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Alternative Tourism Group- Study Center
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Listening to the

Living Stones



Towards a Theological Explorations of
Kairos Pilgrimages for Justice

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Preface

The Alternative Tourism Group (ATG) is pleased to publish its second edition of this booklet, "Listening to the Living Stones - Towards theological explorations of Kairos Pilgrimages for justice"

Our journey with this initiative began in 2005 when a group of tourism activists, human rights defenders, and theologians came together in Alexandria, Egypt to explore the meaning of what a 'Pilgrimage for Transformation' must resemble. At that meeting, we engaged in a search for how to promote the notion that tourism can be a vehicle for the international community to become advocates for peace with justice in Palestine with the goal of ending the occupation. Our search centered on the notion of justice tourism which we viewed as a method and pathway to make known the truth about the Israeli occupation and how it impacts Palestinians. When we defined tourism as a form of pilgrimage, and as a theater of opportunity for solidarity, sharing and caring, we were advancing a new paradigm of tourism within which tourism is a quest for spirituality through encounters in which humankind seeks God's truth. We sought to pursue creative ideas about global campaigns designed to bring political consciousness within the global community of oppression suffered by Palestinians in ways that would break the silence about the occupation, heighten the levels of solidarity between international partners and Palestinians and accelerate the pursuit of freedom for Palestine through justice tourism. In Alexandria we agreed

that it was important that we challenge and transform mainstream tourism and Israeli monopoly over tourism in the Holy Land, especially on Christian pilgrimages by offering alternative models of pilgrimage. In our understanding, a pilgrimage to the Holy Land had of necessity to be a transformational experience, where a pilgrim/tourist/researcher would 'come and see' the facts-on-the-ground and return as advocates for justice to the Palestinians.

The process initiated in Alexandria moved forward with a series of encounters involving a wide array of concerned people -- tourism activists, theologians, and human rights defenders. A Code of Conduct for travelers to the Holy Land was developed followed by the creation of the Palestinian Initiative for Responsible tourism (PIRT).

After the launch of the Kairos document in 2009, ATG decided to work closely with Kairos Palestine and the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF) in developing Biblical and theological frameworks and bases for pilgrimages rooted in the Kairos call to "Come and See". That resulted in the joint publication of the book "Guidelines for Pilgrimage."

Now we have this document titled "Towards theological explorations of Kairos Pilgrimages for Justice", which ATG has published in cooperation with Kairos Palestine and PIEF.

ATG is entirely conscious that this study is but an exploration. It does not claim that the reflections and conclusions must be seen with any sort of finality. The hope, however, is that it will begin processes of wider study and reflection based on this invaluable and in-depth research that has been carried out over a period of nearly two years.

This study was first commissioned in 2012 and Rev. Raj Bharath Patta, then General Secretary of the Student Christian Movement of India, and now a doctoral candidate at the University of Manchester, visited Palestine

on two different occasions. One of these was exclusively devoted to visiting villages, towns, and also to meeting with and interviewing a wide range of people. He then engaged in study/research pouring through a wide array of justice tourism literature, and books and documents that cover theological notions about pilgrimage. His explorations and studies have been applied through reflections to the situation of Palestine Israel today. We are grateful for his time and dedicated work in helping to launch what could emerge as an important field of study and research worldwide.

To the research by Rev. Raj Bharath Patta, ATG also recommends that readers visit websites of various Palestinian organizations, which offer alternative and justice tourism and are already carrying out 'Models of Pilgrimage'. These models illustrate the notions and propositions that Rev. Raj Bharath Patta makes in his study.

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ATG will pursue this study even further. In doing so, ATG will work in collaboration with other partners, who seek to further investigate Biblical insights, and further reflect theologically on what pilgrimage implies for us today in the context of the Holy Land. It will continue to work with Kairos Palestine and PIEF both of which have been important and influential partners, since 2010.

Rami Kassis

Executive Director
Alternative Tourism Group





Introduction

“Guide me, O thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land.
I am weak, but thou art mighty; hold me with thy powerful hand.
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more;
feed me till I want no more.”

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This has been a popular hymn many pilgrims sing on their pilgrimages. Through this hymn, they have sought comfort and solace from the divine for their journeys. Pilgrimages have been as old as the religions themselves, and have given a sense of self-edification and self-enrichment for the pilgrims belonging to all religions.

Over the years, there has been a growing interest for people to travel to Palestine Israel on pilgrimages, and making pilgrimage tourism a major industry. Palestine Israel is a unique tourist destination -- its long history, religious significance and natural beauty make it an amazing place to visit. Palestine's importance derives partly from the fact that it is home to the three monotheistic and Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Every year it attracts many pilgrims, people of faith and scholars who visit the holy places. Secular tourists come to explore the historical sites, Palestine's vibrant cities, rural life and natural reserves.

However, to the most pilgrims the narratives that they hear in the land of the holy are those of Israeli tour operators, who take the tourists/

pilgrims only to the sites in Israel. In the name of security, the tour operators frighten the pilgrims and warn them not to visit the sites in Palestine.

Did we know that there are Palestinian Arab Christians in this part of the world? Have we ever acknowledged their Christian experience which has the strength to strengthen the faith of pilgrims who want to walk on the foot-steps of Jesus Christ? Are we aware that these friends in Palestine have a narrative to share about the Biblical sites in their land?

In such a context, the need emerges for an alternative tourism that must try to explore what pilgrimage means for faith communities of our times. There has never been an opportunity for the pilgrims to Holy Land to listen to the experiences of the living stones, the local Palestinian communities, their narratives, their faith experiences, their stories and their lives for reasons known and unknown. Therefore, alternative pilgrimage is envisaged to listen to the unheard voices of the living stones. Here is an attempt to decipher that alternative pilgrimage -- justice pilgrimage -- which is a creative response to the changing signs of our times. This booklet is meant for the Christian faith communities who embark on a pilgrimage to Palestine Israel to be sensitive to the living stones, and therefore provides a glimpse of the political context of Palestine Israel, a context of Kairos Palestine, and an attempt to bring out the theological contours in understanding justice pilgrimage. Historical and Biblical perspectives on pilgrimages are discussed here, and an attempt on the theology of pilgrimage has been made here with God as a co-companion in our pilgrimage. The relevance of such pilgrimages is also discussed here. This booklet is not an end in itself, but only a starting point, a beginning to unravel justice pilgrimage, with a lone focus for pilgrims to encounter the living God by engaging with the living stones.



Chapter ONE

The Context of Pilgrimage in Holy Land



I. Profiling Pilgrimages

Some of the nuances of the understanding of pilgrimage can be summarized as follows:

a. There has been a tendency to club pilgrimage with tourism. The tour operators explain the various kinds of tourisms like, leisure trips, honeymoon trips, family trips and then they go on to explain the visit to the Holy Land as pilgrimage. So, one draws a thin line between a tourist and a pilgrim, for popularly pilgrimage is understood as religious tourism.

b. Pilgrimage is understood as the best way to discover the Holy Land, understand the Bible, read Scriptures at the sacred sites, and rejoice at the birth of Jesus Christ, and so on for a feel good experience in one's own individual Christian life. Therefore, Christians now think that it is a religious ritual to go on a pilgrimage, to walk on the footsteps, where Jesus Christ lived and walked, that has only become a 'feel good' self-centric spiritual experience.

c. With growing numbers of pilgrims, tourists from global South especially from countries like India and Nigeria, it has become important to understand and unpack the whole concept of pilgrimage. The bishops and Church leaders in such countries are given an Israeli state sponsored tour of the so called 'holy kind.' There are some countries who give subsidies to people to travel to Israel as pilgrims. The tour operators have convincing ways of projecting Holy Land as a destination for pilgrims, and they succeed in commercializing pilgrimage by wooing Christians to go there. In countries like Nigeria, those who go on a state sponsored pilgrimage to Israel are given titles like, J.P. which means 'Jerusalem Pilgrim.' These people with such titles are given prominent places in the Churches and Christian events. People who visit Jerusalem five times are given the title J.P.P., 'Jerusalem Pilgrimage Patron', there by attributing so called 'holiness' to them.

d. Needless to say, in a country of multi-faith, pilgrimage is not a new idea. Hindus go on a pilgrimage to several temples to achieve Moksha (salvation). Muslims, too, go on 'Haj,' to Mecca, where Prophet Mohammed had a revelation. Christians now think, it is their turn to go on a pilgrimage, to attain some blessing through the exposure to the Holy Land. There has been a growing competition among people of different religions. They try to ape the other by evolving religious dogmas to justify their act of undertaking a pilgrimage.

e. Most tour operators have tie-ups with their counterparts in Israel, and those travelers or tourists or pilgrims who visit the Holy Land are taken only to the sites in the Israeli territory. They try to accommodate them in Israeli hotels, giving an Israeli perspective to the sites and convince the travelers by brain washing them that the Jewish land is the Promised Land. The story of Jesus is told from a Jewish Israeli perspective and the Palestine narratives for liberation are told in concocted versions. Pilgrimage has become a good vehicle for promoting Christian Zionism today.

f. Hardly any sites in Palestine are shown by the tour operators, for they try to frighten and threaten the travelers by giving a negative connotation to the Palestine struggle for liberation and self-determination. Even though the travelers visit some sites in Palestine like that of Bethlehem, the Zionist tour operators spend not even an hour in those sites and do not allow the travelers to make any contact with the local people.

This, in brief, is the context of the pilgrimages to the Holy Land today, though there are several other facets and issues related to the pilgrimage. These provide a parameter to our understanding of pilgrimage today, and set the climate for exploring theological contours of pilgrimage.

2. Defining Pilgrimage:

Irrespective of religious affirmations, people from time immemorial have set out on journeys characterizing them as pilgrimages, with varying motives. The word 'pilgrim' comes from the Latin legal word 'pelegrinus' meaning, a 'stateless person' or a person without a country. It has a connotation of one who 'journey between states'.

Henry Ralph Carse quotes Richard Neibuhr's definition of pilgrimage and more precisely about the pilgrims as follows: "Pilgrims are persons in motion, passing through territories not their own, seeking something we might call completion, or perhaps the word clarity will do as well, a goal to which only the spirit's compass points the way." This places the understanding of pilgrimage, where a pilgrim is guided and directed by the spirit towards a process of seeking completion and clarity for one's own self, and such an understanding has been very popular throughout the histories of all generations. He further captures the understanding of pilgrimage from one of the oldest Christian pilgrim's graffito in Jerusalem "DOMINE IVIMUS", an inscription found under the Church of Resurrection, which means, "Lord, we have arrived!"

The purpose of any pilgrimage has been to express that they have arrived near the Lord God, as many Christian pilgrims believe it is in the Holy Land.

People want to express their social piety by going on a pilgrimage and in due course seek an intersection of human life and the divine life at a particular place, which they assume is available and present at holy places.

One has to also notice that pilgrimages are as old as religions themselves, and therefore, with the growth of the religions, pilgrimage sites have also been increased in leaps and bounds. Some people venerated a certain

place either because of a miracle that happened or for some other reasons, and eventually a pilgrimage site emerges there over the years.

It is in a pilgrimage that the people are on a journey trying to explore and encounter the divine. The pilgrim is in a constant search, overcoming all the hardships in life, with the sole aim of meeting God. Therefore, pilgrimage is best understood as a journey to find God, and it is beyond any particular definition.

3. The Context of Palestine & Pilgrimage :

In order to explore theology of pilgrimage in the Holy Land, a brief scan on the understanding of political context and history of Palestine is a necessity, for it is these that set the constraints and barriers within which Palestinian tourism and particularly the pilgrimage have to operate.

Palestine is a unique faith tourism destination -- its long history, religious significance and natural beauty make it an amazing place to visit. Palestine's importance derives partly from the fact that it is home to the three monotheistic and Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Every year it attracts many pilgrims, people of faith and scholars who visit the holy places. Secular tourists come to explore the historical sites, Palestine's vibrant cities, rural life and natural reserves.

However, since the beginning of the 20th century, Palestine has seen complicated changes in its political history. This included the creation of Israel in 1948, and the 1967 war. As a result of the latter, Israel occupied the West bank including East Jerusalem and the Gaza strip. These events have created catastrophic political, economic and social crisis, which have deeply affected the life of the Palestinian people, most of them becoming refugees. In many ways, Palestine itself was simply wiped off the map, and the historic Palestine coming to be known as Israel. In this context, tourism became a political tool in the supremacy and domination of the Israeli establishment over land and people, and an instrument for preventing the Palestinians from enjoying the benefits of the fruits of the

cultural and human interaction on which tourism thrives. Despite the fact that Israel signed the Oslo Agreements with the Palestine Liberation Organization in the 1990s and recognised the establishment of the Palestinian Authority to administer some of the Palestinian territories, namely the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, many areas, and people who live there are still under Israeli control. For example, Israel controls all access to Palestine (land and sea borders as well as access from the airport), most of the Palestinian water resources, and all movements of people and goods from, to and within Palestine. These facts have significant impacts on the development of tourism in the Palestinian territories and the dissemination of information to tourists. Jerusalem -- the heart of tourism in the region -- has been illegally annexed by Israel, filled with illegal settlements, besieged, surrounded by checkpoints, and encircled by the Apartheid Wall, all of which has resulted in its alienation.

Despite all this, the touristic and historic sites, and holy places found in Israel and Palestinian territories are united. They cannot be separated from each other. So, it is important to visit both Israel and Palestine, rather than choose to visit just one or the other. This is the way towards more fairness and justice.

Pilgrimage in Palestine provides visitors with rewarding and enriching experience. Not only may the pilgrims discover the beauty, spirituality and hospitality of the country, but also come to encounter some of the political, economic, spiritual and social factors on the ground that shape the daily lives of Palestinians. This is as it should be for much can be gained both by pilgrims and by their Palestinian hosts from a proper relationship between the two. Too often, the contact is very minimal consisting of rapid, coach driven visits to the Nativity Church in Bethlehem (with the souvenir shop on the way) – a style of tourism that derives from the fact that much of the itinerary is controlled by Israel and the Israeli tourism industry.

4. Kairos Palestine as a Call to Encounter the Truth of ‘Our Reality’

The Kairos document is an affirmation of faith around which courage is constructed, fear is released, and steadfastness is imbibed. It calls for partners-in-faith, partners-for-justice, and partners-in-liberation. Kairos says to the world, “Come and see.”

The Kairos document outlines a desire that the Churches around the world can be received as pilgrims, “visiting us to pray, and to try to take back a message of peace, justice, love and reconciliation.” Palestinian Christians have prepared the guidelines for visionary pilgrims and visitors who seek authentic, face-to-face human encounters in the Holy Land, and who wish to connect with the Palestinian Christians, the “Living Stones” and who share their faith. In this context, the invitation is to be ‘Transformational pilgrims’ seeking to make a positive difference in the lives of the Palestinians. Meeting Palestinians who are living under occupation will be an act of solidarity that brings hope, and contributes to the economic development.

Palestinians have now developed compelling and unique tour itineraries and programmes for visitors and pilgrims with the ultimate goal of “promoting peace with justice for the people in the Holy Land.” Palestinians are particularly conscious of the tendency in the West to attach biblical and theological legitimacy to the infringement of their rights. It is for this reason that Christians are invited to engage in a ‘pilgrimage less taken’ that opens up experiences which, in turn, prompt a deeper and different kind of reflection of the Word of God and to rectify their current interpretations so that they might see in the Word of God a source of life for all peoples. Beyond the rhetoric and the media spin is a reality of suffering that has been denied for decades. In many countries today, the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands and the oppression this brings to their daily lives is not well understood and is often obscured in the media by powerful interests. While some are misled and disempowered to speak or act, many Christians and

other people of conscience feel disturbed by a one-sided narrative that justifies the ongoing occupation and its gross human rights violations.

Palestinian Christians often bemoan the fact that Churches have done a grave disservice to their flock by ignoring the plight of millions of dispossessed Palestinians. As Christians living in the Holy Land, they remain convinced that when their Christian sisters and brothers from around the world gain access to a more inclusive picture of their reality, they will no longer be able to ignore their cry for peace with justice.

With this background, some come to the Holy Land as spectators, touring holy sites, as they would tour museums, not caring or realizing that for Palestinian Christians these are living places of worship. They miss out on the true essence of pilgrimage. Reflecting the pious practices of the Pharisees, they search for a personal blessing, seeking to renew an egocentric, individualistic faith. What they choose to see and do only reinforces their prejudices, preconceived notions, and limited understandings of a complex situation. Yet, true faith requires more from a Christian than purveying stereotypes and untruths and supporting injustice. The genuine Christian pilgrim seeks the living Christ in the now, in solidarity with the oppressed, the poor, and the imprisoned. They look for truth and seek justice, supporting and blessing both Palestinian and Israeli peacemakers. Christian pilgrimage must comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.

The Living Stones are, in fact, the keepers of the sacred traditions of the Holy Land. For decades, millions of Christians have journeyed to the Holy Land and returned home without even realizing that their pilgrimage was missing something very important -- face-to-face human encounters with those who share their faith. Palestinian Christians' continuous presence for more than 2,000 years in the land of Christ's life, death, and resurrection gives them a unique connection to Christianity and its traditions. They also share, along with the rest of the Arab world, a culture of hospitality renowned for its warmth and generosity. In addition, Palestinian Christians have vast experience welcoming pilgrims

to their land, continuing a tradition their ancestors began centuries ago. As hosts, the Palestinian Christians are able to show visitors holy sites rarely seen by ordinary tourists and can illuminate these sites with a faith that is physically linked to these places. For Palestinian Christians, the holy sites are not mere tourist destinations -- they are often their own local Churches -- places that have meaning in their every day worship. The people in these communities -- the "Living Stones" -- are the keepers of sacred traditions in the Holy Land and protectors of the places that mark events in the life of Christ and the prophets.

5. Kairos Palestine in the Context of Pilgrimage

Situating Kairos Palestine in the context of pilgrimage is an opportunity for visitors, tourists and pilgrims, who come to the Holy Land to listen to the voices of the living stones rather than merely visiting the sites; or indulge in superficial spirituality that pretends that it is in touch with and in pursuance of the pathways that Jesus once took.

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The call given by the Church leaders of Palestine is to engage with the harsh realities of the occupation, the realities of ecological imbalances that are being created, the realities of forced migration, the realities of check points, the realities of the Palestinians being denied access to Jerusalem, and to invite the pilgrims to have a real life changing experience reflecting on how Jesus, who was born and lived here, would have addressed these critical realities in these times. Kairos Palestine offers pilgrims an invitation to understand pilgrimage as a journey from despair to hope, a journey from wilderness to the promised-land, by locating faith and spirituality in the realities and aspirations for new hope and new life of Palestinians. Its call is to be in solidarity in ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands and all forms of discrimination as the solution that will lead to a just and lasting peace.

Pilgrims are called to insist that all peoples, political leaders and decision-makers put pressure on Israel and take legal measures in order to oblige their respective governments to put an end to Israel's oppression and

disregard for the international law. The conviction is that even a small wave caused by an individual opinion can grow into a flood of actions that emerges as resistance. The wider community of people from around the world is obliged as a moral responsibility to join the resistance wherever they are and in whatever ways they are able to. For, as Martin Luther King Jr. Says: "Injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere". The international community does not have the convenience of a choice when it comes to the Kairos Call to act in concert to end the injustice. It is an obligation to be co-strugglers for justice.

Chapter TWO

Perspectives on Pilgrimage



Perspectives on Pilgrimage

Having now scanned the milieu of pilgrimage in the Holy Land, one needs to get appraised on the various perspectives of pilgrimage, for it gives an opportunity to understand the varied and different kinds of perspectives on pilgrimage.

It was not until the 4th century, when Christianity became a state religion, pilgrimage to Holy Land assumed more importance and attention. Prior to that, there were some monks and people who went to the Holy Land on pilgrimage. They went as part of their vow to travel as pilgrims and then finding interest to know the Biblical sites for themselves. The New Testament (NT) community was heavily influenced by the heavenly Jerusalem, and paid little attention to the geography called Jerusalem of their times, and therefore we find no specific pilgrimages made by the NT community visiting the holy sites, where Jesus walked or performed miracles, nor we see the Pauline community on a pilgrimage, venerating the holy sites. "The emphasis on the spiritual and universal nature of Christian worship combined with a more negative view of Jerusalem will be the hallmark of the Church's life in the first three centuries."

Though, Pilgrimage is a post New Testament innovation, one can read and re-read the moorings of pilgrimage in the Bible, for there is enough resource in the Scriptures. However for want of time and space, here is a brief glimpse of some random perspectives for a deeper understanding on pilgrimage.

I. Early Christian Perspective

After 324 CE, Emperor Constantine took control of the Roman Empire, and Christianity became a state religion. In order to unite Christians and promote Christian faith in the empire, bringing back the glory of

Jerusalem as the central space of faith was imminent and a necessity for him. The key figure in the process of rehabilitating Jerusalem within the Christian consciousness was to be young Bishop Cyril of Jerusalem (348-384 CE). He was the first one to promote Jerusalem as the 'holy city.' Contradicting the understanding of Eusebius on the importance of 'heavenly Jerusalem', Cyril emphasized and underlined the physical Jerusalem and ascribed holiness to it. He builds up the case for Jerusalem's sanctity by bringing to light the important events that took place in Jerusalem in Jesus' times. "This is the city of incarnation, the scene of Eucharist's institution, of the Cross, the Resurrection and the Ascension; it will also be the place of Christ's return. As such Jerusalem should have for Christians a natural 'pre-eminence in all things'. Each of these events is used by Cyril explicitly to bolster his arguments for Jerusalem as a 'holy city.'" Thus Jerusalem attained the special status of a holy city, and that also made Jerusalem a favourite destiny in the pilgrimage pathway, and Jerusalem from then on became an important geographic destination in the Christian consciousness. This is a shift of gear in the perspective on Jerusalem, for only from the 4th Century did Jerusalem enjoy the special privilege of being a 'holy city.'

With 'Constantine's Holy Land Plan', several Churches were built on the important sites in Palestine Israel. Several visitors and Church fathers like Melito, Bishop of Sardis had started visiting these sites to confirm on the validity of the Scriptures, and there has been a great interest among the visitors to Palestine because of its Biblical treasure. The advent of Constantine's Christianity brought a paradigm shift on the whole perception of pilgrimage and Jerusalem became a happening place, and it was said by 400 CE pilgrimage had 'come of age'.

There has been an increase of the holy sites in the holy land and the church fathers by the 4th century confirmed their validity. In this context, one has to also recognize that the New Testament had left an indelible message where the holy spaces are replaced by the person of

Christ, who became the ultimate destiny for any pilgrimage to the holy land. It is also worth noting that the 4th century was the century which celebrated the mystery of Incarnation.

2. Constantine Christianity's Perspectives

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3. Medieval Perspectives of Pilgrimage

The medieval Christianity brought in new explorations into the very understanding of the pilgrimage for there were several criticisms against holiness ascribed to a particular place and challenging the believers how relevant it is to seek God at one place when God is present everywhere.

The primary understanding of pilgrimage inherited by the medieval Church was not that of journeying to holy places but the Biblical concept of Christians as pilgrims and strangers who travel through this world towards the heavenly Jerusalem. In such a perspective, every Christian was assumed to be a pilgrim and a stranger and have to be constantly on a move in search of exploring God which would involve hardships and bestowing of blessings upon each individual pilgrim. It was also affirmed that a true pilgrimage was a moral journey of obedience lived out day by day in the calling assigned by God. With the rise of Protestantism and pietism and other such movements, the emphasis on the 'heavenly Jerusalem' above continue to be the driving force in understanding the pilgrimage with a belief that God acts in all places impartially. Thus, a life well lived in devotion with God and in relationship with others is what the medieval spirituality ascertained for a pilgrimage.

4. Luther's Views on Pilgrimage

Martin Luther, the Protestant theologian of the Reformation had strong views on pilgrimage. There has been a tough criticism against pilgrimage by the Protestant Christianity, for there has been a widespread understanding that by going on a pilgrimage to holy places and important places like Rome, individuals would be saved. Therefore the Protestant Christian theologians had to contest such ideas existed in their days and had to critique on the practice of pilgrimage. However, for Luther the valid reason in people going for pilgrimage is, 'a man motivated by a singular devotion for the honor of the saints, the glory of God and his edification'.

That the visitors to the shrines of saints or to the Holy Land could secure reward in the form of indulgences was another cause for Luther's opposition. Thus, Luther was outspoken in his critique on the practice of pilgrimages, for the Roman Papacy, pilgrimages were vehicles to transport their indulgence theologies. Luther's critique on pilgrimages though came out of his times of reforming the Church, for it has a long lasting relevance to the Christians in the coming ages. He reiterated that the presence of God was everywhere and no one can contest on the location of God to particular places and spaces.

5. Calvin's Views on Pilgrimage

Calvin sings an almost similar chorus as Luther in critiquing the practice of pilgrimage in his times. He extends the discussion on pilgrimages from where Luther has left and gives a further substantial critique. He goes beyond Luther in suggesting that the Scriptural text such as John 4:21 actually prohibits pilgrimage. He dislikes the idea that a pilgrimage remains meritorious or valid, regardless of the state of heart. Pilgrimage to sites where relics of Christ and the saints are on display has an inbuilt tendency to deflect attention away from the places where God has chosen to make himself known and available to us – most notably in the Word and sacraments – and onto lesser things.

Thus Calvin also joins Luther in objecting to the practice of pilgrimage, and one can understand that their context of Papal domination made them to reflect and respond in that way. Therefore, the 16th Century Protestant Reformation expressed their reservations on the practice of pilgrimages and emphasized on the presence of God being present everywhere, and no one place can assume monopoly over against the other places.

6. Catholic Perspectives

For the Catholics, pilgrimages are very important as they provide an opportunity to tread on the footprints of the saints and the Holy One in Holy Land particularly, and therefore any visit to the shrine of spiritual importance brings blessing to the pilgrims. This has been the driving force for the huge inflow of pilgrims to different shrines across the world. Though Rome and Jerusalem would be two major pilgrim sites for them, the Catholic world encourages going on a pilgrimage to various shrines of historical and spiritual significance.

Pope John Paul ***further in his letter on the occasion of a 'Jubilee Pilgrimage' at the start of a new millennium***, the Holy See says, "Indeed, spiritually I am already on this journey, since even to go just in thought to those places means in a way to read anew the Gospel itself; it means to follow the roads which Revelation itself has taken." The intention of the pilgrim on a pilgrimage is to read anew and understand the gospel afresh from the given context at the Holy Land, and to follow the path of Jesus walk in our context today.

7. Orthodox Perspectives

The Orthodox Church has, from its inception, pilgrimage as one of its faith tenants and has been encouraging its members to go on a pilgrimage in meeting one of their saints at a distant place. Therefore over the years there have been several places of high importance for

the Orthodox Christians named after a saint, with lots of happenings of healings and miracles at those pilgrim spots.

Thus according to the Orthodox perspectives, there is a rich theological understanding on pilgrimage, for the pilgrim is called to have a transformational process internally as one engages on a journey in search of the divine. One has to listen to the narratives and experiences of the communities one is journeying into and therefore one has to seek and search the divine in their own journey of faith. In preparing to listen to the voices from the journey, the pilgrim listens to the voice of the divine from the context to which one is travelling to.

8. Ecumenical Perspectives on Pilgrimage

The 2010 meeting in Chavannes-de-Bogis on Promoting Pilgrimages of Transformation explored the meaning of authentic Christian pilgrimage in the Holy Land. The meeting came out with a statement expressing their ecumenical views on pilgrimage.

“A true pilgrimage is an authentic encounter with the people who live in the place you visit. It is both an inward and outward journey, presenting opportunity to ‘unlearn’ what one thinks they know. It should ‘disturb the comfortable and comfort the disturbed.’ Pilgrims must be open and ready to be transformed by their journey; this begins with a conversion of mind and heart. Like the two men on the road to Emmaus who at first do not recognize Jesus, pilgrims must be open to discovery and journey inward in a way that may radically change their lives. It is critical that pilgrims recognize Palestinian Christians as the ‘living stones’, descendants of the first Christians and progenitors of Christian heritage and tradition in the Holy Land.”

Pilgrimage was understood to encounter the local people and listening to their stories and thereby recognizes Jesus as on the way to Emmaus.

This strand of thinking on pilgrimage comes to the fore by replacing geography with sociology, where knowing the people in the given context takes the utmost priority.

9. Evangelical Perspectives

Yaniva Belhassen and Carla Almedia Santosa in their article “American Evangelical Pilgrimage to Israel: A Case Study on Politics and Triangulation”, aims to explore the political dimensions of a case study in contemporary pilgrimage, namely, evangelical pilgrimages from the mid-western United States to Israel. In this regard, the findings illuminate two important themes. First, tourism is used by evangelical pilgrims to promote their ideology in Israel. Second, marginal political groups from Israel use tourism as a political tool to promote their ideology. There has been a huge inflow of pilgrims from across the world from Evangelical groups travelling to the Holy Land to see the fulfillment of the gospel in that land and to eulogize and evangelize the people in the Holy Land towards Christian faith. Promotion of their ideology of converting people has been one of their driving forces in making pilgrimages to the Holy Land.

Thus the contemporary ecumenical discussions on pilgrimage have been on the move, seeking to inspire the pilgrims to be more sensitive to the situation of the local people on their visit, and persuading them to express solidarity and accompaniment in their struggles for justice and peace, which is a challenge and a motivation making pilgrimage a meaningful exercise.



Chapter **THREE**

Towards a Theology of Pilgrimage



I. Theologising Pilgrimage and Pilgr-image-ising Theology

Do Christians need to go on a pilgrimage to Holy Land like our friends from other faiths? What is the theological significance of a pilgrimage? When there is lots of bloodshed, violence, occupation, construction of huge walls of division, grabbing of the land by the occupiers, (annexing their settlements), when there is a struggle for freedom and liberation of Palestinians, why should Christians go on a pilgrimage? These are some of the questions that may come to mind when making a pilgrimage. There are several other unanswered questions like the post Gaza war in 2014, and what is the meaning of Christian Pilgrimage to the Holy Land? One needs to grapple with such questions. It is against this canvas that the theology of pilgrimage must be examined.

A well formulated theological exploration would serve as an offering to the global theological discourses on Palestine, for the theology espoused in this document shall supplement the Kairos document and the Alternative Tourism Group's (ATG) various instruments of pilgrimages for transformation or justice tourism, as used in secular idiom. The theological formulations are aimed to encourage the pilgrims to undertake their pilgrimages with greater theological depth and spirituality. It should, therefore, be geared to enabling pilgrims to understand the situations and struggles of the Palestinian people. The study also becomes important, for it counters the widespread narratives of Christian Zionism, which is spreading its perilous tentacles everywhere. The exploration also serves as an alternative vision for all the pilgrims, and will, hopefully, equip the pilgrims to become more sensitive to the people of Palestine.

This Theological Exploration of Pilgrimage Aims:

- To explore the theology of Kairos pilgrimage and draw out the ingredients of such a contextual and contemporary theology.
- To be in conversation with the people of Palestine and understand

their struggles towards liberation.

- To understand the ethic of the Alternative Tourism Group and theologize their work for justice

2. The Rationale for a Theology of Pilgrimage

Why do we need a theology of pilgrimage today? What are some of the methodological issues that a theology of pilgrimage needs to delve upon in the 21st century, particularly in the context of pilgrimage to Palestine? These are some of the questions that need to be explored for it would set the tone for articulating the Christian faith response to pilgrimage. Some of the issues to be considered are:

- Christian tourists or the 'pilgrimage market' make up a majority of the visitors to the Holy Land. In 2008, 60 % of the tourists of about 1.7 million were Christians, and over half of those were identified as Catholics, which is a rise from 1 million in 2007. Every year there has been a substantial increase of the inflow of tourists to the Holy Land. All this has been done in the name of enhancing faith, and for spiritual experiences. However, so far there has been no attempt to try and articulate the theological underpinnings of such travels as pilgrimages. Currently most Christian churches have no theology of pilgrimage and therefore lack a starting point. The present attempt can be the starting point to evolve some Christian theological responses to pilgrimage.

- There has been no academic treatise on the theology of pilgrimage by itself, though there has been a growing attention to the pilgrimage among Christians. Amid the resurgence however, there is a noticeable lack of a coherent theology of pilgrimage. There are various descriptive historical accounts of pilgrimage, Christian and others, but theological analyses are rare. Therefore, this attempt is a search into the theology of pilgrimage both for theological purposes and for the local congregations who are planning to go on a pilgrimage. .

- To embrace pilgrimage and religious tourism uncritically is to risk syncretism of the worst sort. Contextualization requires careful theological reflection on the phenomenon of pilgrimage and its resurgence with a view to creative ways in which Christians can and should appropriate its practice. Therefore, a theology of Pilgrimage becomes imminent, for every Christian needs to critically think out the need and the approach for a pilgrimage, for only then a pilgrim's visit to Palestine would be meaningful and challenging.

- In the context of the political milieu of Palestine Israel, the pilgrim is either unaware of the ground realities in the Holy Land or receive information from the dominant Zionist perspective where Palestine struggles are shown negatively. Therefore, a theology of pilgrimage could serve as an instrument in putting things in perspective, and would serve to assist the pilgrim in understanding the context in a more critical way. A theology of pilgrimage would strengthen the theological spectrum, for it would become a lens of operating, viewing, responding and understanding the Bible from a near-totally different perspective. The Bible has been used in and out by Christian Zionist groups to defend occupation, and therefore a theology of pilgrimage would help the pilgrim to critically analyze the Biblical and the present context of Palestine Israel, and would help to recover texts that have been used against the people in Palestine.

- There has been a growing phenomenon of 'pilgrimage' among the Christian communities around the world. Therefore, this attempt of a theology of pilgrimage in the context of Palestine would help Christian pilgrims in any context to apply the given learning and evolve a spirituality of pilgrimage in particular contexts.

- A theology of pilgrimage is an offering to the global Kairos movement for justice, and this endeavor is in continuation to the Kairos Palestine's invitation to "Come and See." Therefore, this becomes a supplementary tool in committing for the cause of peace and justice in Palestine.

- This attempt of theological articulation on pilgrimage would also help set the ethics of the Alternative Tourism Group and other such just tourism platforms to imbibe the essence of pilgrimage and incorporate them in organizing such pilgrimages.

These, in brief, explain the importance of engaging in exploring the theology of pilgrimage. One has to note that the theology of pilgrimage is a biblical, theological and a contextual necessity. So, such an exploration is challengingly relevant to our times today. This articulation of theology is an offering in response to the discerning signs of our times.

3. Towards a Pilgrim-imagining Theology: God as a Co-companion on a Pilgrimage of Transformation

a. *Imaging God as Co-Companion*

Imaging God and imagining God relevant to our contexts is an attempt to understand God in relationship to the human beings and the creation of any particular situation, and these attempts have not been anything new in Christian Theology. In Christian theology, God is infinity, eternal, mysterious and transcendent and takes the form of a human being in Jesus Christ. Christological incarnation provides the impetus in translating and interpreting God in categories of human understanding and human experience appropriating to the given particular milieu.

“That is, the image of God we have within our psyche has a hold over us and shapes the way we view ourselves and our neighbours. If we view God as essentially a Judge, for example, as a Law Giver, who is concerned primarily about rules and the keeping of rules, then that is going to inform the way we relate to ourselves and our neighbour (essentially as judge). If we view God as essentially Love, who calls us into relationship with God and one another, then that, too, will have a profound effect

upon the way we move through our lives. Some images of God are extremely destructive (especially from a psychological point of view), other images can be life-giving and transforming.”

One has to understand that images like God as King, God as Father, God as Shepherd and so on evolved out of human experience in particular contexts relevant to their own particular times, and such notions of God eventually became universal in their value and meaning, adapting to similar other conditions and situations across the history. “Our images of God matter. Just as how people conceptualize God affects what people think the Christian life is about, so do our images of God. Ideas (which include both concepts and images) are like families: they have relationships. How we image God shapes not only what we think God is like but also what we think Christian life is about.” Therefore this attempt of imaging and imagining God as a Pilgrim co-companion is not only a conceptualization of who is God, but also a quest for how a Christian life experience should be in this particular context of pilgrimage that has been discussed here.

b. *God as Co-Companion in the Pilgrimage*

God is a co-companion with the communities. They are called to be co-pilgrims along with God. Such a notion of companionship reveals God as one who keeps accompanying people on their journeys. It includes the pillar of fire by night and the cloud by day that led the biblical Israelites through the wilderness, as well as the presence of God that tented among them in a mobile home (tabernacle). Though, God is the destiny in any of the pilgrimages, God in God’s own way accompanies the pilgrims as a co-pilgrim and ensures the humanity to encounter divine along the journey. To encounter the divine along the pilgrimage, one needs to ground oneself open in encountering the living realities, because God is present among and within those living realities as a co-pilgrim helping the pilgrims and the locals in overcoming the struggles in

life. God of the Bible, whom we believe and affirm, is a journeying God, who places God-self with the journeying pilgrims on their search and quest for meeting the divine.

God began his pilgrimage as a co-companion with 'creation'. God made God's own road as the creation came into order and moved along as God walked. The creation is the handiwork of God, the co-companion who carefully crafted and designed the creation according to God's own taste. So, after a hard work of six days God rested on the seventh day in his own pilgrimage. The creative journeying God was walking in the garden in an evening and was trying to find the man and women exploring "where are you?" During the exodus event, God was a co-pilgrim with the people who were on the journey and God followed them like a pillar of fire by day and night.

Process theology is handy in our understanding God as a co-companion. God has constantly revealed God-self, or each context understood God in various forms and names, and therefore the journeying God received the revelation of God in particular contexts and modes. Revelation means God's self-interpretation as Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. God's being is thus a self-related being. As being it is relationally structured. Therefore, revelation of God expresses the dynamism in God for God's self-interpretation and self-revelation explain the creativity in God's very essence and existence.

The movement in understanding the self-revelation of God went along in the histories as Creator God—>God of Abraham—>God of Isaac —>God of Jacob—>Exodus 3:14 (I am who I am)—>God of prophets —>God of God Justice and righteousness—>God in Jesus Christ—>God as Holy Spirit—>tradition the Triune God / Trinitarian God —>God is on the move —>God brings the new heaven and the new earth. This process theological understanding paved the way in discovering newer forms and titles for God, and therefore in the context of pilgrimage, 'God

as co-companion' reveals both the being and character of God. God is in a pilgrimage of transformation, yearning to establish new heavens and new earth with a 'new Jerusalem' not limited to geography or politics, but who goes beyond such categories. It has always been the journey of God in different histories which very well situates God as a companion in anyone's journey.

God as a co-companion is an evolving God who keeps evolving constantly, involving and intervening in the histories. God has been travelling between states / beyond states and is 'stateless', for God's omnipresence is appropriated by each context as God sojourning with each of them. God on a pilgrimage called Abraham to go as a pilgrim wandering between states, called Moses for a pilgrimage into Exodus for 40 years to experience life in wilderness, **and to locate God by in God's companionship.**

It is worth reading Deuteronomy 26:5-11, which captures the essence of a journeying community. "A wandering Armanean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous when the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us by imposing hard labour on us, we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors, the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil and our oppression. The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders and he brought us into this place and give us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey."

Wandering pilgrims were the people of God. When Egyptians were treated harshly, where there was oppression, occupation, discrimination, hard task masters, God as a pilgrimaging heard the cries, saw their affliction, toil and oppression and came in to rescue the people in pain and deliver them out of the bondage with terrifying signs and wonders

and gave the land. God as a pilgrim is not on a self-gratifying/ self-centric journey, but comes on a journey for justice and peace.

God is a listening God -- sees and hears the oppression and brings liberation and transformation.

God is an advocate -- advocated justice on behalf of the oppressed / occupied communities.

God is an activist – God on hearing to the cries of those occupied communities acts / performs deeds through his out stretched arms and brings them freedom to live in their land.

God is in solidarity – God journeys along with the afflicted communities, as an accompanier and does not sleep until God finishes God's plan of freedom.

God is a just God – for God acts justly on behalf of the crying communities.

God is not on an arm chaired rosy co-companion, but continues to be a struggling companion, struggling along with the communities seeking freedom and peace, and ensuring that justice is delivered to God's people. Throughout histories, God intervened as a pilgrim in all the struggles of people for justice and God continues to be a co-companion even in our struggles for justice. Prophet Micah exhorts both his audience at his times and also to us to today as we engage in pilgrimage, when he questions "What does God require of us?" to do justice, to love, show mercy and to walk humbly with God" Therefore, an invitation by a pilgriming God to all pilgrims is to do justice, to love show mercy and to be co-pilgrims with God in bringing transformation and liberation, particularly in the context of Palestine Israel.



C. **God's Being is in God's Becoming**

There has been a theological anxiety among certain communities in perceiving and receiving the being of God. They understood God as transcendent, and they thought any attempt to understand God in relation to humanity and to human struggles would discount and corrupt the very being and essence of God.

The understanding of God's being in God's becoming as human being in Jesus Christ, situates the notion of 'God as co-companion' among and within the pilgrims in the context of pilgrimage, only to realize that the essence of God is in God's identification with those sojourners in their exploration for a divine encounter. 'God as a pilgrimaging God,' therefore, is trying to make a location for God among pilgrims, who keeps guiding and directing them in their journey in making it a 'just journey', a pilgrimage oiled and run for justice and peace, accompanying the pilgrims as co-pilgrim in making known the context of people around their struggles and aspirations, particularly in the context of Palestine Israel. God's being as just and righteous is best understood in the context of pilgrimage in God's becoming and willing to accompany as co-pilgrim, making pilgrims realize and commit for justice in a land filled with conflict and occupation.

This Christological clue in understanding God's being in God's becoming as human being in Jesus Christ, situates the notion of 'God as co-companion' among and within the pilgrims in the context of pilgrimage, only to realize that the essence of God is in God's identification with those sojourners in their exploration for a divine encounter. 'God as a pilgrimaging God' therefore is trying to make a location for God among pilgrims, who keeps guiding and directing them in their journey in making it a 'just journey', a pilgrimage oiled and run for justice and peace, accompanying the pilgrims as co-pilgrim in making known the

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d. *God as a Shepherd: Walking Along with the Sheep*

God as a Shepherd is an extended image of conceiving the idea of a journeying God, for this biblical image of God, has been time and again used by all people of Christian faith. They try to appropriate this image in their own settings. This image of God as a shepherd, though comes from a very pastoral and agrarian setting in Palestine, has made indelible impact on the people of faith in various contexts and histories. God as a Shepherd comes with an added dimension of giving nourishment and protection to his flock, realizing their needs and requirements. Paulo Coelho in his famous novel "Alchemist" described that being a shepherd, the young boy could explore the riches of the land as he takes the sheep to different places and landscapes and at the end reaches his destiny in life. So does God the Shepherd, for God explores the riches of the land, feed the sheep, and together they move to the destiny. The shepherd not only travels with the sheep but leads them to water and food, finds shelter, protects them and seeks them when they go astray.

In the context of pilgrimage, God as a pilgrimaging Shepherd walks along with the co-pilgrims, leads them to explore the riches of the land and people in that given context, protects them, directs them, nourishes them and guides them to realize the realities of the ground in which they pass by. The Johannine Jesus is understood as the 'good shepherd,' who has come to give life, life in all its fullness. In the context of pilgrimage, God walks along with the pilgrims like that of a shepherd to guard, guide, protect, share, feed and lead.



4. Towards a Pilgrim-imaging Christology: Jesus Christ Listening to Living Stones

The Pilgrimaging God sends God's son as a Pilgrim into the world to identify with other co-pilgrims. The word became flesh and pitched its tent among the other flesh. Jesus was always on a pilgrimage for as an infant he had to go as a refugee to Egypt from Bethlehem, and then again had to return to Nazareth. He was on a constant pilgrimage, healing people, touching people, condemning injustice and proclaiming liberation and peace.

Jesus had, and exercised the Pilgrimage mandate (Luke 4:16-18), which is to proclaim good news to the poor; to release captive, to recover the sight of the blind, to let go oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord to God's people. Therefore, Jesus was on a move, journeying for justice and making sure that his mandate of liberation and transformation is achieved. "Foxes have holes, birds have nests, but the son of man has no place to stay." - Jesus, by stating this about himself, reveals his pilgrim quality, for he is on constant walk, not static and always dynamic in his journey.

J. G. Davis explains the pilgrimage as done by Jesus in his words:

"In the case of Jesus, it will be recalled how the disciples on the way to Emmaus addressed him as a peregrinus who had come to celebrate the Passover (Luke 24:18), exactly as had his parents when they took him with them on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the same feast, a journey that they apparently made annually (Luke 2:41) .

Jesus journeyed as a pilgrim, as a sojourner and the writer Luke provides a clue in the journey of Jesus to understand pilgrimage in the New Testament, for Jesus knew what it means to be a pilgrim and what it means to go on a pilgrimage.

Naeem Ateek, the Palestinian Theologian explains that, "Palestine Israel is the land which is called Holy Land, but the holiness is in the person of Jesus Christ, who was born, died and resurrected in this land." And he further goes on to say that "this land should be called the land of the holy one." Therefore, pilgrimage is highly Christo-centric in its essence and one has to follow the Jesus way in pilgrimaging to the land of the holy one today.

Jesus was on a constant pilgrimage as a pilgrim encountering the oppressed, discriminated and talking to strangers / Samaritan women and was brought to unjust trial because he stood for the values of justice and peace all along but resurrection came after the death and his pilgrimage continued...

a. *Pilgrims' Progress: A Jesus' Way: Pilgr(im)agery Reading of Luke 2: 41-52*

It was a bright sunny morning, in the season of spring. All the relatives, cousins, friends and members of the community gathered at the centre of the town of Nazareth to go on a journey to observe the feast of Passover at Jerusalem. It was an annual custom of the people. Jesus, a twelve year old boy, along with his parents and friends was among the group very eager to go on the journey. The headman of the village told all those who gathered that it was mandatory for all them who believe in God to go to Jerusalem for a pilgrimage every year, to visit the holy temple and observe the festival of Passover to remember how God helped their ancestors pass through the slavery into liberation. In fact, all of them had to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times a year during the festivals of Passover (Pesach), the festival of Pentecost (Shavout) and the festival of Tabernacles (Sukkot). All was set for their journey to attend the feast of Passover-- sufficient food and water for all the days of their journey, tents for their temporary camping and donkeys to carry the old people and women. It was a joy trip for children travelling together

in groups singing and sharing their stories with each other. The elders, as usual, were busy biting each other's ears and discussing the talks of the town and other gossips. After journeying a long time by walk they reached the holy city of Jerusalem, where the holy temple that was built by their ancestors was located. They believed God was present there.

The festival was observed for seven to eight days, and there were lots of happenings around the holy temple in Jerusalem during those days, including the narration of the story of exodus to the future generations. Jesus as a young boy had the opportunity to listen to the story of exodus all those years, and did listen to that story that year too. According to the verse 43, when the festival ended and everyone packed their things to return, **'the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem.'** The young Jesus thought it was not enough to make a ritual of pilgrimage every year by coming, attending the feast and going away. The boy Jesus made it a point to stay behind in that holy city, going to the extent of staying alone in that crowded city of Jerusalem. By doing so young Jesus proposes an alternative way of doing a pilgrimage, unusual from the routine of just visiting and attending the feast. This alternative way has a tremendous relevance to us in this 21st century too.

One can draw the distinctions between the two kinds of pilgrims here. One, the populist way, which was more a ritualistic and routine way, and the other, Jesus' way of pilgrimage, providing some impulses to our Kairos pilgrimage in the context of making pilgrimages to the Holy Land today.

i. *Pilgrimage as Staying Behind in the City (43 v)*

When the whole group came together and was packing their baggage to return, Jesus was not prepared to go back after enjoying the pomp and pleasure of the feast. Jesus saw to it that he stayed behind in the city, risking even to the extent of staying alone as a twelve year old boy. As a group, when all of them came together, they all would have enjoyed

the historicity of that holy site -- the temple. Some elders would have narrated to them that the wood that was used was brought by Solomon, the architecture was according to this design, which was popular way to express their civilization and would have taken note of minute details on the structure of the temple, which was a holy site. Some others would have moved ahead to really think of the great times, how David planned to build, later how Solomon fulfilled that dream and so on, trying to read the scriptural passages from the Hebrew Bible about the location and the position of the temple. Some would have remembered how the temple played an important role in the life of their ancestors in several historical times. In knowing that they are in a holy site, they were satisfied and gratified in their souls for they made a pilgrimage to a holy site in their life time.

46 But, for Jesus, that kind of pilgrimaging was disturbing. He made it a point to stay behind in the city. What could have been the reasons for his staying behind in the city, when all his cousins and friends were satisfied with the learning of history of the holy site and participating in the ritual of observing the feast? Needless to say that, we are aware that Jesus was born in the context of occupation, a Roman occupation of the Palestine, and therefore he grew up in that context of the Roman occupation of their land, controlled from Rome. Therefore, Jerusalem, the Holy Land for Jesus' community then was under occupation, where temple taxes were swindled by the authorities and high priest. Jesus would have thought that it is high time that he engaged in conversation with the teachers of the law and religious authorities, to know and address the context of occupation then, and for that reason Jesus decided to stay behind in the city of Jerusalem. For Jesus, pilgrimage is not in feeling the walls of the holy temple, nor in listening to an old homily on the history of Jerusalem, but to know and reveal the context of injustice in which the holy site, the temple and the people are caught in. Therefore, Jesus stayed back in the holy city -- a primal activity in doing pilgrimage.

ii. *Pilgrimage as Staying Around in the City (46v)*

As he stayed back in the city, Jesus tried to explore the situations around the temple, the signs of occupation being felt in the division of the temple.

He started to realize the hierarchies in the temple and in the society, how certain elite religious groups are benefitting from the temple and how they played second fiddle to the occupiers. Jesus would have gone around the city to further explore how this religious holy site, by then has become a commercial place, where politics of exclusion were on the high, probably for that reason in cleansing the temple. During his last days, Jesus had to say that the temple has become a 'den of robbers.' Jesus would have witnessed the pride of the Pharisees in trying to be the custodians of the law and would have witnessed to the human right abuses on the common people, the women and children by those dominant occupiers in power. Jesus pilgrimage therefore, was to take note of the facts of injustice. His pilgrimage was further strengthened by sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions on the kinds of unholy sights that are seen in and around the holy site, the temple.

a. *Sitting Among the People*

After three days of travel, the parents of Jesus found him in the temple sitting among the teachers, the experts on law, and the well-read educated people. Probably his sitting with them suggests he was trying to engage in a conversation on the theological issues, on the political issues and trying to counter occupation in every aspect of life as sinful and unjust. He was sitting with them to counter occupation, which, then and today, has the sanction of law and scriptures, which Jesus resisted and desisted by all means.

b. *Listening to Them*

As he sat with them, he listened to the local narratives and was widening the horizons of his perspectives. Jesus would have thought, going on a pilgrimage was to listen to the local communities, hear their stories on the holy site, and share their pain and suffering of occupation. He was attentive in his listening to the local micro narratives vis-à-vis the grand mega narratives of the Roman occupiers.

C. *Queries and Enquiries*

Jesus would have been greatly disturbed by the kind of commercialization of the holy site, the temple and therefore started to ask questions to those people there. He was, probably, clarifying the facts and figures of occupation, the magnitude of occupation, and so on and so forth. Listening to the realities certainly needs to challenge us in asking questions on the cruel practices of injustice. Pilgrimage, for Jesus meant to ask, clarify, learn and unlearn the truths in the context of the holy site and the people there in Jerusalem.

iii. *Pilgrimage as Speaking Aloud (47v)*

Jesus' pilgrimage was to realize that an exposure to the life's realities makes him an advocate for the cause of justice. He then spoke aloud about justice. The people around, including his parents, were amazed at his understanding and at the way he answered them, his response to the unjust practices there. As parents, though they have been on the pilgrimage all these years, until they heard Jesus speak on the realities of life, they couldn't think of those realities from the perspective of justice. Jesus spoke the values of justice, the code of ethics, among others, on pilgrimage in the context of occupation, and the audience was amazed at his voice for justice. Pilgrimage therefore is a challenge to come, see, stay, listen, ask and then advocate for the cause of the living stones here, about justice and about liberation. Jesus from an accompanier became a consistent advocate for the cause of just-peace, and all his life and ministry was a response to such unjust practices he saw in his pilgrimage.

iv. *Pilgrimage an Engagement in God's House (49v)*

When the young Jesus was speaking for the cause of justice among the teachers and religious authorities, his parents had to speak that his being lost caused panic and anxiety to them. In reply to that anxiety, Jesus replied that why have they been searching for him? In asking such

a question, Jesus was questioning every one over there, for they have come on pilgrimage to Jerusalem to find God. Did their search for God helped them to find God there? Jesus' question was to all the pilgrims not to search for the lost boy but search to know them by knowing the neighbour; search God by knowing the struggles of the people there, for God is present among the struggling occupied people. Don't make a cosmetic search; go for a genuine search of God, for that is pilgrimage. Jesus further tells his parents that did they not know that he must be busy in Father's house, for that was the very reason for his pilgrimage? Pilgrimage therefore is to make one busy in God's house, to set free the house of God from the clutches of oppression, to set it right, where equality and freedom is enjoyed, for God's house is a dwelling of justice and peace. Pilgrimage is to have a constant engagement with and in the house of God, the holy sites, and elsewhere too.

v. Pilgrimage a Transformative Experience (52v)

According to the verse 51, Jesus then went with his parents and came to Nazareth from the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The writer records that 'Jesus was obedient to them.' Was Jesus disobedient in his pilgrimage by staying back in the city, engaging in conversation with the local community, and speaking justice and widen the perspectives? He was disobedient in the writer's perspective. But, he was obedient to the will of God in doing a pilgrimage. That pilgrimage to Jerusalem was a transformative experience to young Jesus, for in verse 52, it records that Jesus increased in wisdom, stature, in human and divine favour ever since he had this transformative pilgrimage. The gospel writers couldn't record the life and witness of Jesus from his 12th year to 30th year, but imagination draws that Jesus would have made transformative pilgrimages every year, changing the perception of several pilgrims, challenging them to oppose occupation and discrimination, and as a result, he himself had to come out as a revolutionary to fight out occupation and injustice all his life time. His mission engagements were a witness to such a pilgrimage.

Such a pilgrimage has lots of relevance for us today. Pilgrimage has become more a touristic ritual to visit the Holy Land. Is holiness present in the sites here, or does a pilgrimage a search for God? In that search,

are we willing to listen to the local life stories of the people whom we visit? Pilgrimage is not just visiting the holy sites, but it is about listening to the narratives of the local communities' struggle for justice and peace.

b. Pilgrimage as Sacrament

One of the theological arguments in understanding pilgrimage in the contemporary society is the encountering of Christ in the sacrament of Eucharist. The Holy Land or the 'land of the holy one' as Naem Ateek puts it is sometimes called as the fifth gospel, for they say in order to understand the four gospels in the New Testament, the fifth one was needed. Therefore, pilgrimage is understood as "the Sacrament of geography," where the people, the place and the past, tribe and terrain and time-story are very important to hold on.

Thus the one meets and encounters Christ in and through the Eucharist that we celebrate at any place, and not just connected to the holy sites in Jerusalem, for the people of faith in Christ await for a new Jerusalem, a Jerusalem from above, which is far from the old and the present geographical Jerusalem. Pilgrimage in the contemporary world view is encountering God at any opportune time and space and trying to make relevant the very act of Christ on Cross.



Chapter **FOUR**

Implications for Pilgrimage in Today's Context



Implications for Pilgrimage in Today's Context

After exploring the theology of pilgrimage in a candid way, we need to discuss the implications of such a theology for our times, situations and people, so that we can become sensitive in overcoming the populist ways of doing pilgrimage and would take up a much serious role in listening to the living stones, who have been unheard and unrecognised. These implications are not an exhaustive one, but are some pointers and directives in moving forward.

I. Pilgrimage as Solidarity with Living Stones, the Local Communities in Palestine

The biblical verse that the popular tour operators choose as their invocation caption is from Matthew 22: 14, to draw the attention of people to come and join a pilgrimage. This particular verse is drawn from the parable Jesus narrated about a wedding banquet. For, at the banquet, the king invites his guests to attend and when the hour for them to attend the wedding banquet has come, each of them brought forward their excuses why they could not attend the banquet. Infuriated by their absence, the king killed them and asked his slaves to invite everyone they found on the streets. When the banquet began, the king found one person without the wedding robe, and punished him for attending the banquet in that condition. The gospel writer marks this verse as crucial and points out how "many are called, but few are chosen." The intention of the gospel writer about the parable is to convey that many were 'invited', and all those had an excuse and could not attend the banquet. Those originally uninvited were then called to attend the banquet from the streets and thus became chosen. So the 'chosenness' is a surprise package, for the uninvited ultimately become the chosen, and even if the invited chose to come and attend, they wouldn't be given the wedding robe and would be brought to punishment. So, many are called but few are chosen.

Now, in the context of the pilgrimage and in the context of an invitation to Christians to join on a Holy Land tour, this question must be answered: Why did this biblical verse interest the tour operators in appealing to the customers? In his world view, the tour operator would have thought many are invited to be Christians, but few become chosen if they travel to the land, where Jesus Christ walked and lived. So the tour operator on the one hand attributes chosen-ness to those who travel on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and on the other hand links the chosen-ness to the people of Israel in that Holy Land. To further stretch the discussion, according to the popular pilgrimages, chosen-ness comes along with the pilgrimage and therefore the choice is on the Christians to choose if they want to be chosen people, by making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Otherwise, they remain as mere invitees.

The question therefore that needs attention is: "Does a pilgrimage make the pilgrim a chosen one just by travelling to the Holy Land?" The biblical parable from Matthew 22: 1-14 sets the perspective in unraveling the given question. Those that had the formal invitation and who were called 'invited' at the end became 'uninvited', and those that were on the streets who have been perceived by many as 'uninvited' at the end turned out to be the 'invited' ones or the chosen ones. The chosen-ness now is attributed to those unexpected, 'uninvited', unrecognized, strangers, and people on the streets rather than those that always thought that they would anyway be called chosen, because of their land, their historicity and their lineage. Therefore, it is not merely by going on a pilgrimage that a person ends up being the chosen one. Nor does a pilgrimage to the land of the chosen ones make someone a chosen person. One becomes chosen by responding to the invitation to come, see, and partake in the banquet, though they happen to be non-invitees. In the context of Palestine today and the historical factors that shape its people lives and future, this becomes the exact time to demystify the notion that those who go on a pilgrimage are exclusively the 'chosen' ones vis-à-vis those that do not make a pilgrimage to the land of the chosen ones.

The implications in understanding pilgrimage, therefore, are:

- Pilgrimage does not lie in merely receiving the formal invitation, or just going on a tour to the Holy Land or such places. But it is to respond to the invitation by willing to partake in an authentic encounter be it a conversation, or dining together as long as the meeting results in the invitee knowing the realities of the people in that very particular land. In the context of the Palestinian struggles, pilgrimage is not going on a tour to see those places of historical and scriptural values ascribed to them, but rather willing to eat along with the local common people, trying to know their struggles, seeking to understand their pains, for only those who have been suffering under the cruel occupation, enduring the pain as homeless refugees will, at the end, be called the chosen.
- Pilgrimage is to express solidarity with the local communities. For in the parable, the one who attended without a wedding robe was sent out and punished, for this person could have just come to enjoy the fun of the wedding. So a common wedding robe for the invitees was to show-forth a common solidarity with one another. Identifying with the Palestinian struggles is the need of the hour, and that's how one needs to perceive and experience a pilgrimage.

2. Pilgrimage as Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus Christ who Pitched his Tent Among the struggling Communities

The experience of popular tour operators in question was that, 'they found themselves' as they visited this Holy Land. Also, such an experience has taught them to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. Indeed pilgrimage is walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. But it is not sufficient to merely walk on the sites of Jerusalem or Nazareth. The question is: "What does walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ mean today?"

We, as pilgrims and tourists are distanced by a time period of nearly

two thousand years from where Jesus Christ lived and walked. How do we then perceive what it means to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ? Is it merely walking on the so called sites where Jesus walked and performed some miracles? Is walking on the footsteps of Jesus Christ mean just walking where Jesus was believed to have walked and lived? How do we theologically discern walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ today?

Take the case study of one particular site, which is believed to be one where Jesus walked on. From there, it is helpful to posit how we recognize the imprints of Jesus path in such a place. The place of Crucifixion of Jesus, the Calvary, outside of the Jerusalem is a case at hand. On travelling to that site, one can see not just one place of crucifixion. Rather there are three places each established by different Church traditions and denominations. There is a cave that connotes the spot. And under that cave, one is witnessed to see one more place, where a Cross was found by the mother of Emperor Constantine, and that site is further venerated. On reading the Scriptures, one imagines that after the trial Jesus had a long and suffering journey of carrying the Cross and was crucified outside the city. But today one is perplexed to see the contradictions and counter claims in depicting the holy site among the Christian believers. It begs the question: Is mere walking around those three places of beliefs of crucifixion consonant with walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ? Walking around those sites is mere religiosity with the value of spirituality completely diminished or obscured. Therefore, how then should we understand the walking on the footsteps of Jesus Christ?

- Pilgrimage as walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ can be better understood in the words of Jesus: 'If anyone wants to follow me, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me.' In the context of pilgrimage in the Holy Land, it is not merely walking on the sites where Jesus was supposed to have walked. Rather, it is to take up one's cross, the cross of identifying with the suffering under

the occupation today, deny all our luxuries of superiority complexes, and then find Jesus among those occupied communities and then to follow Jesus Christ. Therefore pilgrimage in the context of occupation in Holy Land is to walk along with those suffering communities, who are living under bondage, fear, and constant threat to live a life of dignity. In that encounter with them try to find Jesus among them, for Jesus Christ is still suffering along with them crying out for freedom and liberation.

- Pilgrimage as walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, can also be understood in the prophecy of Micah, when he summoned people with the question: 'And what does God requires of you? To do justice, to have mercy, to walk humbly with God.' In the context of illegal occupation of land by the oppressive powers, God certainly requires of us to do justice for there has been lots of injustice surmounting in the land of the holy one, and that can be possible by proclaiming the year of the Lord, by releasing the captives and working to set free the oppressed to liberty. It also implies to have mercy for Palestinians; the original inhabitants of that land of the holy one, for there have been merciless killings and attacks on those that ask for justice. To walk humbly with God is to walk with those suffering communities, for God is willing to walk with them in their quest for justice.

3. Pilgrimage is Locating God Among the Living Stones

Many popular tour operators rhetoric that 'life is incomplete if one doesn't visit Holy Land' is deviant and deceptive, poignantly confirming that this is just a commercial tactic in attracting the tourists. How is it that life is incomplete if one doesn't visit the Holy Land? Travel to the Holy Land today is a very middle class, bourgeoisie affair. Only the upper middle class and those that can afford are able to travel to the so called 'Holy Land.' What about those that cannot afford to travel because of their poor economical status and situation? Will every one of them have led incomplete lives only because they could not undertake that

travel to the Holy Land? In pilgrimage one needs to demystify this very understanding, for pilgrimage is not a compulsory religious mandate for the Christian faith like in the case of other faiths. It is only optional. There, too, the goal of any pilgrimage is to seek God in the journey, and that is possible only when that traveler is conscientized about the local context and seeks to explore God among the 'living stones,' the local people rather than in the remnants of dead stones in the sites there. In any pilgrimage, the traveler is called to find completeness in life, and that is found only when he or she can resonate with the living conditions of the people in suffering and pain. The aim of pilgrimage is to announce and pronounce life to all those who are striving to live amidst situations of lifelessness and death. Hence, the pilgrim is challenged to channel life towards those who are living amidst occupation.

4. Pilgrimage is Listening to Living Stones & Transforming Pilgrims Lives

Indeed, pilgrimage should be a life changing spiritual journey, but unfortunately it is only made as a 'feel good' trip to visit the sites of where Jesus lived and walked. Every pilgrim has to take into consideration the reality of the situation in the Holy Land. Why are there walls as walls of division in the Holy Land? Why does a dominant Israel use the name of religion, scripture and God to occupy the land of Palestinians and take blood on their hands? What are the predicaments and pains of the Palestinians in their own land? These are some of the questions one needs to ask oneself as one visits the Holy Land. Travelling on a pilgrimage is not like going on a holiday. Jerusalem is not Disney Land or any other favourite holiday spot. On the contrary, one needs to ask critical questions about the context there. Pilgrimage is for sure a life changing spiritual journey, for spirituality lies in locating God among the suffering, listening to the life stories of those occupied, and liberating those that are caught up in the pangs of discrimination. Like Jesus, pilgrimage is staying back in the pilgrim place, walking around the places and engaging in God's house by encountering God among the living communities.



Chapter FIVE

Relevance for Pilgrimage Today: Towards a Kairos Pilgrimage



In the preceding chapters we have analyzed the theological explorations on pilgrimages and have drawn several trajectories in the journey of theology of pilgrimage. The back drop so far have is a rich collage of various pertinent issues surrounding and embracing pilgrimage and pilgrims today. Though the theology of pilgrimage in Holy Land is first of its kind, it draws its succinct yet wider relevance to several vertices around theology, Church and pilgrims today paving way towards kairos pilgrimage, a pilgrimage at a God's appointed moment, a moment of truth that would lead to a movement of justice and liberation for Palestinians.

I. Kairos Pilgrimage Calls for Listening Theologies, Listening Churches and Listening Pilgrims

“After three days they found Jesus in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, **listening** to them and asking them questions.” Luke 2:46.

Therefore, faith and theology today needs to be more missional in its approach, more strategic in its direction and more practical in its applications, for the goal of having faith in Jesus Christ is to promote life, life in all its fullness. In order to make theology and faith more relevant and local congregation-friendly, whatever be its method, whatever be its framework, whatever be its ideology and whatever be its orientation, keeping aside its 'preaching/speaking' attitude, it needs to be rooted in the voices that emerge from the margins of the society. It was said that 'if speaking is sharing, listening is caring', therefore today we are in need of listening theologies, listening Churches and listening pilgrims rather than prescribing and describing theologies, churches and pilgrims. The context today is in need of theologies, churches and pilgrims that listen to the cries of living local communities, communicating the language of the people on the margins rather than the theologies that are abstract. "Faith comes from hearing" (Rom 10:17). Theologies that hear and listen can critically articulate faith in a particular context, and therefore a Kairos

pilgrimage theology calls on the pilgrims to be listening pilgrims, listening to the cries of the living stones. Listening then will drive towards action and praxis, and by that theology becomes action-oriented and lively.

Bishop Atallah Hanna of the Greek Orthodox Church in Jerusalem shares that, "Holy Land is the 5th gospel, witnessing the life and ministry of Jesus. As much as the history of salvation is important, the geography of salvation, which is the Holy Land, is also important, and therefore pilgrimages have been done to the Holy Land right from the beginning of Christian Church in history." He further says, that the call for pilgrims is, "not only visit the holy sites, but speak to the local communities, listen to their faith narratives and experiences, for Church here is made of people and not with memorial stones." Therefore the call to the pilgrims is to engage in conversations with the local living stones, willing to receive their hospitality and be open to get challenged from their local life narratives.

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Listening to living stones will provide a space to listen to alternative narratives of the Holy Land from the Palestinian people, and shall provide opportunities to listen and understand the local Palestinian Christians experiences and stories of life. The call, therefore, for a pilgrim is to be a listening pilgrim, be an advocating pilgrim, an action / activist pilgrim, and make the best utility and understanding of pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

2. Kairos Pilgrimage Calls for a Discipleship of Cross for the Pilgrims

"Then Jesus said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." Luke 9: 23

Patriarch Michel Sabbah, explains that "on a pilgrimage, pilgrims come in contact with holy places and receive blessing, and those blessings needs

to be shared with the people living in the local contexts as well.” He further invites pilgrims to Holy Land to “come here and find God and not tourism. See God in the Holy Land where God manifested in human beings here. Pilgrimage is a meditation in depth in finding the mystery of God, who is made visible in the lives of the people living here.”

Therefore, the call is to look for God among the living realities of the people of Palestine, who have been under the rubric of the Cross of occupation, crucified and is longing for an experience of resurrection of new life. Following Jesus Christ today is to deny oneself, taking up the challenges of crosses in Palestine and striving for their liberation.

3. Kairos Pilgrimage Calls for Redeeming and Recovering the Zionised Biblical Texts and Interpretations

“Let my people go.”Exodus 8: 1

Reading and reflecting on Biblical texts is a challenge in itself, as the narratives have been appropriated by the occupiers in the name of written Scriptures as a sanction for them to occupy. Christian Zionism has conveniently taken a deep root in most of our theologies, hermeneutics and churches today, which has called the Christians to take for granted that the biblical Israel is today’s political Israel and therefore there is a divine sanction for them in occupying the land in Palestine. However, Kairos Pilgrimage provides us an opportunity to redeem and recover the Biblical narratives from the occupier’s territory and to redeem it from the occupier’s perspective by re-appropriating it to the given context of the imprisoned Palestinians, who are today’s biblical Israel, forced into slavery and occupation. We need to recover the Biblical texts from Zionist readings and interpretations, and try to relate the revelation of God to the given context of occupation, suffering and imprisonment today, for God stands on behalf of the crucified communities.

Rifat Kassis, the Co-ordinator of Kairos expresses the anguish on how the pilgrims come and go without any understanding of the local context. He laments that, "Pilgrims and Pilgrimages have been successfully monopolized by the Israeli tourism industry and its accompanying political agenda. Beginning with co-ordinated Israeli propaganda at home, before their trips, tourists (including pilgrims) are received in Israel by Israeli tour guides, accommodated in Israeli hotels, and accompanied by Israeli stories and Zionist interpretations of the Old Testament. While visiting the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem, an Israeli tour guide may offer a quip about Arab backwardness or a warning about Arabs' exploitative nature; they may be discouraged from wandering beyond the immediate vicinity of the touristic zone and from patronizing Palestinian businesses; they are then ushered back onto their buses and sped through the checkpoint back to Jerusalem..."

This observation challenges the pilgrims for they come and visit merely for a pleasure trip without even knowing the context and sometimes go back home with prejudices about the Palestinians and Arab Christianity. Therefore, the Kairos call to 'come and see' is an invitation to overcome the prejudices about Palestinians and to engage in deeper conversations with the local communities. Rifat Kassis, therefore, explains the rationale for Kairos document and expresses that: "The 'Come and See' call was borne of our belief in the significance of tourism as an economic and political force that can effectively and truthfully advocate for the Palestinian struggle for peace with justice within a context of Palestinian-organized tours. We believe, then, not only in the potential solidarity manifested by such tourism, but by the power of what it can enact with consciousness, information and sincerity. With 'Come and See,' we invite tourists to experience Palestine from within. Accommodated in Palestinian regions, tourists are greeted by Palestinian hospitality and introduced to the rich Palestinian culture by means of the voices, hands, stories and lives of Palestinian individuals and communities eager to deliver the truth and forge connections."

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4. Kairos Pilgrimage Calls for Living Testimonies from Transformed Communities

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8

Having come to the Holy Land for pilgrimage, the challenge is not to feel self-satisfied with the visit, rather on engaging with the living stones one can encounter the living God, and then go back to one’s own place to testify for the encountering of God by advocating for justice to Palestinians.

Naeem Ateek, the Palestinian theologian explains that, “holiness is not in a place but in a person called Jesus Christ. There have been ‘selective pilgrimages’ by different faith communities that come to Palestine Israel.” According to Naeem, pilgrims from the Orthodox spirituality background, who come during Easter, Passion Week...feel that “being physically near to the place brings them a blessing. For Protestants, Bible is more important than the place of the land. Most Catholics want to go to Nazareth, to the place of Mother Mary. Therefore, each pilgrim

comes with some motives and notions on their visit to the land here.” He further says that, “the pilgrims are to look for the importance of the person in the place and search for the living testimonies that emerge of these places.” He then challenges the pilgrims, by saying, “You run where Jesus walked”. Pilgrimage according to him is to spend time with the local faith communities, the living stones, striking a balance between the person and the place of the land.

Therefore, the challenge is to come back from the pilgrimage as a transformed pilgrim, testifying as living witnesses about the injustices done to Palestinians and partake in sensitizing the local congregations and churches.

5. Kairos Pilgrimage Calls for Advocacy and Solidarity Pilgrims

“And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6: 8

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As transformed pilgrims, the pilgrimage should inspire the pilgrims to partake in global solidarity campaigns for justice to Palestine. The call is to organise forums in support of justice to Palestine, sensitise the local communities, join with other responsible civil society partners in garnering support for Palestine, and lobby with the government authorities for justice to Palestinians. The transformed pilgrim has firsthand information about the realities in Palestine, and therefore need to be the first one to advocate for justice to Palestinians.

The call is to be prophetic in our faith, address the human rights violations done to the people under occupations, speak to the principalities and powers of occupation by joining in movements like Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS), academic boycott movements and so on to express our dissent with the occupation.

The call is also to join the global advocacy like observing World Week of

Prayer for Peace in Palestine Israel, imploring on the government officials of our own countries to address this global human rights violations and make known to the world about the unjust practices of the occupiers. The call is also to build movements of global solidarity for the release of people who are profiled and imprisoned on false charges of sedition, and strive for their release. Being and becoming an advocate pilgrim is the greatest relevance of the theology of pilgrimage.

Epilogue

Pilgrimage is a vocation and not a vacation, for which the pilgrims are called to embark upon. In the back drop of many popular pilgrimages being conducted in the land of the holy one, alternative pilgrimage or justice pilgrimage is a creative response in discerning the signs of our times critically. These pilgrimages are the need of the hour as we are challenged to listen to the unheard stories of the living stones, the local Palestine people, their narratives, their faith experiences and their cries for justice and life. Having been appraised of the history of pilgrimages, both politically and sociologically, the call of Christian faith to the pilgrims is to seek themselves as co-companions with God, for God in Jesus has been on a pilgrimage seeking life and justice. God accompanies the pilgrims in listening to the unheard living stones, for God dwells among the living stones and not on the stony buildings. For the companionship of God is not from a distant, unknown territories, but co-companionship of God is to experience God for God dwells along and among the living communities. God becomes a listening pilgrim, an advocating pilgrim, an activist pilgrim, a solidarity pilgrim and a justice pilgrim, and therefore calls us to become such pilgrims on our journey to encounter the living God.

The other call to the pilgrims is to inculcate and practice Jesus' pilgrimage, staying behind the city, critically understanding the context, and voicing out the concerns for transformation and justice. It had been a routine

ritual for Jesus to go on a pilgrimage annually, but he had done it not as a religious tourist but with a difference, as an alternative pilgrim, and as a justice pilgrim. He does his pilgrimage for transformation, exposing the exploitations done on the local people and countering the occupiers and those perpetrators of power. Jesus' pilgrimage involves listening to the local voices of the living stones and calls for transformation and liberation.