As our readers know, *Church, Communication and Culture* dedicates the last installment of every volume to a special issue. This time the chosen topic is ‘Tourism, Religious Identity and Cultural Heritage’. Our special issue deals with this subject in a double dimension: the first section, focused on the promotion and reception of identity of the Christian heritage, has been followed by guest editor Ralf van Bühren; the second section, supervised by Silvia De Ascaniis and Lorenzo Cantoni as guest editors, is dedicated to the role and use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the tourism and religious experience at sites of religious heritage.

**Section 1: the artistic heritage of Christianity: promotion and reception of identity**

Travels over long distances, especially among common people, were considered quite arduous until the early 19th century. In our time, by contrast, people can enjoy these journeys for pleasure or recreation. Traveling as a leisure activity has developed a good deal since the mid-19th century, above all in Western Europe. Thanks to the increased comfort and speed of transportation in the early 20th century, organized travel and hospitality expanded to accommodate the phenomenon of modern tourism as a mass activity. A new expansion of tourism was triggered in the 1960s by low-cost infrastructures and public visibility in new communication media.

Nowadays tourism is basic to ordinary life. This is obvious if we see its economic impact at local and global levels, which is constantly growing. More importantly, modern tourism has become a sociocultural phenomenon: it reveals and shapes the ways in which people understand and act in our world, including the religious dimensions of life.

The diversity of topics addressed in this issue shows the complexity of the subject and the need for further research. Traveling to and staying in religious places or attending mass events might include visits to Christian churches, museums, sanctuaries or special sites of pilgrimage. Cultural heritage, in particular that of the Catholic Church, attracts tourist attention all over the world.

Religious tourism is a very recent form of tourism. The motivations of these visitors are mostly mixed. For anthropological, cultural and also religious reasons, the Catholic Church is convinced that tourist activities at religious sites cannot be considered only from an economic point of view. Rather, she considers it necessary to share the identity of her heritage artworks and religious events. Here, the new media communication and the pastoral approach to Christian art in the new evangelization could be important factors to share the said identity.
Readers of the first section, entitled ‘The artistic heritage of Christianity: promotion and reception of identity’ gain insights into how the identity of the Christian artistic heritage is promoted by religious or civil authorities, and how it is received by tourists. Regarding the statements of the Catholic Church’s magisterium on tourism, this section informs about doctrinal norms and pastoral proposals after Vatican Council II (1962–1965). The historical and cultural frames for these directives are also given.

The first article, by Łukasz Wiśniewski, deals with religious tourism to Christian sanctuaries in Europe and North America. Its main focus is on the implications of mixed interests for the communication of the faith. In history, such shrines have become a meeting place for pilgrims. This tradition still exists today, even if many sanctuary visitors explore primarily the heritage’s culture or the sources of spirituality. This new trend has consequences for the pastoral services on-site, which are frequently diverse and personalized. Wiśniewski shows how the Catholic Church’s Magisterium since the second half of the 20th century has invited shrine rectors to make their sacred sites a place of the new evangelization. His study concludes with an analysis of the new media communications of shrines (websites and social media channels).

The second article, by Enrique Banús, explains how university courses on cultural management could be an educational opportunity for Christianity. Much of the global artistic heritage has a religious dimension. A good part of it belongs to cultures inspired by the Catholic Church. Here, academic and pastoral mediation could help to manifest the religious dimension of the cultural patrimony and to educate the audience in understanding it.

Nowadays, part of the artistic heritage of the Catholic Church has lost its value as a place of worship. The article by Silvia Aulet and Dolors Vidal discusses this issue regarding religious heritage sites in Catalonia (Spain). Here, the authors investigate the actual uses of both tangible and intangible heritage. They reflect on the relation between monumental and religious values of Christian places, and on how wise tourism management might help to preserve such values and to improve the quality of visitors’ experience.

The case study by Emanuela Edwards analyses a survey of audience reception (2017) in the Sistine Chapel (Vatican City). It investigates how tourists interpreted the Christian art that they contemplated in the Vatican Museums. The author highlights the importance of producing explanatory materials and of an effective guest management strategy to ensure visitors are given the opportunity to know the spiritual significance of the artworks. Encouragingly, many visitors in the survey demonstrated that they understood the religious meaning. This draws attention to the potential that the Sistine Chapel provides for cultural education and evangelisation today.

Joseph Tan’s case study correlates religious tourism with the new evangelization. It provides the reasons why the Catholic Church since Vatican II has promoted her artistic heritage as a pastoral tourist product. This is because she is aware of the original cultural setting of the heritage, which requires a religious communication. The author gives reasons why the Church needs to reframe secular mass tourism within the Christian anthropological vision of man. A final analysis of ‘best practices’ examines six cases of such approaches in Europe and Asia.

Section 2: ICTs and travelers’ experience at sites of religious heritage

The Decree on the Media of Social Communications ‘Inter mirifica’, approved by the Second Vatican Council in 1963, opens by claiming that ‘among the wonderful technological discoveries (…) [particular attention has to be given to] those media which, such
as the press, movies, radio, television and the like, can, of their very nature, reach and influence, not only individuals, but the very masses and the whole of human society, and thus can rightly be called the media of social communication’ (Introduction, no. 1). Today we live, indeed, in a ‘digital era’: understanding how digital technologies work and how people use and appropriate them, is necessary to understand social dynamics in different fields.

The second section of this special issue is devoted to studying the role and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in tourism and religious experience at sites of religious heritage. On the one hand, in fact, tourism is probably one of the sectors where ICTs are playing a major role – starting from the dreaming and planning phase, during the visit itself, and also in the ‘after’ phase. On the other hand, ICTs might also support the religious and spiritual dimension.

The first paper by Silvia De Ascaniis, Marc-Marie Mutangala and Lorenzo Cantoni investigates the thin line between ICTs as obstacles vs. facilitators of experiences, taking into consideration the dialectic between the religious and touristic experience of people visiting sites of religious heritage. Visitors to the Sanctuary of the Holy House of Loreto (Italy) were surveyed, studying their use of ICTs in the different phases of their visit.

The second article, presented by Terry Inglese, builds on two pilgrimage experiences in Switzerland in which the author was actively involved. It proposes a model for training pilgrims’ guides. Concrete pedagogical suggestions are made, which point out effective uses of ICT applications in the field.

The use of ICTs for the transmission and valorization of cultural repositories of history and faith is the topic addressed in the case study by Cecilia De Carli as well as in that by Victor Manuel Pérez-Martínez and Miguel-Angel Motis Dolader. De Carli presents the case of the ex-votos of the Sanctuary of the Holy Virgin of Succour of Ossuccio (Como, Italy), showing how a dedicated website was developed making the story and the significance of the ex-voto accessible beyond difficulties of space, differences of faith, and various consumption styles. The second case study mentioned, dedicated to the material and immaterial heritage of the ancient Jewish quarters of the Autonomous Community of Aragon (Spain), points out how the creation of transmedia stories allowed the ability to differentiate among types of tourism segments and to offer enriching and emotional visit experiences.

Major religious events, just like any other kind of events, attract tourists and represent, thus, opportunities for cultural promotion. The case study by Juan Narbona and Daniel Arasa provides an analysis of users’ access to the website of World Youth Day 2016 in Krakow, a mass event of the Catholic Church that gathered more than 3 million young people. The paper investigates the role of the website in promoting the destination where the event took place.

The issue ends with three book reviews. The first one, by Enrique Fuster, concerns a recent volume that attempts to look at sacred Christian art through the lenses of Pope John Paul II’s theology of the body. The second one, by Joshan Rodrigues, deals with a recent book on contemporary Christian travel, with a particular focus on the practice and the destinations of pilgrimage. Finally, Luigi Senise offers a review of five printed tourist guides, which aims at comparing the description they give of three of the most famous religious artworks in Rome.
