How Is Fortitude Among Pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago Expressed and Formed? Clues from a Study of Polish Pilgrims

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Abstract

In 2019 alone, the Camino de Santiago (the Way of St. James), one of Europe's three most significant medieval pilgrimage routes, was followed by 347,511 pilgrims from around the world. This pilgrimage route has been the subject of numerous research projects conducted by international groups of specialists in various scientific disciplines. This study presents correlations between St. Thomas Aquinas's doctrine on the virtue of fortitude and the experience of Polish pilgrims on the Camino based on 50 in-depth interviews conducted in the summer of 2019 on Monte do Gozo in Santiago de Compostela. This objective was achieved using the methodology of qualitative research following Steinar Kvale's recommendations. The transcriptions of the interviews were coded based on the classifications in the *Summa Theologica* by Aquinas, classified into categories, and subsequently analyzed using MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2020. The virtue of fortitude is indispensable in the decision-making process and the ability to put one's decisions into practice (Morales-Sánchez & Cabello-Medina, 2013. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 116(4), 717–734). One manifestation of the Camino pilgrims' virtue of fortitude allowed them to believe that they would be more employable after they returned to their communities.

Keywords Pilgrimage · Cardinal virtues · Fortitude · St. Thomas Aquinas · Qualitative research · Camino de Santiago

Background

Since the Middle Ages, the Camino de Santiago (the Way of St. James) has been a pilgrimage route followed by pilgrims walking to the tomb of St. James the Apostle in Spanish Galicia.¹ Throughout the centuries, the actual practice of the pilgrimage has undergone changes related

¹ St. James was one of the apostles closest to Christ. He was the first faith martyr, he fulfilled the command of preaching the gospel to the ends of the world, and his tomb is in Galicia, Spain. Going to his tomb and visiting the shrine built around it is, therefore, a journey to the ends of the Earth that reminds pilgrims of James's apostolic experience. The maps of the world from the first century CE placed Jerusalem at the center of creation. In the Far East, usually represented at the top of the map, there was an earthly paradise, now forbidden and closed to people (Rucquoi, 2019, p. 41).

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to religious, cultural, and political conditions. The medieval pilgrims began their journey at the threshold of their own home and, after reaching Santiago de Compostela, they returned to their homes on foot. Nowadays, a pilgrim who has completed the Camino and wishes to obtain a certificate of the journey needs to report to the Santiago Pilgrim's Office and rarely walks home. In 2019, the office recorded 327, 378 people from all over the world who had walked at least 100 km or cycled at least 200 km.² The office issues two types of certificates: the *Certificación del Peregrino* is granted to pilgrims who are travelers without spiritual or religious purpose, and the traditional Compostela is issued to persons who travel with a spiritual intention, whether *ex-voto* (as the fulfillment of a vow), *per penitentia* (as penance), or *pietatis causa* (as a request for God's intervention).

The Spanish poet Antonio Machado wrote a famous poem in which he claimed that one can find the way out of a problematic situation through the Camino de Santiago mechanism—*el camino se hace caminando* ("the way is created by the process of walking"). This means that the way is not prepared and ready to follow, like a modern expressway, but is created through the process of living one's life (Misgeld, 1997, p. 151). Starting from the definition of man as *homo viator* (Aquinas, 2014, I-II, q. 4, a. 1c), a wanderer, the pilgrim is portrayed as a participant not only in the journey to Santiago de Compostela but also in the spiritual journey to God. In 1992, Canadian anthropologist Alan Morinis indicated this model of understanding the Camino pilgrimage by writing that whereas the physical journey brought the pilgrim closer to Santiago, the spiritual journey brought him closer to some desired ideal. Moreover, he emphasized transformation as the central phenomenon of the pilgrimage (Morinis, 1992, pp. 20, 25–26). According to Morinis, the transformation takes place between the two poles where the movement takes place. The starting point is the imperfection of everyday life, while the goal is a mysterious and miraculous ideal. In this arrangement, the pilgrim moves from everyday life to the desired perfection. Moreover, the transformation understood as healing does not have to be total but can be partial, as Elo Luik (2012) confirmed in her study of the Camino de Santiago (p. 30). This experience is reflected in the teachings of Aquinas about the virtues, the acquisition of which is directly related to being on the way as the acquisition of virtues requires both time and discipline (Aquinas, 2014, I-II, q. 95, a. 1; q. 99, a. 2). Also, the patron saint of the Camino pilgrims, St. James, is called Santo Adalid. This is a reference to the knightly tradition of the one who paves the way for other warriors, which can also be understood as helping the pilgrim achieve victory in the spiritual struggle (Roszak, 2018, pp. 31–32).

In an interview held in Monte do Gozo³ in 2019, an 18-year-old pilgrim, after completing his several months' pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, was asked about his expectations for his life after he returned home. He said he was afraid that his response would sound banal, but most of all he would like to be a good person. This desire came from his heart, not from a theological analysis. Nonetheless, this confirms the theological sciences' teaching that humans differ from the uncomprehending creatures through reason and will and can be the masters of their actions, which gives individuals the opportunity to grow and become good people (Mróz, 2001, p. 588). Moreover, Aquinas claimed that as a person approached their goal, they were *strengthening their desire* and, in a way, *accelerating their pace*.⁴

² These statistics are maintained by the Pilgrim's Office. See www.oficinadelperegrino.com/en/statistics.

³ Monte do Gozo (Hill of Joy) is the place where pilgrims on the French Way (Camino Frances), one of the major Camino de Santiago routes, can see the towers of Santiago de Compostela Cathedral for the first time.

⁴ This gravitating toward God, seeing in God one's purpose, was the reason behind Aquinas's example of falling bodies that accelerate as they approach the ground. This is found in *The Summa Theologica* (I-II, q. 35, a. 6), as cited in Mróz (2001, p. 589).

A broad spectrum of links between faith and mental health is provided by studies collected by Deborah Cornah (2006) from the Mental Health Foundation, which confirms the beneficial effects of spirituality on mental health. However, since they are based almost exclusively on quantitative measurements, the conclusions are not exhaustive. Another potential issue for future research is the excessive focus on the influence of spirituality on mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and schizophrenia. However, there is a noticeable lack of research on the mechanisms by which spirituality can promote the mental health and well-being of people who do not experience such problems (Cornah, 2006, p. 4).

The current study addresses the links between the Camino de Santiago and the pilgrims' virtue of fortitude using the concept of virtue developed by Aquinas in the thirteenth century based on the classical philosophy of Aristotle. Among the numerous scientific studies aimed at illuminating the richness of the Camino de Santiago phenomenon by researchers in various disciplines, there has not yet been any study of the virtues. The words of St. Jerome —“Their virtues would not have received the finishing touches they deserve if they had not bowed to Christ in those places where the Gospel shone forth from the Cross for the first time” (Jerome of the Strydon 2010, Letter 46)—indicate the close relationship between the virtues and pilgrimage. From the psychological perspective on research on pilgrimages, only the psychological manifestations of the virtues (e.g., gratitude, honesty, and kindness), understood as character strengths, can be examined. The virtues themselves are understood as fundamental and universal characteristics of human behavior that are valued from the perspective of the philosophy of morality, such as courage, wisdom, and moderation (Kaczmarek & Drązkowski, 2014; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Aquinas's doctrine is explained by the Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, who distinguished three ways of moral inquiry: Thomism, based on natural law; the encyclopedic tradition, based on the rationality of the Enlightenment; and pluralism, based on Nietzsche's *Genealogy* (Barszczak, 2014, p. 155). Of these three, MacIntyre (2009) points to the special value of the Thomistic concept, which, unlike the other two traditions, has not yet exhausted its possibilities. Although MacIntyre's work may provoke some discussion, it emphasizes the need for further reflection and a search for the right path. However, although MacIntyre combined his thinking with the doctrine of Aquinas through occasional references, his books do not give access to the theological context of Aquinas.

As Paul Tillich writes in his book *The Courage to Be* (2014, p. 40), the virtue of fortitude is understood by Aquinas in two ways. First, it is a spiritual force capable of overcoming everything that hinders the achievement of the highest good. Second, it can be understood in a more narrow sense as courage and understood as, for example, the courage of a knight. As noted by Tillich, similar to Aquinas, perfect fortitude is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and it raises the natural strength of the mind to supernatural perfection.

Therefore, in the current study, following MacIntyre, we selected the doctrine of Aquinas for understanding the proper meaning of the virtues. We planned to conduct the research in 2019 among Camino de Santiago pilgrims, i.e., perform in-depth interviews with 50 pilgrims on their practice of the four cardinal virtues. The study was intended to provide an answer to the question of whether, for these pilgrims, manifestations of the virtues (understood in line with the classic Thomistic approach) had therapeutic aspects as this would be a feature that would distinguish their pilgrimage from other types of excursions, such as a long-distance hike.

The study also provided an opportunity for deeper theological interpretation of the psychological research currently being carried out in Spain by Albert Feliu Soler and Manu Mariño known as the Proyecto Ultreya (see <https://www.estudiocamino.org>). These

researchers aim to assess the impact of the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela on the pilgrims' state of mind, satisfaction with life, happiness, ability to pay attention to the present, and ability to make choices more consciously and in line with their own values. In this sense, the current study could also contribute to the theoretical theological basis for other social science research (e.g., in the fields of psychology or sociology).

Review of the existing literature

In the methodology of the current study, the first phase consisted of analyzing the available data sources, including in particular their compilation, mutual verification, and processing. Our analysis led to the conclusion that the planned study would be exploratory in nature since the Camino de Santiago has not yet been sufficiently researched by theologians, although it has been the subject of numerous studies by specialists from various disciplines. In the theological literature, it functions almost exclusively as a typical example of folk piety (see Congregation for Divine Worship & the Discipline of the Sacraments, 2001, Ch. 8, Paras. 279–287). Since the theological sciences have not yet addressed this topic, and since empirical methods in theology still constitute a niche in hermeneutical, historical, and normative approaches, the planned research will provide an opportunity to fill the identified gap by using the teachings of Aquinas, which may also benefit pastoral theology and moral theology. Also, for other fields of study, such as sociology or psychology, the planned research can be a significant point of reference. The research helps to explain why humans, through the development of the virtues, have the possibility of becoming more, as they were created. The research, set in the context of the four cardinal virtues, concerns four supreme powers. Each has a corresponding virtue. The power of the intellect is associated with prudence, will with justice, irascible appetite (*irascibilis*) with fortitude, and concupiscible appetite (*concupiscibilis*) with temperance (Aquinas, 2014, I-II, q. 85, a. 3).

Starting from Aquinas's understanding of grace, the pilgrimage is presented as a sign of God's grace, following Dariusz Doburzyński's (2020):

Pilgrimage is a sacramental sign in Christian terms (assuming a broad understanding of the concept of sacramentality) which, through the anthropologically significant markers of pilgrimage (sanctuary, journey, community, hardship, admiration, and reverie) directs towards salvation, and their experience is a potential way for the pilgrim to participate more fully in its fruits, that is, to deepen the life of grace. (p. 152)

In this context, the pilgrimage, according to Pope John Paul II (2000), "through the practices of active asceticism and penance for human weaknesses, expresses man's constant vigilance towards his own frailty and prepares him internally for the transformation of heart. Through vigilance, fasting and prayer, the pilgrim advances on the path of Christian perfection." Making various kinds of efforts to prepare a person for inner transformation, on the other hand, are part of the question of growing in the virtues that organize feelings using the life-giving dynamism of grace that builds up the attitude of a person throughout all of the natural human life (Mróz, 2001).

The Camino de Santiago has been studied by specialists in various disciplines. Suzanne Amaro and a group from Portugal studied the motivations of 1,140 pilgrims (Amaro et al., 2018). The motivations of pilgrims were also examined in Germany by Christian Kurrat (2019). Anna Davidson Bremborg conducted a comprehensive survey of the spirituality of Swedish pilgrims (Bremborg, 2008), and a Portuguese scientific team also conducted

a survey of pilgrims (Fernandes et al., 2012). Similar studies on a group of Australian pilgrims was conducted by Neil Harrigan (2010) and on Korean pilgrims by Im and Jun (2015). In Poland, this type of research was undertaken by Piotr Drzewiecki, who conducted quantitative research on various characteristics of Polish pilgrims (Drzewiecki et al., 2016; Mróz, 2019). Peter Felkai of Hungary conducted a study of medical problems of pilgrims on the Camino (Felkai, 2019). Iranian Zahra Moaven (2017) analyzed 30 in-depth interviews on the spiritual health of pilgrims and therapeutic nature of the Camino pilgrimage.

Of course, research on Camino pilgrims has also been carried out in Spain (Vázquez de la Torre et al., 2012), and the ongoing Ultreya Project is being conducted by a group from Zaragoza to assess the therapeutic changes among pilgrims based on quantitative psychological research carried out before the start of the pilgrimage, at the end of the road, and three months after the end of the Camino (see www.estudiocamino.org/slider/proyecto-ultreya/). An international survey on the motivation of pilgrims on the Camino was also conducted by the team of Antonio Gallegos (Gallegos et al., 2007) and a Spanish team (Farias et al., 2019; Oviedo et al., 2014).

In research conducted in psychology, each virtue is assigned a set of several strengths of character. Fortitude, according to Aquinas, has two primary forms: stopping fear and being guided by fortitude (Aquinas, 2014, II-II, q. 123, a. 3c). Aquinas also assumes that the virtue of fortitude has four integral parts (*partes integrales*): generosity, magnanimity, patience, and perseverance. According to Aquinas, people with fortitude are characterized by generosity (*magnanimitas*), which makes them consider themselves worthy of great things, given the gifts they have received from God (Aquinas, 2014, II-II, q. 129, a. 1). Magnanimity (*magnificentia*) makes people wonderfully realize their ideas and achieve the lofty goals to which their spirit aspires. Patience (*patientia*) consists, according to Aquinas, in voluntarily and long-term abolishing through a balanced mind the evil inflicted by others, especially evil that is particularly difficult to bear, combined with risking death for a noble and useful purpose (Aquinas, 2014 II-II, q. 136, a. 4). A person of fortitude is also characterized by perseverance (*perseverantia*), which leads them to maintain the strong and unwavering performance of some good work until the end. This is therefore called resilience, the brave climbing in hardship and drudgery toward distant goals in life. Its main task is to protect people from weariness and discouragement because of the long duration of their good work (Aquinas, 2014, II-II, q. 137, a. 1).

These are positive human qualities that different cultures and historical periods have held to be important in achieving a good and happy life. They manifest themselves in the *thoughts, feelings, and behaviors* of people (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). These strengths of character are a subgroup of those personality traits to which people usually attribute moral value, i.e., evaluate them as good (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Aquinas, on the other hand, distinguished three levels of virtue. First are the *virtutes omnino imperfectae*, which are also called false virtues (*falsa similitudo virtutis*). These are tendencies that lack practical wisdom and, therefore, are directed toward false goods that are incompatible with the ultimate meaning of life (Aquinas, 2014, II-II q. 23, a. 7). The second level of virtue is that which, based on just reason, does not reach God Godself through love. These are true but imperfect virtues (*vera virtus sed imperfecta*), the so-called pagan virtues (Tao, 2015, p. 41). Aquinas described only the third level of the supernatural virtues as unreservedly perfect (*simpliciter perfectae*), aimed at the ultimate goal of God (Aquinas, 2014, II-II, q. 23, a. 7). In the current study, therefore, the manifestations of the virtues were analyzed according to the second and third levels of virtue according to Aquinas's categorization (Osborne, 2007).

The theory of virtue is also used in value assessment studies (Cawley et al. 2000, p. 59) but has not yet been used in empirical research in the theological sciences, even though studies of business ethics have shown that the virtues associated with the practice of virtue benefit individuals and entire organizations (Cameron, 2003; Cameron et al., 2004; Chun, 2005; Wright & Goodstein, 2007). Another interesting example is an initiative in the banking sector in which Santander Bank created a program called America Camina in 2010. Under this program, bank employees could travel the last hundred kilometers to Santiago de Compostela as pilgrims (Pedrotti, 2012, p. 29). The Italian study conducted by Pedrotti (2012) shows that the Camino is a potential educational space, especially for students of hospitality management and tourism; through experience and action, they can acquire the qualifications and competencies needed for the profession (p. 30). The study of the virtues described here is aimed at analyzing why the Camino is identified in such diverse ways as a space for the development and acquisition of valued competencies.

New approach and research questions

We aimed to explore the virtue of fortitude, as described above, among Polish pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago. The four cardinal virtues play vital roles in the decision-making process (Morales-Sánchez & Cabello-Medina, 2013, p. 730). The question is whether the manifestations of the virtue of fortitude in pilgrims on the Camino allow the pilgrims when they return to their communities to be predisposed to take responsibility for decisions related to everyday life or to be more valued by their employers and colleagues. In one of the interviews we analyzed, a 20-year-old pilgrim who came on foot from Poland (more than 4,000 km) summed up his pilgrimage as follows: “I have such a desire to give myself to others, and above all to be a good person. And I think that when I come home, I will simply do so.” The study also examined whether the medieval concept of the virtues of Aquinas is still relevant to the experience of pilgrims on the path to Santiago in the twenty-first century. The category of *sacrifice* often appears in pilgrims’ discourse, which explains their effort to complete the pilgrimage to Santiago despite the challenges (e.g., accepting uncomfortable conditions and accommodations). It is evident that, in this way, the theology of the pilgrimage has regained a non-cultic meaning of sacrifice, or rather its essence as a “recognition of God,” when pilgrims sacrifice to God what is most important in life (Roszak, 2019, p. 36).

In order to properly diagnose the essence of the Camino phenomenon, we decided to conduct a qualitative study of individual in-depth interviews with pilgrims following the guidelines of Steinar Kvale (2010). The in-depth interviews with pilgrims ($N=50$) were conducted following our interview design during a two-month Erasmus + grant research internship in the Centro Europeo de Peregrinacion Juan Pablo II, Santiago de Compostela, Spain (July– September 2019). The possibility of carrying out the interviews where the pilgrims completed their journey created the opportunity to obtain fresh information about their current experience. Besides the standard interview, questions were modified on an ongoing basis and adapted based on the interactions with the respondents. All the survey participants agreed to answer the questions. The data was obtained in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and national research commission (Commission on Ethics in Science at the Polish Academy of Sciences) and the Helsinki Declaration of 1964, as amended, or with comparable ethical standards.

The interview transcripts were coded according to a classification presented in *The Summa Theologica* of Aquinas, categorized, and then anonymized and analyzed using MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2020 (Tables 1 and 2).

Method

The idea to carry out the study was inspired by the first author's personal Camino pilgrimage experience and three months of volunteer service (June–August 2014) at the Centro Europeo de Peregrinacion Juan Pablo II in Monte do Gozo. At that time, many pilgrims displayed great willingness to talk and presented personal and intimate stories about their life and experience of the Camino. Many of these stories were linked by the common thread of experiencing a deep inner transformation under the influence of the Camino and their conviction that the journey they had made would have a tangible positive impact on their later life. Their fresh perspective, caught right after the completion of their pilgrimage, was also very clear; their narratives displayed openness and sincerity and addressed a broad spectrum of topics and themes.

For this reason, the site for the current study was located at this center, 5 km from the center of Santiago, in Monte do Gozo. This the first hill on the French Way (Camino Frances) from which the pilgrim can see the destination—the soaring towers of the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in the city's center, which stands out in the Santiago landscape. Also, the Centro Europeo in Monte do Gozo was well suited to conducting the in-depth interviews. Despite the presence of many pilgrims, it was possible to find secluded places to have a personal, long, and informal conversation. Many of the interviews were conducted in the open, in the *auditorio* (an outdoor concert venue), a secluded place that encouraged free conversation. Technical difficulties included outside noises (e.g., cars and planes in close proximity). Yet, these did not affect the quality of the recordings and the accuracy of their subsequent transcription. For the pilgrims, the atmosphere of this place encouraged them to talk frankly and to become open quickly, as it was quiet enough and in beautiful natural surroundings. If the weather or time of day required it, the field interviews were conducted in an area of the Centro chosen to ensure appropriate confidentiality for the respondents.

The two-month stay under the Erasmus+ internship scheme allowed for interviews with 50 different pilgrims. The recruitment ensured that the respondents were diverse in many respects, although all were from Poland. There were 22 interviews with women and 28 interviews with men. Two respondents came by bicycle, and two came on foot from Poland. Most of them were walking the Camino for the first time, but some were on pilgrimage for the second, third, or even fourth time. The respondents included diocesan clergy, consecrated persons, volunteers, high school graduates, students, pensioners, artists, people in other professions, and people who were unemployed. The average interview lasted about 45 min, and the longest conversation took about an hour and a half.

Pilgrims from Poland were informed by volunteers at the reception desk in a nearby *albergue*⁵ that there was a person writing a PhD dissertation about Camino who hoped to conduct interviews with pilgrims. The pilgrims often immediately reported their willingness to participate in the study and booked specific hours to meet with the researcher.

⁵ A shelter, hostel, or other lodging for pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago.

Table 1 Study schedule

Testing method and technique	Actions implemented	Research tool	Number of actions carried out
Preliminary research	Library query, analysis of existing data		
In-depth interviews using qualitative research methodology	Development of the authors' interview design for Polish pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago Conducting interviews in Monte do Gozo in July–September 2019 Transcription of interviews Categorization Analysis of the test results	Analytical guide	50 in-depth interviews

Table 2 Code categorization

Category No	Category	Code No	Code (based on St. Thomas Aquinas)	Code description
1	Generosity (<i>magnanimitas</i>)	1	Hope for the success of the works undertaken	Stimulating desires and trust as a force against the fear of failure
				Counteracting falling into the trap of mediocrity—imagination and spontaneity, knowing one's true value in humility, keeping a distance from the opinions of others
		2	Spiritual readiness for great things (Aquinas, 2014, II-II, q. 129, a. 1.)	A person of generosity is considered worthy of great things, taking into account the gifts received from God and being willing to involve all spiritual authorities to be more open to God's action and to develop the person's potential (talents)
		3	Willingness to forgive and unreservedly sacrifice money, strength, and time	Generosity in actions on behalf of others serves as the most noble manifestation of an above-average life in the mundane acts of everyday life undertaken with passion and devotion
2	Magnanimity (<i>magnificentia</i>)	1	Not stopping a good work that has begun	Noble behavior when difficulties arise, looking for the best solutions, avoiding pettiness
		2	Taking joy in someone else's success	
3	Patience (<i>patientia</i>)	1	Bearing with a balanced mind the evil inflicted by others	Faithfulness, suffering in silence, enduring a particularly difficult evil
		2	The evil that people inflict, which is particularly grave and difficult to bear, is the evil connected with the danger of death, and this is what fortitude is about (Aquinas, 2014, II-II, q. 136, a. 4)	Not being discouraged even in the face of death, counter-acting sadness, doubt, and despair
4	Perseverance (<i>perseverantia</i>)	1	The disposition of the soul by which a person remains firmly attached to virtue despite attack	Avoiding drifting, mastering fatigue, enduring difficulties
		2	Intention to persevere in the good	Consistency in pursuing a goal—persevering in the good for a long time and to the end
		3	The guarantee of effective continuation of goodness for the rest of the person's life	Overcoming pain that stands in the way of happiness until the act of martyrdom

They often waited until after dinner, so the interviews were conducted late in the evening or at night (sometimes the last interview ended after midnight). Some also brought to the interview their notes from the Camino to help them recall more details about their experiences and thoughts. Sometimes, on the day after the interview, they came back to talk about something they had forgotten to mention during the interview. These additions were added to their interviews.

Many times, the conversation was beneficial to both parties. The respondents willingly discussed their experience; it gave them a way to tell someone about matters that they considered important. They were happy to find a person who listened willingly and patiently. Moreover, they were aware that their participation was helpful to science, and they found their participation in the scientific study to be of great importance. This made them aware that they were contributing to an important matter related to the Camino, which they thought was valuable. They also wanted others to know about it. Many people stated: “Maybe I won’t say anything too brilliant because my story is so ordinary,” to which the research would respond: “It’s all right because I’m looking for a real Camino experience and not some kind of extraordinary story.”

Seven of the interviews were conducted with volunteers from Monte do Gozo who felt a need to help pilgrims. We considered them associated with the Camino, similar to the pilgrims. A large number of the volunteers had been interviewed along the Camino several times and, in the context of the study of the virtues, the conversations with them made it possible to check whether they had maintained a particular virtue after completing the pilgrimage or whether it was only a result of being fresh from the experience at the end of the pilgrimage and thus did not persist in everyday life, especially when they were faced with difficult situations that verified the presence of these virtues.

All interviews were recorded with professional equipment, i.e., an Olympus Digital Voice Recorder DS-3500. They were later copied to a laptop and stored on a flash drive. At the beginning of the interview, each respondent was asked if they agreed to participate in the interview recorded on a dictaphone. They were also informed that all statements would be anonymized, they were not obliged to answer any of the questions, and they could interrupt the conversation at any time. They were encouraged to feel at ease and to speak frankly about their needs if, for example, they needed a break during the conversation or wanted to change the place of the interview. Such situations did occur, and addressing the needs of the respondents resulted in greater trust and openness. All the respondents except one agreed to be called by their first name. This also guaranteed greater openness and sincerity of speech. It is worth emphasizing that it is a general custom on the Camino that most people call each other by first name, regardless of their age, education, or profession. This makes the pilgrims equal and does not allow for the formation of a social hierarchy.

Results

Pilgrims pointed out that during the Camino, they realized they needed to determine the purpose of their life. The Camino also allowed them to address their spiritual issues, set priorities, and learn the truth about themselves, often difficult and painful but usually liberating. They described this process as “removing the mask” or “removing the make-up.” They realized that they lacked time in their everyday life for the kinds of reflections they were able to do while on the Camino. Thanks to the Camino, they were able to distance themselves from everyday life and observe the value of matters they had not appreciated previously. It was a time of struggle not only with their physical endurance but also with their own thoughts.

Many of the respondents stated that they set off on the trail with certain expectations and that these changed during the journey under the influence of various experiences related to matters they could not have predicted before leaving home, such as the weather, difficulty finding accommodations, and fatigue. They found that it was not possible to conduct the profound theoretical spiritual meditations they had planned. As they found simple solutions to their basic needs for accommodation and food, they realized that it was in this simplicity that their reflections on their own life often came. Simple daily activities also often took on new meaning and value. Those who did not consider themselves deeply believing Christians or close to the church admitted that during the Camino they were more willing to pray personally and participate in church services than in everyday life.

Among the respondents, there were also pilgrims who began the Camino because of difficult personal experiences such as cancer, addiction, or a traumatic life experience (e.g., participation in warfare). They described their Camino experience as therapeutic. Thanks to the journey, they felt strengthened and ready to take up their daily duties anew. A few of them had returned to the Camino to renew the experience for the next stage of their lives. Some respondents did not share the above-mentioned experiences. One said that she was happy about finishing the Camino because she missed her home and hoped to return there quickly.

Regardless of their degree of religiosity or age, most respondents described the experience of wandering on the Camino as definitely different from that of a tourist trip. However, one respondent talked about her experience when she was wandering for a few days with people who behaved as if it were a tourist holiday. They did not hide the fact that they used various means of transport at many stages of the way, such as tram, bus, or train. Day after day, they feasted late at night in various places, drank large amounts of alcohol, and told fascinating and colorful stories. The person who told this story, after spending two days with these people, realized that they were not authentic and that their conversations about fashion, finance, or politics did not enrich her. On the contrary, she felt anxiety and disharmony. She stated that she saw it was possible to “make a Camino” in this way, but such a Camino did not bear the same fruit as when a person allowed the “masks” mentioned above to fall off, allowed oneself to be tired, was oneself, and opened up to the authenticity of the experience.

All of the above-mentioned virtues of fortitude were visible in the pilgrims’ statements during the interviews. The statements often emphasized taking up a challenge, which could be understood as the readiness to take up the work, knowing that achieving the goal would require developing one’s skills and talents. Key to the teachings of Aquinas on the virtue of fortitude, the manifestation of generosity can be found in the attitude of Polish pilgrims going to Spain without being able to speak Spanish or without a guide who would be able to communicate with others and find the right way. In many of their statements, the pilgrims also talked about practicing an attitude of humility in the face of situations related to various dangers during the journey, such as stray dogs, unfavorable weather conditions, or the difficulty of finding a place to stay. This attitude resulted in a feeling of inner peace and joy. Another example of such an approach was breaking down their resistance to knocking on a door and asking for help.

One of the respondents said that at some point she felt “light inside, ready to act, ready to accept further problems, just living, and I was just so calm in spirit. And that’s what happened during those seven days of talking, arguing, silence, pouring sweat.”

The most extreme example of an attitude of generosity was presented by one of the respondents telling the story of a French pilgrim who, having lost his wife, house, and

family within a few weeks, having nothing, decided to go to the Camino from the threshold of his own house. Along the way, working for a living, he rebuilt his life during the long journey. Another 29-year-old pilgrim told the story of his decision to go to Camino to change his life, abandon his drug addiction, and find answers to troubling existential questions. To this end, he gave up his job and spent all his money on this pilgrimage, and he said at the end that he hoped this would be the beginning of a new stage in his life.

The pilgrims also expressed their generosity in their simple relationships with other people. They often mentioned the positive experience of feeling joy at someone else's success and of offering disinterested help to others, even to strangers. They stressed that this attitude came naturally to them during their journey; although they realized how different it was from what they were used to in everyday life. They saw the value of the other person without any calculations or any advantage to themselves.

Many pilgrims also emphasized the experience of patience, especially in the face of acute pain and fatigue. They said that prior to the Camino they had been aware that a long hike could cause suffering. Most of the respondents experienced various types of physical pain; some experienced painful leg injuries. However, without giving in to sadness, doubt, and despair, they calmly decided to take up the effort consciously every day with peace of mind. A few of them experienced particular difficulty in sharing crowded rooms with other pilgrims. Some said that it was easier for them to endure these experiences in a spirit of penance. Some compared their suffering to carrying a cross.

The experience of perseverance was present in the statements of the respondents. Regardless of the unforeseen situations that occurred during the journey, they were ready to persevere in their decision until the end. They mentioned that the destination at the end of the pilgrimage was crucial to them and that it was not similar to climbing a mountain peak or reaching some other point on the map. For the majority of the respondents, the journey to Santiago de Compostela was related to the figure of St. James the Apostle and his shrine. Parallel to the kilometers they walked, they were following an equally important and sometimes even more critical spiritual path. Therefore, most stressed that the pilgrimage experience was fundamentally different from the tourist experience.

However, one of the respondents aptly described the fact that the experience of the pilgrimage was not the same for everyone, that it depended whether one was open to the way, or open to the grace that comes from that way, that can be pulled out, that teaches different things. Otherwise, someone would simply go to the Camino for tourist reasons or to lose weight.

Discussion

The study confirmed the authors' theory that for many pilgrims the Camino is an experience of profound internal transformation and development in light of the Thomistic approach to moral virtues. Virtue promotes happiness. The fundamental mechanism that ancient philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle pointed to is that virtue is the path to the happiness. Aquinas, also starting from the category of happiness, points to virtue in the understanding of efficiency, subject to internal factors, *principia intrinseca*, of human action in the sense of psychic authorities (reason, will, and feelings) and external factors, *principia extrinseca* (law and grace). According to this understanding, virtuous actions are possible thanks to human reason, which determines the moral value of a given

action; to the will, which impels one to act in the direction of the objective determined by reason; and to the emotions, which give strength to that action (Mróz, 2001, p. 74).

The interpretation of Aquinas's teachings in the light of new considerations by Paul Tillich and positive psychology undertaken in this study demonstrates the timelessness of Aquinas's teaching on virtue. Tillich claims that the virtue of fortitude is our self-affirmation that overcomes all adversities that stand in our way. In this way, the virtue of fortitude gives us the opportunity to face many existential fears and allows us to learn to experience joy and happiness expressed as an opportunity for the self-realization of our true selves (Tillich, 2014). According to positive psychology (Seligman, 2002), human beings strive to realize what they can become by nature, but they also possess a potential that they acquire in the course of their development and socialization. This approach encourages deepening scientific reflection on the subject of the virtues, which are the basic category of positive psychology. Virtues in this sense determine a person's character, psychological strength, and ability to cope effectively with the challenges and difficulties of everyday life. According to positive psychology, a person characterized by virtue exhibits through acts of will all, or at least most, of the six universally recognized virtues.

The list of virtues, according to the Aquinas's categorization, is long; however, four give the right attitude of desire (Aquinas, 2014, I-II, q. 61, a. 1c, as cited in Mróz, 2001, p. 591). Therefore, they are called the cardinal virtues: prudence (*prudencia*), justice (*iustitia*), fortitude (*fortitudo*), and temperance (*temperantia*). Three are moral virtues (justice, fortitude, and temperance); only prudence is a mental virtue, but because of its material aspect, it is included among the moral virtues (Mróz, 2001, p. 591). Prudence corresponds to the rational part of the soul; fortitude corresponds to the driven part (the angry force); temperance corresponds to lust (the urge for pleasure); and justice introduces order and harmony in the will (Aquinas, 2014, I-II, q. 61, a. 2c, as cited in Mróz, 2001, p. 592). Thus, the four cardinal virtues improve the four forces that are the stimuli in a person: reason, will, drive, and lust. According to Aquinas, moral virtues are gained through moral action, so reaching a state of virtue depends on human effort. In the list of moral virtues proposed by Aquinas, there are clear references to Greek philosophy, especially to Aristotle. Nonetheless, Aquinas, in his doctrine of human virtues, maintains the harmony between natural and supernatural morality and the conformity of the gospel to philosophical truth (Mróz, 2001, p. 577). Human virtues are, therefore, presented by Aquinas from the perspective of humanity, according to the formula that grace does not destroy nature but perfects it (Aquinas, 2014, I, q. 62, a. 5).

The current study makes it possible to show the virtue of fortitude in the sense of efficiency in good actions, such as those that guide pilgrims to Santiago with regard to the categories of truth, goodness, and beauty (Mróz, 2001, p. 13). This is not, however, a statement on the abstract moral order governing human acts and actions; instead, it reflects the reality of personal and relational experience presented in the interviews of Polish pilgrims going to Santiago, in which one can recognize the relevance of the teachings of Aquinas about human virtues. Thus, from a theological perspective, the creative escapism of Camino pilgrims is manifested by the characteristic traits developed by the pilgrims that can be defined as the virtues in the theology of Aquinas (Mróz, 2001, pp. 92–97). Therefore, although Aquinas was neither a doctor nor a psychiatrist, his doctrine about the virtues, especially about the virtue of fortitude, reveals the mechanism of their formation and the resistance to shaping them (Serczyńska, 2019, p. 53). According to Aquinas, a person remains a psychosomatic unity; hence, human moral abilities are analyzed on the psychophysical, cognitive, and affective levels as well as on the levels of mental reason and will in which irascible passions (hope-despair; courage-fear, anger) and concupiscible

passions (love-hate, desire-avoidance, joy-sorrow) play an important role (Mróz, 2018, p. 117). The rituals characteristic of the Camino, such as the blessing of objects associated with the pilgrimage, are also associated with the attribution of new meanings to the objects. The rituals most often relate to a defense against the hardships and dangers of the journey undertaken. This experience leads pilgrims from the economic-technical sphere to the spiritual experience of reality (Roszak & Serczyńska, 2020). It also falls within the scope of research on religious or spiritual capital (Serczyńska et al., 2021), which is consistent with the writings of Paul Tillich. He stated that the virtue of fortitude is combined with the Christian virtues of faith (including hope) and love and finally begins to be identical with faith (Tillich, 2014).

The fundamental process in virtue formation is the transformation of a person under the influence of a good act. Therefore, virtue is simultaneously a creative actualization of a person's potential and also of the excellent quality of the person and their act. The Book of St. James (*Liber Sancti Jacobi: Codex Calixtinus* n.d.⁶) also points to the fruits of St. James's intercession. Good acts as presented in this study are key to the Aquinas's virtue of fortitude according:

*How blessed before God are those who have such an intercessor...
Many poor people went there, who then became happy,
many who were weak and then healed,
many who were divided then at peace,
many who were cruel then gentle,
many laymen then monks,
many greedy then generous,
many proud then humble,
many liars then sincere.* (Liber Sancti Jacobi, *Codex Calixtinus*, book I, chapter XVII)

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⁶ The codex was probably written by three authors and completed around 1140 CE on Pope Callistus II's order. The main author was a French monk, probably Aymeric Picaud. It contains an anthology of information for pilgrims, including sermons, miracles, liturgical texts, music, descriptions of the route, places to visit along the way, and local customs.

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