

G. Worship, Prayer & Ritual | Sample Answer

Profile the development of two of the above contemplative practices, from the way in which each began to the way in which each is practiced today - Hermitage, Pilgrimage. (2016 Section G [a])

Pilgrimages and hermitage are experiencing increased popular appeal in contemporary culture. They have developed and changed since their origin many years ago. They are still very meaningful and are practiced by many.

A pilgrimage is a journey made by a person of faith to a place which holds a moral or spiritual significance to them. A pilgrimage is a journey inward as well as outward. Pilgrims seek to strengthen and renew their faith through travel. Our travel to historical sites is the outward part and our drawing closer to God is the inward part. It is an “outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace”. Going on pilgrimage has a long and respectable history. Followers of several of the world’s great religions have included pilgrimage as part of their spiritual disciplines. For centuries, Muslims have journeyed to Mecca and Jews to Jerusalem.

The first Christian pilgrimages were made to sites connected with the ministry of Jesus. Since the days of Jesus, Christians have gone on pilgrimages to the Holy Lands, to walk where Jesus walked. Pilgrimage has been made to sites connected with the birth, life and crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Christian pilgrimages to the Holy Land and Jerusalem date back to the 4th Century. The oldest Christian itinerarium, ‘itinerarium Burdigalense’ was written by the anonymous ‘Pilgrim of Bordeaux’. He recounted the stages of a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. At this time, pilgrimages were encouraged by Saint Jerome and established by Helena, the Mother of Constantine the Great.

Today, pilgrims seek to strengthen and renew their faith. Pilgrims travel with a clear intention to draw closer to God and they expect to return transformed from the person they were when they began their journey. T.S Eliot said pilgrims search for “something good that will enrich their lives in the everyday world back at home”. There are many reasons why pilgrimages are still popular today. Many Christians journey to Medjugorje and the Camino each year. People are drawn to the

peaceful atmosphere, it is so difficult to find sacredness in contemporary life that people are drawn to these sacred places, to enjoy peace and nature.

Pilgrims separate themselves from the familiar in life and immerse themselves in a religious experience. They seek to escape the pressures of materialistic life and share the sense of the sacred with others, to pray as one. The physical aspect of pilgrimages is attractive. Hindus wash in the River Ganges, Catholics climb Croagh Patrick barefoot and Jews place prayers inside the cracked walls of their ancient temple in Jerusalem. There is something about touching the sacred place and feeling a true presence of diving. Whilst the spiritual and transcendent remain removed from our everyday senses, pilgrimages give us the opportunity to walk on, touch and kiss the sacred.

Pilgrimage has developed from being a long and arduous journey that was often penitential in origin, to a popular activity to facilitate personal and spiritual development.

A hermit is a person who lives in seclusion to seek God in solitude. By the end of the 3rd century, those who wanted to pursue a contemplative life, separated from all distractions, deemed it necessary to move to the desert to live alone. The hermitage sites at Glendalough and Skellig Islands show how hermits lived contemplatives and lived within the safety of a monastery.

The appeal of hermitage for people today can be seen in the number of people who visit heritage sites like Glendalough and St.Aidan's in Ferns. The hermitage sites in St.Aidan's monastery in Ferns were built in 1994. The sisters decided to act upon the understanding that "a life of activity is sustained by occasional withdrawal to a place of solitude and silence". They believe that such a separation creates an opening to the heart and to the presence of God. Four small dwelling places were built, designed to be conducive to prayer and reflection.

Another reason for the popular appeal of hermitage today at Ferns, lies in the understanding of a ritual activity. Hermitages allow people to escape to familiar places in life and find space for reflection, inspiration, creativity and regeneration.

In conclusion, the practices of pilgrimage and hermitage are still important and popular today. They have changed in regard to their purpose but both still seek spiritual development and to deepen their faith.