeed, George Greenia's insight that pilgrimages generate 'the least violent mass public gatherings that humankind has designed for itself'[4] inspires the principal question of this research: in what ways can the concept of the sacred or secular journey lend itself to envisioning and realizing a better world, one where the view from the mountaintop shows human beings united in their shared joys, concerns and differences?

In his book *Hindu Places of Pilgrimage in India*, Svrinder Mohan Bharwaj (1973, p. 1) speaks of

how every religion has its sacred foci – mountains, springs, temples, etc. – upon which men and women of faith have periodically converged. For instance, in the performance of their ritual activities, the Sumerians of antiquity reverentially ascended the steps of the Ziggurat, a rectangular stepped pyramid, just as Chinese emperors would ascend holy Mt Tai in north-east China. While the meanings and significance would vary, physical journeys like these have their modern equivalents in pilgrimages to places such as the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, the Ganges River in Allahabad or Varanasi, or to the Croatian mountaintop associated with a vision of Our Lady of Medjugorje. Such sites of convergence in the natural and constructed world are often described by pilgrims in otherworldly and liminal terms as 'thin places'. The sharp distinction between the sacred and the mundane realms have become blurred here; one can almost perceive the doorway linking heaven and earth.

According to historian of religion Mircea Eliade (1961, p. 16), throughout the ages people were in awe of such places because they were considered to be a source of power, fertility and identity. From time immemorial, pilgrimages were understood to be an avenue for asserting and reasserting the norms and values of the group, and securely locating individuals within the collective.

Rarely would this quest for identity and belonging lead pilgrims to consider the world from anything but their own cultural viewpoint. In some settings, to do so would have been both ill-advised and possibly disloyal. The acknowledgement of spiritual plurality or the worth of other systems of knowing or believing was at odds with what was termed the 'natural duty': looking first to the needs of one's own family and kin (Feierman, 1998, p. 3). With a few notable exceptions,[5] coexistence with members of other faiths on equal terms has been uncommon in human history. The tendency was towards domination and conversion of others rather than listening to and learning from them.

Philosopher and animal rights activist Peter Singer says that in this earlier stage of human development, most groups held a tribal ethic (Good Reads, 2015a). Although members of one's own tribe were protected, people of other tribes could be robbed or killed according to one's pleasure. Gradually the circle of protection has expanded; however, we have a long way to go towards building a sense of belonging and inclusiveness that is global in scale.

The concept of publicly affirming shared values across faiths was not developed in any concerted fashion until the 20th century. The growing awareness of our inherent ethnocentrism, for example, has opened the door to an appreciation of cultural relativism, which argues that all cultures and religions are equally valid once understood on their own terms. Today we can more readily observe examples of people reaching out beyond their comfort zones, and the motives are varied, as I will discuss later. This trajectory of inclusivity in terms of how we define ourselves and our future was referenced in 1858 by Theodore Parker, one of the founders of modern Unitarian Universalism. He said:

> I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways; I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight, I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice.
>
> (Good Reads, 2015b)

Is this concept of an arc bending towards justice a fundamental truth? Perhaps not as outlined in the universal prayer known as the 'great invocation', where there is deemed to be a divine evolutionary plan in the universe. However, the concept is nevertheless well established in the literature. Steven Pinker (2010), for example, in his *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, speaks of the growing recognition of individual and collective human rights and a steady and substantial decline in violence over the past few centuries. Skinning people alive, burning them at the stake or drawing and quartering them are no longer practices associated with crime and punishment or the 'rule of law'. More recently, Michael Schermer's (2015) *The Moral Arc* addresses the role of science in this noticeable trajectory of hope for humankind. Of the many factors that have come together since the Enlightenment to bend the arc in a more moral direction, rationality and reason are deemed to be the most significant.

Is there a role for sacred journeys in moving humanity along this arc? What are the preconditions for positive outcomes? In considering this

question, Indian theologian Deenabandhu Manchala says that the pilgrim with justice and peace in mind must begin by confessing his or her complicity with structures, cultures and systems that cause, nurture and legitimize injustice and human aggression. Such a pilgrimage, he says, is about:

> effecting transformation of structures and cultures that deny life and keep many in endless cycles of oppression and exploitation, poverty and misery [in particular the]…victims of racism, casteism, and patriarchy…and many others who remain nameless and faceless, existing only as categories.
>
> (Manchala, 2014, p. 141)

Each year, an estimated 330 million people participate in major sacred journeys in Saudi Arabia, India, Japan, Spain and elsewhere[6] and many more are engaged in what Gitlitz (2014, 36) calls the 'new pilgrimages' which are focused more on the self than on deities. By one account, one in three global travellers is on a journey that is, to some degree, pilgrimage-related, and linked to the desire for transformation at some deep inner or spiritual level (UNWTO, 2014).

We should acknowledge that not all pilgrimages are peace-focused, nor are pilgrims always driven by peaceful motives. Pilgrimage sites are often centre stage in military conflicts. The 1989 revival of the Serbian pilgrimage to the 'Field of Blackbirds' in Kosovo preceded acts of genocide against ethnic Albanians. Similarly, the 1950s revival of Hinduism in India led to an increasing desire to assert Hindu identity through sacred journeys. This led to a number of violent conflicts with Muslims, including the destruction of Mathura's 16th-century mosque and the rebuilding of a Hindu temple as a place of pilgrimage (Singh, 2013, p. 201). Also to be acknowledged are the efforts of authorities in former conflict zones to prevent certain sites from becoming associated with pilgrimages, for example the Documentation Center in Berlin which details Nazi World War II atrocities.

In the remainder of this chapter, the focus is on pilgrimages with a demonstrated peace dimension. In what ways are they contributing to the promotion of unity, justice, tolerance, gender equality and healing?

Pilgrimages of Peace

Peter Jan Margry in *Shrines and Pilgrimage in the Modern World* defines pilgrimage, much as others do, as a journey by individuals or groups:

> to a place that is regarded as more sacred or salutary than the environment of everyday life, to seek a transcendental encounter with a specific cult object for the purpose of acquiring spiritual, emotional or physical healing or benefit.
>
> (Margry, 2008, p. 17)

Pilgrimages associated with all the major world religions provide multiple avenues for such encounters of this nature for the purposes of healing and benefits, but they also have the potential to deliver much more. Despite the widespread failure by researchers to reference peace-building as a motive for sacred journeys, visions of peace and harmony, and of healing writ large, often feature in the accounts of pilgrims. The following represents a brief summary of the peace dimension of various religious pilgrimages:

- *Reconciliation*: The highest objective of Islam's pilgrimage to Mecca (the Hajj) is peace. Hajj rituals convey a message of reconciliation with oneself, with other Muslims and non-Muslims, and with the environment. In Mecca, men and women pray together and experience God both individually and as a community of believers. The great diversity of pilgrims fosters a broad and inclusive sense of identity and community.
- *Justice*: The Shi'a Islam pilgrimage to the Karbala (Ashura and Arba'een) commemorates the martyrdom of Imam Hussein. This is considered the largest peaceful gathering on earth; over 28 million pilgrims attended in 2015. The emphasis on sacrifice in the name of truth and justice has inspired peace leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. The pilgrimage attracts devotees of many faiths, including Sunni Moslems, Christians (including from the Vatican), Yazidis and Zoroastrians.
- *Solidarity*: The 'universal holiday' of peace in Judaism, called Sukkot or the Feast of Tabernacles, invites all peoples to travel on pilgrimage to Jerusalem in both solidarity and joy.

- *Unity*: Religions such as Baha'i, Sikhism, Caodaism and Chrislam were created out of a desire for harmony and an end to injustice, and pilgrimages associated with these faiths promote inclusion and belonging.
- *Ending suffering*: Buddhism's message of peace, compassion and love for all living beings is reflected in the pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya in India, one of the four major sites of Buddhist pilgrimage, where it is believed that the Buddha achieved enlightenment. Pilgrims are driven by a desire to eliminate the three poisons within themselves (greed, hatred and delusion) and to eradicate the suffering of others.
- *Tolerance*: Hinduism is a polytheistic religion and its adherents describe themselves as being highly tolerant of other faiths. The city of Varanasi (Benares) in India, often described 'a city that is a prayer,'[7] is viewed as a role model for peace for it is here that people of different religions, regions and walks of life converge and coexist in peace and harmony.
- *Healing*: In France, the annual peace ritual for ex-combatants at the Catholic Shrine of Lourdes, the famous Virgin Mary apparition site, draws military personnel from 35 countries including Malta, Croatia, the UK and the USA, in search of physical and spiritual healing and forgiveness.
- *Peace*: Also from Catholicism, a replica statue of Our Lady of Fatima in Portugal, created in 1947, comes complete with a rescue plan for humanity. Known as the 'international pilgrim virgin' statue, Fatima has visited over 100 countries and autonomous regions, some of which are beset by violence. Fatima is on a mission of hope, peace and love not just for Catholics; her name alone links her to the Muslim world. Our Lady of Fatima reaches out to all people of good will and miracles are said to abound wherever she travels.
- *Equilibrium*: The Chinese philosophy of yin and yang, the two great originating principles by which all things have evolved, is highlighted in a wide variety of sacred pilgrimage sites including mountains, caves, temples, rivers and gardens. Here, the opposing forces flow into one another, transforming and stabilizing each other and promoting equilibrium.
- *Compassion*: In pilgrimages throughout East Asia, Buddhists and Taoists honour Guanyin, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. With her miraculous powers, she assists all those who cry out for help. Guanyin is depicted as both male and female in statuary to show how she has transcended gender.
- *Gender*: In Nigeria, the popular Osun Osogbo pilgrimage attracts the faithful from many indigenous Yoruba groups. This journey speaks directly to the cherished relationship and sacred interdependence of men and women, one of the ultimate preconditions for peace.
- *Harmony*: Confucius was driven by the desire to bring peace to a world divided by conflict and dissension. He stressed the goal of creating accord in the family and humaneness in society. Pilgrimages associated with his teachings promote the ideology of an 'intermediate harmony' where heaven and humankind are considered as one.

There are many other examples which highlight the peace dimension of pilgrimages, but they tend to be not widely known or even appreciated. The annual year-end pilgrimage around Mt Kenya by the Kikuyu and Meru tribespeople affirms not only their identity and place in the world, but also something much deeper. They wear blue as a symbol of peace and, making seven prayer stops, walk counter-clockwise around the mountain. Pilgrims believe that Mt Kenya once hosted the holy covenant and they pray so that God can take control of the country and bring peace to all. Their non-selfish efforts envision unity and harmony well beyond their own communities in a country that is currently plagued by tribal conflict and terrorism.

In a similar fashion, the Aborigines in Australia's north-east Arnhem Land, a people known as the Yolngu, will openly say that they are engaged in universal peace-building practices when they celebrate the Dreaming, their sacred religious tradition. While today Yolngu women might be more inclined to undertake a pilgrimage to the Holy Land than to sacred sites on their own homelands, Yolngu men will still journey

along the 'songlines' of their ancient territories; and, together, both the men and women will 'hold up the universe' for the benefit of all (McIntosh, 2015). The Dreaming, now incorporating Christianity, reinforces the view that we must each contribute – in our own unique ways – to sustaining our world through sacred journeys and rituals.

Pilgrimage in a Positive and Collective Sense

Davidson and Gitlitz (2002), in their encyclopaedia of pilgrimage, identify the various motives for embarking upon pilgrimage. These motives include the desire for fertility, love, good fortune, merit, thanksgiving and especially for health. The quest for healing, according to Dubisch and Winkelman (2005, p. 1) is often described by pilgrims in spiritual terms as restoring one's relationship with oneself (or one's God, whoever or whatever one might conceive that to be). The pilgrim may be searching for a cure for physical or spiritual problems, or seeking a sense of belonging to fill a spiritual vacuum, or may be motivated by a deep desire to connect with like-minded individuals who will reinforce their sense of self and their place in the universe (Singh, 2013). Religious scholar David Haberman (1994), for example, says:

> Pilgrims take to the road in search of some object, often quite vague, which promises to provide something to fill the painful holes in their lives. This object of yearning is difficult to pin down; it is experienced as that which is missing, some unnamed object lost long ago; it is that haunting lack which engenders the incessant flight from one thing to another. The promise of fulfillment, of wholeness, of perfection, of completion lures us out onto the road to begin a quest.
>
> (p. 7)

With its communal rather than individual emphasis, the quest for peace is not acknowledged in most definitions of pilgrimage and, as discussed earlier, this is a common oversight. I use definitions of negative peace and positive peace, and also negative and positive health, to explain the distinction between individual journeys designed for personal benefit and those journeys with a more universal or collective focus. In the literature, peace is defined not merely by the absence of war, just as health is defined not merely by the absence of disease. Rather, positive peace is characterized by the presence of justice and collaborative effort towards bridge-building. Health, likewise, is understood as a positive sense of well-being, not just the lack of any discernible ailment. Applying this same logic to pilgrimage, the journey is seen as much more than overcoming a personal deficiency, like fulfilling an obligation, repaying a debt, doing penance, dealing with a loss or purifying oneself in God's vision. To focus instead on the positive dimension of pilgrimage is to recognize its potential for societal restoration and transformation along the arc of the moral universe. The idea of this healing writ large moves our thinking beyond the needs and interests of the individual to the needs and interests of society as a whole, and many pilgrims are guided, and indeed inspired, by this notion of working towards the greater common good, as I discuss next.

Drawing Inspiration from Other Faiths

Today we are increasingly experiencing our fast-changing post-modern world as both plural and multifaith. While some feel threatened by the new and are retreating to the comfort and security of what Eleanor Nesbitt (2003) describes as the 'old certainties', like race, colour and creed, others with an eclectic religious mindset have demonstrated a willingness to investigate the faiths of others in their midst, and to acknowledge the many influences that intersect uniquely in each one of us.

The 20th century was witness to many sincere attempts to facilitate inter-faith dialogue on a global scale, in particular with the establishment of the Parliament of the World's Religions, the World Conference on Religion and Peace, and the World Congress of Faiths. Since the crisis of 9/11 and the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001, there has been a renewed urgency in calls for people of faith to publicly affirm and celebrate their shared values. Inter-faith dialogue can challenge one's beliefs, but this is a prerequisite for dispelling stereotypes and promoting understanding (Jaoudi, 1993).

Victor Turner coined the term *communitas* to refer to the fleeting sense of unity in diversity that some pilgrims experience on their sacred and secular journeys, including at the aforementioned global inter-faith gatherings. Can *communitas* also inspire spirited work beyond the trail or conference halls towards a world that embraces a vision of peace, harmony and sustainability? How might the peace-builder facilitate an experience for pilgrims where they can envision a new order freed from existing boundaries and hierarchies?

People reach out for spiritual inspiration beyond their own faith communities for many reasons. Some are inspired by the desire for healing or blessings, or the search for the 'divine spark' that may have deserted their own religious communities. In the television documentary, *Extreme Pilgrim*, Anglican vicar Peter Owen-Jones (2008) searches for divine inspiration not just within his own Christian tradition (by visiting hermits in the deserts of Egypt), but also in Hindu pilgrimages and Zen Buddhism. He undertook three arduous journeys in the remotest parts of the earth in order to bring a revitalized faith back to his UK parishioners. Indeed, more and more people are 'voting with their feet' in this religious experimentation. Some are moved by the emotion of *agape*, the deep and abiding love of humankind, while others have peace-building explicitly in mind. Christians in Mindanao in the Philippines, for example, are well known for undertaking a 'Solidarity Ramadan' in alliance with their Muslim brothers and sisters in a profound display of inter-faith unity. There is an acknowledgement that we are all on this journey of life together and differences can only be overcome through dignified interaction and camaraderie.

There are numerous cases that highlight this crossing of boundaries. Consider the hundreds of thousands of Muslims who join with Christians each year in a search for healing in pilgrimages to the major Virgin Mary apparition sites in Egypt, such as Zaitoun. Despite the potential accusation of apostasy and the very real threats to their person by hardliners, these pilgrims have helped to foster a spirit of interreligious alliance in that troubled country. The Virgin Mary is held in the deepest regard in Islam and, as Samir Khalil Samir (2013) says, the shared human need for spirituality, mysticism and beauty sees many Muslims reaching out to Mary (Maryām) alongside their Christian brothers and sisters.

In a mirror image of this practice, Orthodox Christians join with Muslims in this same search for healing or blessings in inter-faith pilgrimages in cities in both Ethiopia and South Asia. In the latter case, there is no shame associated with a Muslim or Dalit ('Untouchable') participating in the Hindu Wari 'pilgrimage of joy' in Maharastra in India, or of a non-Muslim participating in the inter-faith Sufi pilgrimage to Ajmer in that same country. Rather, it is the very opposite. Ajmer, for example, owes its fame to the spirit of inclusion fostered by Sultan Chisti, the 'patron of the poor'.[8] His Sufi devotees, and also adherents of other religions, undertake a long walking pilgrimage to Ajmer to experience and share what is described as a joy that transcends all divisions.

In Nigeria, where Christian–Muslim animosity is an ongoing heartbreak, a unique religion known as Chrislam has emerged. Adherents recognize both the Bible and the Koran as holy texts, and they practise 'running deliverance', a distinctive practice of spiritual running which members liken to Joshua's army circling Jericho, or the Muslim practice of circumambulating the Kaaba.

Some may criticize or feel threatened by this emerging 'pastiche spirituality', this buffet of religious offerings now available to all. But an openness to the other does not necessarily imply a 'watering down' of one's faith or a blurring of the boundaries that exist between some religious groups. Rather, people are seeking new answers to old questions, and in so doing are developing an appreciation for the rich diversity in their midst.

Civil and Cultural Religion Pilgrimages

The next category of sacred journeys discussed here is linked to what is known in the literature as civil (civic) and cultural pilgrimages. It will be demonstrated that even overtly nationalistic pilgrimages in the USA and elsewhere can project a message of justice and peace that is universal in nature.

North America is not well known as a pilgrimage destination in the traditional sense (Olsen, 2016). A recent commentary by Philip Jenkins (2015) in the journal *Aleteia*, for example,

asks why the USA, with its 70 million Catholics, has no great pilgrimage centres comparable to Lourdes in France or Fatima in Portugal. Jenkins says that by any standard measure, the USA is a much more religious society than most of Europe: church attendance figures are higher, and religious institutions occupy a far greater role in public life. Yet Europe over the past quarter century has witnessed a massive revival in pilgrimage. Jenkins mentions the very popular US pilgrimage sites at Chimayo in New Mexico, Maryland's national shrine of the Virgin Mary and New York's shrine for Lilly of the Mohawks, but adds that these pilgrimage sites do not have a reputation far beyond their own states or their interested ethnic communities. However, no less than any others, North Americans seek through pilgrimage that same sense of connectedness with themselves and with others, and with fundamental or timeless truths.[9] So what is the explanation?

The most obvious answer is that the doctrine of the separation of powers in the USA precludes governmental backing for religious pilgrimage sites as in Saudi Arabia. Pilgrimage is not a mainstream practice for Protestants and, as Daniel Olsen (2016, p. 34) says, it 'has not been fully incorporated into the religio-cultural fabric of North America'. Protestant resistance to Catholic displays of religious fervour that span more than a few parishes is another factor,[10] as is the reluctance of the American Catholic establishment to respond to hype over miracles.[11]

Not considered by Jenkins is the notion of civil religion pilgrimages. While the USA lacks a well-developed traditional culture of sacred journeys, this great ethnic, cultural and religious melting pot does have major quasi-religious pilgrimages that are the equal of anything in Europe. These pilgrimages are not associated with any specific faith or tradition but rather with the mantra of 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness'.

It was Robert Bellah (1967) who popularized the idea of civil religion, describing its birth in the American Revolutionary War and Civil War. According to Bellah, Americans widely embraced this non-sectarian faith, replete with its shared beliefs, values, holidays, rituals and pilgrimages. George Washington was the Moses-like leader of the civil religion, and Thomas Jefferson was one of its prophets. There were devils like Benedict Arnold, sacred places like Valley Forge, and Holy Scripture like the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution (Albanese, 1977). The American flag was the equivalent of the 'totemic' Cross. Together, these shared patriotic ideas and values promoted a spirit of inter-faith co-operation and coexistence that allowed the USA to flourish (Marvin and Ingle, 1996, p. 770).

Pilgrimage scholar George Greenia (2014b, p. 53), in his paper 'Pilgrimage and the American myth', draws inspiration from this tradition. He divides sacred and secular journeys in the USA into three categories:

1. Pilgrimage sites of immigrants who have constructed replicas of their sacred sites in the New World, such as the various Catholic churches and grottoes associated with apparitions and miracles; or, like the Vraj pilgrimage to Schuylkill Haven in Pennsylvania, the officially accredited western hemisphere shrine of Shree Krishna.
2. Civil religion sites of pilgrimage, focal points of national identity, where patriotic values are highlighted.
3. Cultural religion sites of pilgrimage that convey something of the national sentiment and sacred values such as the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village in New York City, the annual 'Burning Man' gathering in Nevada, or Elvis Presley's home (Graceland) in Tennessee.

There is a repertoire of essential touchstones, Greenia says, that promote one's 'Americanness'. Through visitation, one can forge a sense of unity and belonging that transcends ethnic and religious divisions.

Pilgrimages to sites of national significance in the USA are often taken in the context of the long cross-country road trip. Consider, for example, the potentially transformative trip to the National Archives in Washington where the sacred icons are housed and ritually worshipped,[12] or the Gettysburg Battlefield, where Lincoln's timeless words on government 'of the people, by the people and for the people' are rightfully held upon high. These sacred places, and others, reinforce a national ethic centred on freedom and justice for all; principles for which citizens will lay down their lives (McClay, 2001, p. 51).

The sanctity of the nation as a whole is uppermost in the mind of civil religion pilgrims and, like pilgrims to Lourdes or Fatima, they see themselves as walking on hallowed ground. Both civil and religious pilgrimages, in their own ways, inspire the pilgrim to higher ideals and also to spread the faith. In *Paths in Utopia*, Jewish theologian Martin Buber (1949) says that as people come to a deeper understanding of the sacred core of their tradition (whether secular or sacred), their attention is drawn outwards to the world around them and to larger levels of membership where their work lies. Why? Because it is only beyond their immediate circle that the authority and authenticity of their core beliefs are proved. Pilgrims are constantly putting their faith to the test for it is in the very nature of pilgrimage that one will try and affirm the truth and validity of the sacred texts, whether they are housed in the Vatican or in Washington DC.

The civil and cultural religion pilgrim may be glorifying his or her nation and culture, but at the same time, in some instances, the pilgrim might also be honouring universal principles like freedom and justice that transcend national borders.

Pilgrimage and Modernity

In his studies of pilgrimage, Ian Reader (2014, 2015) provides impressive figures for the growing numbers of pilgrims, both religious and secular, on the global stage. He credits improved communication and transportation, for example, for the increasing turnout at the Kumbh Mela pilgrimage in India from around 15 million in the 1980s to over 100 million in 2014; or at the Camino, which was almost moribund in the late 1800s, but now attracts hundreds of thousands of pilgrims annually.

While practical matters, including the influence of the internet on our concept of boundaries, are certainly major contributing factors, Dean MacCannell (1976, p. 2) sees contemporary tourism/pilgrimage as emblematic of the rootlessness and alienation of the modern era. In his book *The Extra Mile*, Peter Stanford (2010, p. 29) concurs, and suggests that this growing sense of disenchantment with modernity is driving people to religious sites of pilgrimage. Among these are people who know something is missing in their lives, something not found in the materialism that the world offers as a cure-all.

In the 1970s and 1980s some of the great pilgrimage sites of the world were not religious in nature. Consider the lure of the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow (EPCOT) at Walt Disney World and the Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral in Florida, the likes of which did not exist elsewhere. In the parlance of modernity, the triumph of science over religion was at hand. In a sense, people would worship the god of progress, and envision a future good life that would be available to all – an illusion that would not be shattered until the 21st century.[13]

However, in the 1970s pilgrims were in awe of EPCOT's vision of the future, made intensely real by the Apollo moon landing and the seemingly unbelievable fact that 130,000 dedicated people could manipulate 400,000 parts and land a lunar module on the moon. It was a miraculous achievement and people came by the millions to glimpse NASA's Saturn V rockets and to experience the 'spiritual urgency' that the Buddha says one should feel on a visit to a sacred site. However, that urgency to develop the 'third world', to modernize and to leave the old ways behind in the headlong pursuit of the new, has not been without its consequences. One might ask, where is that dream today? Those pilgrimage sites in Florida, while still popular, have lost something of their sheen, and EPCOT's future world is now an anachronism. Disillusionment is on the rise, driving the upward trend in numbers of religious and non-religious pilgrims on the world stage.

David Gitlitz (2014, p. 36) argues that many of these individuals feel empowered to emulate the old forms of pilgrimage, but for their own idiosyncratic purposes. He argues that the loss of conventional religious identification and an expressed hunger for transcendence are powerful motives for taking to the road. Additionally, Ellen Badone (2014) believes that as individuals become more detached from specific bases of identification in the globalizing world, we will see the rise of larger-scale and more extraordinary ritual or pilgrimage events. Some of these new pilgrimages have a human rights dimension, while others are focused on righting the wrongs of the past, which is the subject of the next section.

Sites of Conscience

In the past few decades, pilgrimages that address historical injustices and that seek truth and reconciliation have been on the rise. A focal point for such justice-focused pilgrimages is the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience which includes places like the Apartheid Museum in South Africa and the Genocide Museum in Cambodia. Here, pilgrims can learn about the past and consider the necessary steps to be taken to ensure that such crimes are never repeated.

In the USA, new pilgrimage sites have emerged post-World War II that fall under this banner of 'dark tourism'. These include Manzanar in California where there was an internment camp for Japanese Americans. This is now a National Historic Site. In 1969, pilgrims created a Japanese-American version of a civil religion site by incorporating poetry readings, music, cultural events, a roll call of former internees and other non-denominational ceremonies. While this pilgrimage is designed to reinforce Japanese-American cultural ties, the main message is 'Never Again' (Iwamura, 2007). The Trinity site in New Mexico, where the first atomic bomb was detonated on 16 July 1945, is another example of a pilgrimage to a 'site of conscience'. It is open 2 days a year for visitors to contemplate the wonders of science and the horrors of nuclear war.

More recently, African-American author Toni Morrison has created pilgrimage sites across the USA through her 'Bench by the Road' project.[14] Morrison's inspiration was the lack of recognition of Sullivan's Island, near Charleston, South Carolina, in the history of North America's slave trade. Current estimates are that over 40% of all slaves arriving in North America passed through the 'slave pens' or quarantine stations of Sullivan's Island; however, as late as 2008, there was no monument or signboard addressing these atrocities. The fact that it took a private citizen to lead the way in the recognition of this site says something about the pace of change in addressing historical injustices. Also of major concern is that many of the deceased slaves lie buried in unmarked graves near what is now a high-end tourist resort. Morrison sought to create a place of commemoration and contemplation so that everyone would know the truth about this foundational crime upon which the nation is built. This 'Bench by the Road' was the first of a series of dedicated pilgrimage sites created by Morrison. Others include the place where young African-American Emmett Till was murdered, and sites associated with the Underground Railroad.

Journeys to sites of conscience like those described above both educate and empower pilgrims. They not only provide an opportunity to mourn the past, but also emphasize the importance of global citizenry over national identity and promote a vision of the future where freedom and justice are paramount.

Green Pilgrimages

The final category of pilgrimage in this survey is green pilgrimage. US poet Joe Miller has written movingly about the earth as a place of pilgrimage. His words highlight that sense of reverence that 'green' pilgrims strive for in the interest of long-term co-habitation, sustainability and peace. He writes:

> If the Earth were only a few feet in diameter, floating a few feet above a field somewhere, people would come from everywhere to marvel at it. People would walk around it marveling at its big pools of water, its little pools, and the water flowing between the pools. People would marvel at the bumps on it, and the holes in it, and they would marvel at the very thin layer of gas surrounding it and the water suspended in the gas. The people would marvel at all the creatures walking around the surface of the ball and at the creatures in the water. The people would declare it sacred because it was the only one, and they would protect it so that it would not be hurt. The ball would be the greatest wonder known, and people would come to pray to it, to be healed, to gain knowledge, to know beauty, and to wonder how it could be. People would love it and defend it with their lives because they would somehow know that their lives, their own roundness, could be nothing without it. If the Earth were only a few feet in diameter.[15]

This prose poem could well be the mantra for the international green pilgrimage movement. Solving problems that are global in scale, like climate change and environmental degradation, requires a type of thinking, like Miller's, that transcends borders and also religious and cultural divisions.

Secular pilgrimages that honour Mother Earth, such as Henry David Thoreau's 'experiment with simplicity' at Walden Pond in Massachusetts in the mid-1800s, or today's treks along the Appalachian Trail in the USA, might be described as avenues for addressing social and environmental problems in that they have the potential to unite walkers in thinking about the challenges of planetary survival. The same should be true of religious pilgrimages, but even the most sacred of journeys on the global stage are not without their ecological footprints. Increasing numbers of pilgrims and pilgrimages in fragile environments have caused serious negative impacts, a 'tragedy of the commons', and subsequent threats to the lives and livelihoods of those who might otherwise benefit from the pilgrimage industry. In India, for example, many of the sacred rivers, such as the Ganges, are severely contaminated (Singh, 2013). Reports of pollution along the Camino de Santiago de Compostela, and elsewhere, are also on the rise.

To address this issue, in 2011 the Green Pilgrimage Network (GPN) was founded in Assisi, Italy, with representation from 15 different faith groups (GPN, n.d.). This network dedicates itself to ensuring that pilgrims leave a positive footprint on the earth. The GPN has committed itself to inspiring pilgrims and pilgrimage organizers to:

- prepare mindfully for pilgrimage;
- choose sustainable tourist agencies;
- eat and drink sustainably and ethically;
- minimize water use;
- dispose of rubbish and pick up after others;
- support a fund to 'green' the pilgrim cities they are visiting;
- 'green' their religious buildings, energy and infrastructure;
- safeguard the natural landscape, wildlife and parks;
- bring faiths and local authorities together to create sustainable cities; and
- bring greener ideas for living home with them.

A notable example of 'greening' a pilgrimage site is with Sabarimala in southern India. This pilgrimage attracts upwards of 50 million pilgrims a year and is famous because it promotes Hindu, Muslim and Christian unity; but the waste products associated with this pilgrimage are endangering wildlife and the evergreen forests. Recently the High Court of Kerala banned the use of plastic for the sacred bag of offerings that pilgrims carry on their heads for presentation to Lord Ayyappan, their deity. In addition, the use of soaps and oils are now forbidden when pilgrims bathe in the holy River Pamba as part of their long and arduous journey. By initiating such steps, the stage is set for sacred pilgrimage destinations to become leaders in pursuing a global environmental ethic. As pilgrim scholar Rana P.B. Singh (2013) says, 'Our temples must become models of care and respect for the environment, reflecting the deep values of [our] tradition'.

Conclusion

Earlier, this chapter introduced the idealistic vision of Indian theologian Deenabandhu Manchala who has set the benchmark for imagining pilgrimages of justice and peace that would lead to the transformation of structures and cultures worldwide that deny life and liberty to so many. My primary task has been to investigate how the experience of pilgrimage can help facilitate personal and societal transformation in ways that promote such a vision, and my goal has been to lay a foundation for future studies that would document the contribution of specific pilgrimages in peace-building.

The peace-builder's toolkit contains various strategies and tactics and it is evident that pilgrimage can be considered as one possible avenue for promoting peace and harmony. In my brief survey, the following categories of 'peace pilgrimages' were identified:

- Walking pilgrimages where joy is the unifying principle and the spirit of love and inclusion is emphasized. Examples include the Hindu Wari pilgrimage and the Sufi pilgrimage to Ajmer where there is an opportunity to envision the essential unity of humankind.
- Inter-faith pilgrimages such as the ascent of Adam's Peak in Sri Lanka, and the various Mary apparition sites, for example in France and Portugal, which bring people of multiple faiths and cultures together as one.
- Pilgrimages that call upon devotees to acknowledge the worth of followers of other

religions, such as the Hindu journey to the temple of Lord Ayyappan at Sabarimala which entreats the pilgrim to recognize and honour Islam, Christianity and tribal religions.
- Pilgrimages associated with religions that were created out of a desire for harmony and an end to injustice, like Baha'i, Sikhism, Caodaism or Chrislam, which promote a broader sense of identity and community.
- Pilgrimages that promote the equality and interdependence of men and women, as in pilgrimages honouring the Bodhisattva Guanyin, and in the Osun Osogbo pilgrimage in Nigeria.
- Pilgrimages that reconcile internal and external journeys, and which foster an appreciation of the journeys of others, as with the Camino de Santiago de Compostela.
- Justice and human rights-focused pilgrimages such as to the Karbala in Iraq, or to 'sites of conscience' like the US' World War II internment camps, or Toni Morrison's 'Bench by the Road' project, where there is an opportunity to reflect on the mantra 'Never Again'.
- Civil religion pilgrimages, for example to the Statue of Liberty or Gettysburg, which reinforce universal values of freedom, justice and democracy.
- Cultural religion pilgrimages which celebrate progress, rationality and science, and which confront irrationality and fundamentalism. The message is that the people can achieve the seemingly miraculous, just as the sick can be healed, through the application of science.
- Green pilgrimages associated with a global environmental ethic where pilgrims are united in the interests of planetary survival.

Pilgrims are motivated to take to the road for many reasons, including those that are cultural, religious, physical or simply personal. In the Indian context, pilgrims might undertake an arduous journey in pursuit of a certain 'fruit', such as cleansing oneself, achieving merit or finding bliss (Haberman, 1994, p. viii). For the peace-builder, the desired fruits of pilgrimage are justice and peace, and it is my contention that all the categories of pilgrimages discussed above have the potential to deliver in this regard; they help to address the social inequality, race hatred and injustice so prevalent on the global stage today. When pilgrims have the opportunity to undertake their spiritual and secular journeys and they reach out in a spirit of camaraderie beyond their comfort zones, there is a real potential for confronting stereotypes, promoting dialogue and creating avenues for healing. By walking mindfully in the interests of peace, they are both wittingly and unwittingly moving humankind forwards along the arc of the moral universe towards a more just and equitable future. We should view such pilgrims – including my Gaza students engaged in their inspired vision quest – as being like peacemakers in uncharted waters, helping to shape the image we have both of ourselves and of our common destiny.

Notes

[1] Upon being expelled from Paradise, Adam was sentenced to stand on one leg for 1000 years doing penance. Eve herself landed in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and her tomb was a major pilgrimage site until the 1920s when it was erased from existence by the authorities following accusations of idolatry.
[2] In recent times Sri Pada has become politicized and 'Buddhacized', perhaps diminishing its interfaith potential.
[3] Pers. comm., George Greenia, 12 October 2015.
[4] Pers. comm., George Greenia, 15 July 2014.
[5] During the reign of India's Akbar the Great, interfaith dialogue was actively pursued. Under the rule of Genghis Khan religious freedom was also promoted.
[6] Bruce Feiler's PBS Television Series: Sacred Journeys. Available at: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/sacredjourneys/content/home/ (accessed 7 April 2015).
[7] In Varanasi there are 3000 Hindu temples and shrines, 1400 mosques and shrines, 42 churches, 7 Jain temples, 9 Buddhist temples and 13 Sikh temples (Singh, 2013).
[8] The Life of Hazrat Khawaja Moinuddin Chishti (R.A.). Available at: http://www.israinternational.com/knowledge-nexus/170-the-life-of-hazrat-khawaja-moinuddin-chishti-ra.html (accessed 25 March 2017).

[9] A report of the US Travel Association said that 25% of Americans say they are interested in taking some sort of spiritual vacation (Erickson, 2015).
[10] Pers. comm., George Greenia, 2 October 2015.
[11] Various Virgin Mary apparition sites, like Conyers in the state of Georgia, where Mary is said to have made numerous appearances and welcomed over 1 million people over an 11-year period throughout the 1980s, did not receive the seal of approval from on high.
[12] The sacred icons include both the US Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.
[13] Recall, for example, the Global Footprint Network's startling wake-up call that it would take the resources of many planet earths for the standard of living enjoyed by the middle classes in the West to be replicated in the developing world (McDonald, 2015).
[14] Bench by the Road Project. *The Official Website of the Toni Morrison Society*. Available at: http://www.tonimorrisonsociety.org/bench.html (accessed 17 January 2016).
[15] Joe Miller's poem is available at: http://coyoteprime-runningcauseicantfly.blogspot.com/2010/09/joe-miller-if-earth-were-only-few-feet.html (accessed 16 August 2015).

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