Religious tourism in Christian sanctuaries: the implications of mixed interests for the communication of the faith

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ABSTRACT

Christian sanctuaries are places of a unique contact between man and God. This article deals with shrines in Europe and North America (Washington, Guadalupe, Lourdes, Fatima, Czestochowa, Assisi, San Giovanni Rotondo, Santiago de Compostela). Such shrines have long been meeting places for people on a pilgrimage of faith. This tradition still exists today, even if many sanctuary visitors primarily want to explore the cultural heritage or discover the sources of spirituality. This new trend has consequences for the pastoral services on-site. Therefore, it is significant that the Catholic Church's Magisterium since the second half of the 20th century has invited the shrine rectors to make their sacred sites a place of the New Evangelization. This article explains how the message of faith that is communicated to believers by pastoral care, sacramental ministry and proclamation of the word of God could also be offered to cultural tourists and nonbelievers, in particular through art, architecture, music and the works of mercy. Here the study offers insights into how the recent Church documents emphasized Christian hospitality as a tool of evangelization. Finally, we analyze the new media communications of shrines (websites, social media channels) as opportunities for proclaiming the Gospel message.

Introduction

The Second Vatican Council (1962 – 1965) opened up new perspectives on the dialog between the Catholic Church and the contemporary world. The Church ‘has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel’,1 affirmed Gaudium et spes, the pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world. Thus, Vatican II stated that the Church should ‘recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics’.2

Such ‘signs of the times’ include contemporary mass tourism. As a new phenomenon, it originated in Europe and America during the 1960s thanks to relative social and
economic stability. After the Second Vatican Council, one can notice, therefore, a growing interest of the Church in free time and human activities connected with tourism. The custom of making pilgrimages to sacred places has been known for many centuries. Pilgrims poured to shrines to worship God, pray and participate in religious rites. However, today’s phenomenon of mass tourism is, in many cases, dominated by cultural curiosity combined with eagerness to see new places, including religious ones. So, the religious motivation of traditional pilgrimage is today one of many elements of the ‘Mixed Interest Tourism’ (MIT), that is, tourism undertaken for a vast variety of reasons.

Tourism, like all human activities, calls for evangelization. Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, reminds the Church that all believers are invited to proclaim the Gospel in three areas. The first area is ordinary pastoral ministry, aimed at all practicing members of the faithful. This pastoral ministry seeks to help all believers to grow in faith. The second area of pastoral interest concerns the baptized who have abandoned their faith. Third, there is the evangelization of those who have never heard about Jesus. Through her pastoral care of tourism, the Church addresses today the basic need for evangelizing all nations. This kind of pastoral care allows the Church to meet people who are far distanced from the faith and the Church.

Since the beginnings of Christianity, sacred places have constituted privileged space because they are considered God’s chosen places, where pilgrims have sought contact with God. Today’s shrines are meeting places of pilgrims and tourists with both religious and cultural interests. Religious tourists are interested in sacred places and events as spiritual elements of human heritage, while cultural tourists are interested in the cultural experiences of the sacred places. This diversity of ‘Mixed Interest Tourism’ is a challenge that offers great pastoral opportunities. The greater the numbers of tourists visiting a holy site, the greater will be the variety of chances to communicate the Christian faith.

The present article will discuss some important international shrines in Europe and North America and their websites and channels on social media. Shrines are – and have always been – important places of evangelization by the witness of Christian love, kindness and hospitality. Even though nowadays people come to shrines not only for religious purposes, they may still become for them a meeting place with God, also thanks to the dialog with the representatives of various cultures. This new perspective opens up opportunities for transmitting faith to believers and to people far distanced from faith, whose only contact with the Church might be through visiting a shrine and similar cultural heritage sites of the Church. For this reason, this article analyses the current situation of international sanctuaries with regard to their faith communication to tourists. It considers how sanctuaries today could seek constantly new ways of reaching out to the tourists with the content of faith.

**Shrines as a sacred place**

**Bearing in mind the action of God and the life of the saints**

It is generally understood that sacred places are churches, chapels, shrines, monasteries, cemeteries and other places dedicated in a special way for prayer and worship, excluded from secular jurisdiction because of their religious character. Hence a
pilgrimage site, such as a shrine, comprises space and matter that help people to get in touch with God and offer all pastoral and cultural ministries conducive to personal holiness.

Many different elements contribute to the recognition of a given space or building as a sacred place. The general atmosphere of the shrine can reflect a recognized event of a supernatural character, an apparition or a miracle, or some historic events that took place at the given site. Those events can be a part of Christ’s ministry on earth or an episode from the lives of the Apostles and saints. A shrine is mainly a fruit of God’s activity and not only of human activity. The Church cannot officially approve a shrine as a sacred place without a tangible sign from above. If there is no religious worship, which proves that a given place has been chosen by God, it cannot be recognized as a shrine commemorating God’s works. However, according to the Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy, a shrine may arise for different reasons: as a commemoration of an extraordinary event or as witness to piety and gratitude of the faithful. There are also shrines where the Mercy of God is at work, as seen in frequent miracles and healings. A shrine commemorates God’s works by reminding of the fact that the earth, heaven and man were created by God. The fullness of time – past, present and future – in shrines shows clearly the presence of God. The present time in a shrine emphasizes the community of believers gathered before God’s presence in a sacred place. Finally, the reference to the future points to the final destination of man, which is eternal life. Besides, every shrine has its own charisma, a gift from God for all pilgrims visiting the site, where they can receive special graces. The special charisma of a shrine depends on its beginnings and on the pilgrims’ awareness. Most shrines trace their beginnings to apparitions, healings or other important events with regard to faith.

The first of a type of shrines are biblical places. Such places are important for Christians, for example, the Shrine of the Annunciation in Nazareth in the Holy Land. The angel sent by the Lord greeted Mary and announced her a remarkable message, whereas she accepted God’s plan of salvation. Today the Basilica of the Annunciation is towering on the spot, which according to archeologists was the real site of Mary’s family house. It has been the place of worship and pilgrimage destination since the beginnings of Christianity.

The second kind of shrines are those in the sites of later Marian apparitions. According to tradition, on December 12, 1531, Mary appeared to Juan Diego in Guadalupe, Mexico. The apparitions gave rise to the most-visited shrine in America. The story of Lourdes began in 1858, when Mary appeared to the 14-year-old girl, Bernadette Soubirous, in a rock grotto on the outskirts of the town. In the subsequent months, 18 more apparitions took place. In 1917, Mary appeared to three children in Fatima, Portugal, talking to them about praying the rosary and the need for conversion. This event led to the erection of the shrine in Fatima.

The third type of shrines is connected to the veneration of a holy image or other sacred objects. The shrine in Czestochowa, Poland, originated thanks to the worship given by people to the Black Madonna image. Mary, venerated in this image as the Queen of Poland, takes all Poles under her protection. The monastery on Jasna Gora (Luminous Mount) was founded by Duke Vladislaus II of Opole, who also presented
the monks with the image of Mary. The monastery of Jasna Gora very soon became a pilgrimage destination. In Loreto, Italy, the beginnings of the shrine are connected with the Holy House, brought from the Holy Land during the Middle Ages.

Fourthly, there are shrines linked to the Christian saints. Santiago de Compostela, the burial place of St James, one of the twelve Apostles, has been a famous worship center and pilgrimage destination since the Middle Ages. In 1205, St Francis had a vision, in which Christ called him to rebuild the church of St Damian in Assisi. Francis gathered a group of followers, later to be called Franciscans or Friars Minor of Assisi. His burial place in the Basilica of Saint Francis became later an important pilgrimage site. The Sanctuary of Saint Pio of Pietrelcina in San Giovanni Rotondo – a town with no remarkable monuments or interesting history, also far away from main Italian tourist tracks – enjoys the reputation of one of the most-visited Catholic shrines in the world thanks to St. Pio of Pietrelcina, who lived there.

Finally, shrines can have a particular importance for the pastoral life, may be dedicated to a special devotion. The National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. (USA), is such an important pilgrimage center. Its history is closely connected to the history of the American nation. In 1792, John Carroll, the first bishop of Baltimore, entrusted the United States to the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary Immaculate. In 1947, Pope Pius XII gave an official approval to this act, proclaiming the Blessed Virgin Mary Immaculate the Patroness of the United States.

Sacramental and spiritual dimension

Shrines were and still are meeting places between man and God. This uniqueness is expressed, first of all, in the fact that a shrine provides an exceptional space for celebrating the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and the sacrament of reconciliation. A pilgrimage to a shrine can fulfill the human need for finding spirituality and inner silence. The encounter with God provides opportunities for solidarity by creating a new social order with mercy, justice, peace and responsibility for the weak and the poor as the most important values. The sacramental dimension of the shrine helps to avoid superficiality in the everyday life of pilgrims and tourists.

In shrines, the main priority is given to the celebration of the Eucharist, which plays a vital role in building the community of all the faithful. The second place is given to the sacrament of reconciliation. It is an expression of the Mercy of God, and therefore an important sign for all visitors: God chooses the shrine to reveal his Face full of love.

The Church encourages all those responsible for sacred places to celebrate the liturgy there in an exemplary way. Liturgical celebrations held in shrines are to set an example to all visitors. As the shrine provides an ideal setting for conversion and lifestyle change, the celebration of the sacrament of penance should be well prepared. Shrine rectors should plan for meetings and conferences preparing the faithful for the sacrament of penance. This sacrament is also worth celebrating in the community and the shrines should be a ‘house of forgiveness’.

Visitors coming to a shrine should have an opportunity to deepen their spirituality. As already said above, many visitors come in search of faith, thus the Directory on
Popular Piety and the Liturgy advises the rectors of shrines to celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours and other liturgical celebrations helpful for people who want to perceive and discover God in their trials. Several shrines offer the possibility to participate in the Liturgy of the Hours, e.g. Assisi, where the faithful can recite the solemn vespers together with the Friars.

The possibility to participate in prayers in various languages is a very important aspect. Nowadays shrines are visited by people from many countries. The opportunity for people to participate in the Mass in their own language helps them to pray. At the same time, such a multilingual offer expresses the universality and community of the Church. In Fatima, apart from Masses celebrated in Portuguese, the Masses in the Chapel of Revelations are very frequently celebrated in English, Italian, Spanish, and even Polish. The shrine in Santiago de Compostela offers to pilgrims Masses in German, French, Polish, Spanish and Portuguese. In the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, apart from Masses in English, there are also Masses in Spanish. It is worth noticing that only Czestochowa provides Holy Masses in Latin, both on feast days and weekdays. On the website of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe some can find the online broadcast of the Mass celebrated in the Basilica. It opens up new possibilities to participate in the life of the shrine while not physically present there. According to the shrine information provided on the websites of Loreto and San Giovanni Rotondo, Masses are celebrated only in Italian. Of course, groups coming to the shrine may celebrate Masses in their mother languages if they bring their own priest.

Shrines should also provide good conditions for the pilgrims’ individual prayer. On the websites of all shrines, we can find the schedule of the Eucharistic adoration together with directions on how to get to the chapel where the Blessed Sacrament is exposed. All shrines provide information on their websites on the possibility and the value of confession. As Lanci says, confessors are special ministers of shrines who offer their time to pilgrims longing for mercy.

Besides, many shrines propose several forms of piety: in Lourdes processions with the statue of Our Lady, in Fatima processions with candles, in San Giovanni Rotondo the ‘Fiaccolata Mariana’ processions with the wooden statue of Our Lady of Grace.

The division of sacrum and profanum space is conducive to the mission of a shrine. On the outskirts of a shrine, there is usually some infrastructure for receiving pilgrims and offering basic services such as information offices, souvenir shops, restaurants, car parks, sanitary facilities. This is the area in-between the sacrum and the profanum. However, the sacred place inside the shrine is allocated only for liturgical celebrations, pastoral care and personal piety. The need for keeping silence is mostly emphasized. In many shrines, loud recitation of prayers for groups is banned and respectful silence demanded. To strengthen the spiritual dimension, there are green areas and parks, meant for relaxation, but also for religious meditation.

**Shrines as places of evangelization**

The Church today sees the need for giving priority to New Evangelization, especially in the societies marked by secularization. New Evangelization is the process of
transmitting faith to people and countries who were baptized in the past and have Christian roots, but have lost them for a variety of reasons. Shrines may become special places of such a New Evangelization, offering people, who are not necessarily believers, a chance to rediscover and strengthen their faith, experience brotherly encouragement and love, see the witness of Christians in everyday life and also participate in prayer and liturgical celebrations that make the reality of the Incarnation of the Word present among them.

The Letter to Rectors of Shrines (2011) stresses the vital role of sacred places in the process of evangelization. One should have in mind that not all visiting a shrine are pilgrims coming for religious purposes. Therefore, the main task of those responsible of shrines is to create a space which could help visitors discover a possible encounter with Jesus or even receive the grace of baptism. The mentioned document, directed to rectors, offers several suggestions for transmitting the faith through liturgical celebrations like night adorations, prayer vigils or works of mercy. Ordinary sacramental ministry can give a foundation for rediscovering the mercy of God. Also, cultural events play an important role in this evangelization process. The Letter to rectors of shrines encourages organizing congresses, seminars and exhibitions with religious themes in sacred places, as they may provide tools for reaching those in search for spiritual truths.

The mission of shrines is to adequately welcome all groups. To do this, it is first necessary to recognize the needs of the visitors. This recognition determines the forms of evangelization: from simple tools to individual treatment including willingness to listen and spiritual accompaniment.

Shrines are always a place of adoration and meditation. Hence, they offer places for retreats and days of recollection as part of their evangelization ministry. The shrine in Fatima offers retreats for priests, in which they can listen to reflections on the word of God, participate in prayer and Eucharistic adoration, and have a chance to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation in the context of a brotherly meeting with other priests.

The Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe offers to pilgrims La plaza Mariana, the center for evangelization and catechesis. It is a kind of pastoral center, which promotes and proclaims the message received by Juan Diego on very important days for all pilgrims. Besides, it offers halls, cafes, a small bookshop and an interactive museum, which proclaims the Gospel message to pilgrims by means of the Guadalupe story. There is also an encounter tent, where lectures and evangelization meetings with communal prayer and singing take place.

According to Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Lourdes is a unique place of New Evangelization. Spring water, which is continuously flowing in Lourdes and in which the pilgrims bathe following the advice of Our Lady, has close analogies with the refreshing water of the sacrament of baptism. Many pilgrims witness to the physical, emotional and spiritual renewal they experience in Lourdes. Another sign of evangelization may be seen in the light and procession with candles symbolizing the light of God burning in the darkness. New Evangelization invites us to bring the light of Christ to the world immersed in darkness. Dolan also points to the conversion of pilgrims taking place in the sacrament of reconciliation. New Evangelization, according
to Dolan, includes also the ministry of love to those in need, to the poor and particularly to the sick coming to Lourdes in search of healing.\textsuperscript{33}

A very interesting example of New Evangelization is provided by Czestochowa shrine. Every year over hundred thousand pilgrims from all regions of Poland make a pilgrimage on foot to the shrine. During the pilgrimage, lasting at least a week, pilgrims make a retreat. Even though most pilgrims are, naturally, believers, many are motivated by curiosity or desire for adventure. However, thanks to pastoral ministry of the shrine, in time they rediscover their relationship with God. Pilgrimages like those offer the possibility of strengthening faith, but also of New Evangelization of those distanced from God.\textsuperscript{34}

The Santiago de Compostela shrine is a special place of New Evangelization. Since its very beginnings, St James shrine has had a tradition of pilgrimage, very often solitary, undertaken as an opportunity for reflection and meditation as well as experiencing the witness of Christian love. According to the pilgrim’s office, the visitors may be divided into three groups on the grounds of their motivation: it may be religious, or both religious and cultural, or only cultural. There has been a noticeable decrease in the number of pilgrims coming for solely religious reasons and an increase in those who come for religious and cultural reasons. These data call for the adjustments in the pastoral care of those coming to Santiago. In the 20th century, there was a clear revival of Confraternities of St James, promoting pilgrimage as well as prayer as a tool for strengthening faith and finding God. These confraternities, present in all the world, together with Friends of the Way of St James, understand their mission as evangelization through brotherhood, solidarity, hospitality to pilgrims, promoting the Christian pilgrimage and the religious and cultural heritage, especially the devotion to St James, the Apostle. It is worth mentioning that their main kind of evangelization during a pilgrimage is the hospitality offered to pilgrims. The shrine of St James engages all dioceses, monasteries and parishes to provide accommodation facilities for the benefit of pilgrims.\textsuperscript{35}

The vital role of shrines in New Evangelization is expressed in sacramental and spiritual dimensions, but also in the dimension of silence and peace, which a tourist or a pilgrim may find in a shrine, and which can facilitate their prayer and the change of heart. A sacred place offers an opportunity to meet people belonging to a variety of cultures or even a variety of religions, which provides a chance for giving witness to Christian faith and brotherly love.\textsuperscript{36}

**Visitors to sacred places: pilgrims or tourists?**

**Pilgrims as the ordinary visitors to shrines**

The term *pilgrimage* is derived from Greek and denotes a strange or outsider to a given town. The Latin term *peregrinus* has a similar meaning, as it describes a person traveling in other countries, of which he is not a citizen. Hence the term *peregrinatio* means being abroad, away from the hometown, far from relatives and neighbors. These Latin terms focus on a journey and being away from a permanent residence. Without conducting a detailed lexical analysis, it can be noticed that the concept refers to elements most characteristic of a pilgrimage: an expedition, being away from
home, movement in space, traveling in foreign places to reach a destination, which is, in case of a Christian pilgrimage, visiting a sacred place.\textsuperscript{37}

Christian pilgrimages reflect the fundamental need of every believer to reach the eternal, heavenly homeland, where there will be no death, pain, crying or toil. Those desires have an impact on the first stage of a pilgrimage, i.e. a decision to leave home and embark on a journey. The journey of the believer will, first of all, abound in religious experiences. Pilgrims start their journey despite psychological insecurity because of their strong desire to solve problems or to heal spiritual and physical wounds. Making this decision, motivated by faith and hope in God, becomes most important during a pilgrim’s journey. Therefore, only those who love God are able to go on such a pilgrimage.\textsuperscript{38} If, however, the reasons are not grounded in Christian faith, the journey gives way rather to a cultural tourism or to religious tourism in a general way.

Summing up, Christian pilgrims are the \textit{ordinary visitors} to shrines as a sacred place which came into being as an answer to their spiritual and liturgical needs. A pilgrim as ‘\textit{homo viator}’ is aware of making an earthly pilgrimage to heavenly destination together with other Christians. The main purpose of visiting a shrine is usually spiritual, namely prayer and participation in liturgical celebrations. For a Christian pilgrim, a sacred place constitutes the space chosen by God to remind people of God’s activity in the history of salvation.

\textbf{Visitors with spiritual longings}

\textit{Religious tourism} is one of the recent forms of tourism. The increase in the number of people and groups who visit a Christian shrine but do not consider themselves pilgrims, is one of the signs of our times. At the same time, they accept to participate there in some forms of worship as a part of their tourist visit of the shrine. This may be the start of a spiritual journey. Spiritual longings might well be among the reasons why tourists travel to Christian shrines. Nowadays spirituality seems to consist not as much in liturgical ceremonies as in reaching the general sense of spirituality in everyday life.\textsuperscript{39}

\textit{Spirituality} as a technical term, nowadays employed by all religions, is derived from Christian theology.\textsuperscript{40} It is frequently understood as seeking self-realization, discovering the path of life, or as transforming the human life. The contemporary idea of spirituality does not always involve searching for God, it may focus on some spiritual reality or supernatural dimension. It may concern religion, but not necessarily. \textit{Spiritual tourism} as such is closely connected with culture, education and nature. Moreover, the most important reasons are famous places and tourist attractions. Spirituality seems to be more than a simple consumer tendency, in fact, it has become a global value.\textsuperscript{41}

Religious tourists include also nonbelievers, who are interested in religious places and events as elements of cultural heritage. The gradual secularization of the society involves the individualization of spiritual life and increases the distance between people and the Church as institution and community. Nevertheless, the decline in religious practices does not necessarily reduce the tourists’ awareness of spiritual roots,
neither does it take away the respect for religion, at least as a vital element of their individual and common identity. In the face of secularization and the process of individualization of religious behaviors, religious tourism may become an expression of individual religiosity. In case of a pilgrimage, its purpose does not include a meeting with the Christian community. In fact, religious tourists frequently visit sacred places only to fulfill their spiritual needs in general. According to Mazza, a contemporary tourist may be described as a traveler without a specified aim. Religious tourists seek the meaning of life in a dispersed way, also regarding their religious formation and participation in events, which does not mean longing for fulfillment. As it has been said above, for religious tourists a shrine is not the actual destination of their journey, but rather a shortstop in a continuous religious quest. Religious tourists are characterized by cultural curiosity and intellectual reflection. They attempt to understand divine reality while looking through the lens of culture, architecture, art and music. Pilgrims seek directly a divine dimension in a sacred place, whereas tourists fluctuate between divine and human elements in their life.

This recent shift towards a non-denominational spirituality is striking: the people today seek to find their own spirituality and their own truth, to find peace and happiness in their own heart, by focusing on themselves. The today’s needs for religious tourism feed on the desire to participate in great events, to find mental and spiritual relaxation or to enter into oneself. Among the contemporary offers of spiritual development, we will find journeys directed at nature and physical activity, counseling, music, creativity or physical and spiritual exercises. Some of these activities are also available in chosen minor shrines, e.g. meditation trips paired with music or counseling i.e. talks with a spiritual life coach or a person of the pastoral care. There is today a noticeably rising interest in silent retreats. The offers of religious holidays should be helpful in finding mental peace and in determining one’s priorities in life.

Visitors with religious longings choose mostly shrines, where it is easier to find a place for contemplation or meditation. Assisi offers individual retreats in silence and solitude. Another type is the Way of St James where – apart from the many pilgrims walking for religious reasons – are those who leave temporarily their job and start their journey – at least for a month – to take stock on their lives and reflect on themselves. These visitors seek some kind of personal transformation.

The task of those responsible for sacred places is, first of all, getting to know the people who arrive there. Visitors who come with spiritual longings or in search of deepening their sometimes non-denominational spirituality, have a map of their journey in their hearts. Hence, creating the conditions to make a silent retreat or providing a space for meditation may be very helpful in receiving those religious tourists in a shrine. Moreover, it can be a chance for evangelization by communicating the Gospel message.

Visitors motivated by cultural curiosity

A cultural tourist is a person who visits the historic sites, architectural monuments, art museums and galleries, he also may attend concerts and plays and is interested in the cultural experiences of a certain place. While sightseeing, cultural tourists aim to
get acquainted with the cultural heritage, and therefore they are also interested in its religious context. This category of tourists also includes nonbelievers interested in the Christian culture. They want to visit religious places and events as elements of their own or of other cultural environments. Therefore, they are interested in the historical beginnings of Christianity, its worship and cultural traditions. In this, the cultural heritage of the Church could cause a change of the Church’s public image. Many people think of the Church solely as an institution, whereas the pastoral care of cultural tourists could promote a more differentiated view of the Church.47

The Church has plenty to offer to religious tourists. The cultural heritage takes its beginnings in the life of faith, in the encounter between people who come from different cultures inspired by the Gospel. Therefore, the Church regards works of art and architecture as means of an authentic dialog between cultures and nations, helpful also for evangelization. The purpose of pastoral care of cultural tourists is to show the religious nature of Christian art and, consequently, presenting the faith in the new light of its cultural background.48

Tourism may contribute to exploring the cultural heritage created by mankind. This effort also includes the Christian faith, which may direct man towards God. Contemplating and experiencing the culture helps people to get in touch with the supernatural realities. The world needs beauty, which is able to express praise, inspire joy and faith in the heart of man.49

Usually, cultural tourists have three aims: to visit, see and experience. Firstly, they want to visit and know the cultural and artworks. This desire expresses their interest to contemplate beauty and to transcend the everyday reality. Seeing the artistic heritage does not only engage the physical eyes by observing the artworks but requires also preparation and a critical maturity. Experiencing art and culture is about inspiring emotions and feelings as well as enriching the own personality.50

Pilgrimage destinations – such as shrines, churches and monasteries – provide a space for sharing values, ideas and practices concerning not only the faith and worship but also culture. Medieval pilgrimage routes, especially to the Shrine of St James in Compostela, made up part of the Christian culture and European civilization.51 It is worth considering that many pilgrimage destinations are also great works of art indeed, encompassing magnificent architecture, painting, sculpture, valuable museums and music compositions.

Of course, shrines emerged because of the veneration of saints, of religious events or of apparitions. However, in the course of centuries, the cultural activity of Popes and lay people, monks, friars and confraternities allowed for creating the artworks as expression of the Christian faith. Therefore, shrines constitute an important reference point for cultural tourists, because they offer them a chance to experience a part of a huge cultural heritage of Christianity.

**Communication of faith to tourists in shrines**

**The potentiality of art and architecture for communicating faith**

In the 20th century, the Catholic Church did not always include artistic language in her pastoral practice. Only during the recent post-conciliar period did the Church
become aware of the great pastoral potentials of Christian art. This affected also the pastoral care of religious tourists.

Similarly, it was only after the Second Vatican Council that the Church initiated a pastoral turn in the dialog between vanguard artists and the Church. With the exception of sacred architecture, the Church did not take great interest in the esthetic experiences of contemporary art. On the other hand, many avant-garde artists were not interested in the religious concerns of the Church. Vatican II intended to renew the relationship and cooperation between the Church and artists by recognizing both the reasonable autonomy of the artist and the necessity for respecting the liturgical and moral requirements for using art inside the church building. During the pontificates of Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI, several official meetings with artists spurred on the dialog undertaken by the post-conciliar Church.

In the 20th century, a main historic obstacle in the dialog between the Church and artists can be found in a kind of humanism, characterized by the absence of God and often by opposition against faith and the Church. However, the Church continued and still continues the dialog with artists, since the authentic artworks always provide possibilities for dialog, because such art can also inspire the religious experience. As John Paul II confirmed, art is by nature a kind of invitation to explore the divine mystery.

In the course of history, Holy Scripture has become an endless source of inspiration both for artists and philosophers, as John Paul II emphasized in his Letter to artists (1999), because the Bible is full of stories describing human joys and sufferings – e.g. the account of the creation and sin, of the Exodus, and then also of the stories about the countless protagonists in the history of salvation, particularly from the Nativity to Resurrection of Christ, from his miracles and teachings to the Apocalypse. Thanks to the artists, the word of the Bible has become present in pictures, music and poetry. Artworks manifest, in a certain way, the mystery of Incarnation, using their own aesthetic language.

A core issue of the tourist industry should be to respect the identity of the Church’s cultural heritage and promote the cultural value of the great artworks, liturgical celebrations and festive traditions in the dialog between civilizations, and not to satisfy themselves with trivial commercial targets. A real threat for cultural tourism is posed by creating a kind of superficial egotism with regard to the cultural heritage. Cultural activity is not the main role of a shrine, certainly, but it is important for fulfilling its missionary tasks for those visitors who are nonbelievers.

The document Towards a pastoral approach to culture (1999) offers numerous guidelines for the renewal and valorization of the cultural and religious heritage within the phenomenon of religious tourism. Thus, the pastoral care of tourism could include the catechesis through Christian art and architecture, which have been for centuries an esthetic expression of faith. Preparing devotional routes within the network of architectural works provides a chance not only for promoting cultural and religious heritage, but also – and first of all – for transmitting the faith to all those sensitive to artistic expression.

In many shrines, visitors have a possibility to take a guided tour listening to explanations about history, art and faith. The Church recognizes the need for spiritual
and cultural formation for tourists visiting religious sites. She creates websites and publishes tourist guidebooks or specialist journals on the cultural heritage. Thus, the Sanctuary of Saint Pio of Pietrelcina in San Giovanni Rotondo offers pilgrims the possibility of guided tours after a welcoming liturgy. According to information on the shrine website, a guided tour completes the experience of a pilgrimage to places connected with St Pio of Pietrelcina. The shrine offers guided tours in several languages, i.e. in Italian, English, French, German, Spanish and Polish.

The phenomenon of mass tourism includes a growing interest in the cultural heritage of the Church. The Conference of Italian Bishops in its document *I beni culturali della Chiesa in Italia* states:

The phenomenon of mass tourism, the expression of civilization of free time, is often characterized by seeking new experiences and by a desire of cultural developments, especially in rediscovering the historic and artistic heritage. In this respect, the phenomenon directly concerns our churches, monasteries and cultural goods of the Church in general. It requires, however, generous and rational hospitality, together with careful preserving and conserving cultural goods, so that they could serve the Christian community, to which they belong.

Such conservation of the cultural heritage and also the pastoral hospitality could be supplemented by the communication of the faith. Several scholars point to the mystagogical meaning of entering the church or shrine. The architectural beauty can help proceed from the profanum to the sacrum and so contemplate divine realities. This is possible if the sacred space, despite being a part of the material world, focuses on the divine.

On the website of the Shrine of Fatima, the communication of faith through culture takes a very important place, just beside the Christian formation. First of all, the new Basilica of the Holy Trinity in Fatima presents the effort to improve the pastoral use of art by communicating the Christian faith. The iconography of the works of art, created especially for this church, is also in the service of evangelization. The sculpture in the portico depicts the apparition of the angel and invites us to enter the church. Distinctive panels illustrate the twenty mysteries of the Rosary with biblical quotations in 26 languages. It is worth noticing that the Basilica of the Holy Trinity was designed to serve the liturgy, whereas the chapels of the Blessed Sacrament and of the sacrament of reconciliation are located outside the Basilica to allow people to pray and confess in silence. Worth mentioning is also a large plate with the Fatima message, made of terracotta and gold, and placed in the Basilica of the Holy Trinity. Visitors may discover the spiritual charisma of the shrine through art at the very entrance. The artist, P. Marko Ivan Rupnik, was inspired by the 22nd chapter of the Apocalypse. The Shrine of Fatima has its own Museum of the Shrine and offers also temporary exhibitions, where it strives to transmit the Fatima message by means of aesthetic language. The temporary exhibitions present the Fatima story and Marian apparitions through the works of contemporary art created by Portuguese artists.

The Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe offers all pilgrims the Museum of the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which contains devotional objects and objects of sacred art, sculptures, prints, and numerous paintings by Mexican artists: Matías de Arteaga y Alfaro, Cristóbal de Villalpando, Nicolás Rodríguez Juárez, José de Ibarra,
Miguel Cabrera, Sebastián López de Arteaga, Baltasar de Echave Ibía, José de Alcibar, Juan Correa and Juan Cordero. The museum has a collection of at least four thousand cultural objects, which enable pilgrims to follow the history of the shrine as well as deepen their faith.65

In Assisi, the promotion of culture is noticed in the existence of the Treasury, which not only enables pilgrims to see the cultural heritage but is also very well described on the shrine website.66 Visitors may see the examples of sacred gilding art, missals, breviaries and liturgical paraments.

The promotion of culture plays a vital role also in the Shrine of Loreto. There is a bookmark on the shrine website dedicated to art and history.67 A virtual pilgrim may pay an online visit not only to the Holy House but also to the whole shrine, both inside and outside, the Treasury, the Library and the Historic Archives. The descriptions of buildings and architectural heritage let visitors know the history and meaning of the shrine. They also transmit the faith through cultural treasures.

Another example of cultural promotion in a shrine can be found in Washington and its Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. Pilgrims may participate in liturgical celebrations and view the shrine to the sounds of sacred music. The shrine offered a series of CDs with sacred music, for example with organ and choir concerts. One can buy the recordings of the music performed in the basilica and discover the history of organs and music heritage of the basilica on the shrine website.68

Santiago de Compostela is a place where the promotion of culture goes hand in hand with transmitting the Christian faith. The shrine website clearly gives priority to art and culture.69 Besides the details of the Shrine Museum, pilgrims will find the information on cultural activity and descriptions of the works of art present in the shrine. Similar to Washington, the sacred music plays an important role in transmitting the faith through culture. The website presents the history of musical tradition of the St James Cathedral, one can also listen to fragments of pieces of music performed in the Cathedral.

**Shrines as a place of encounter and dialog**

In his *Message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace* in 2001, Pope John Paul II pointed out that the dialog between cultures ‘is the obligatory path to the building of a reconciled world, a world able to look with serenity to its own future’.70 Hospitality is a common feature in shrines. Church documents consider hospitality an example of a merciful solidarity. This attitude is based on a Christian conviction that every person is a gift from God. Tourists are not tools for making money, the precedence must be given to a person as such. The level of hospitality in a shrine reflects the Christian values practiced in everyday life, i.e. generosity, gratitude and respect.71

A good example of receiving pilgrims is provided by the Shrine of Saint Pio of Pietrelcina in San Giovanni Rotondo. Friars Minor organize welcoming liturgies in the Church of Our Lady of Grace for all groups registered in the pilgrims’ office. Friars Minor Capuchin plan for welcoming liturgies at a time convenient for particular groups to help them enter the spiritual dimension of a pilgrimage.72
Hospitality is also expressed in providing space for congresses, conferences, meetings, exhibitions or concerts. Therefore, preparation of facilities for various groups, e.g. pilgrims’ hostels, retreat centers or inside chapels is very important. In Loreto, Fatima and Lourdes, guests have conference halls at their disposal. Shrines include in their schedules congresses, conferences, and other activities intended not only for pilgrims but also for academic and scientific communities.

The shrine’s community dimension is seen in making the buildings accessible for disabled people. Only some shrines provide this kind of information on the websites. A good example is to be found in the Shrine of Lourdes, perhaps because the charisma of the Shrine concerns the sick and disabled. Also, the website of the Papal Basilica of St Francis and the Franciscan Friary in Assisi offers directions for disabled pilgrims, where they can learn how to get to places in various churches of the Shrine. The website also gives information on lifts and ramps for people on wheelchairs.

The most popular prayer request in the history of mankind has been for healing. The common thing in many cultures and religions is that the people seek help from their deity mainly in case of illness or disability. The Fathers of the Church and many theologians forcefully agree that prayer itself is sufficient to obtain grace. However, people of all times have considered prayer in sacred places and being close to holy relics as the most efficient. Nowadays, after discoveries in the field of psychology, we may add that being ill is a very complex process, so pilgrimages undertaken with a specific intention might be, even today, interpreted in a broader context, as seeking healing by putting one’s hope in God. The Church addresses this need by founding hospitals, hospices and nursing homes near the shrines. A good example is provided by San Giovanni Rotondo, where the hospital and research center, House for the Relief of the Suffering, together with John Paul II Clinic was erected next to the shrine.

The Shrine of St James in Compostela stands as a good example of ecumenical function and as the meeting place of cultures. Pilgrims arriving on foot from various cultural communities bring their own music, art, philosophy and also cuisine. The shrine has become a place of cultural intersection, where people meet and share their religious, cultural and social values.

The example of the community dimension can also be seen in the Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa. There is a broad offer of various counseling services there, including marriage and family, addiction (to alcohol, drugs, etc.) or emotional and psychological issues. In consultation points, pilgrims can get professional assistance from psychologists, doctors, solicitors and priests. Another initiative of the shrine is a helpline for people in difficult situations, struggling with various problems. Every evening there are lay people and priests who wait for calls from those in need.

Communication of faith by means of internet and social media

The communication office at a shrine is necessary for an effective passing on information to pilgrims and visitors, but also to those visiting sacred places incidentally, giving them a chance to rediscover their faith. Pope John Paul II said that the world of communications is a New Areopagus of evangelization. Hence, fulfilling the
spiritual desires of pilgrims and visitors is no longer the only task of those responsible for shrines, but rather to provide adequate information on the shrine activities. This can be a challenge. In fact, the new media are not only mediators between shrines and their audiences, but the media themselves are interested in the shrines being visited usually by large numbers of people.\(^7\)

The communication of faith by means of new media poses a real challenge for the 21st century Church. Garrido González claims that every visitor today is, on the one hand, the source of information and, on the other hand, its recipient. To present the shrine adequately, one must, first of all, know its own identity, i.e. the charisma of the sacred place. As we have said before, every shrine has its own characteristics and speaking in theological terms, its own spiritual charisma. Therefore, media communication depends on the shrine’s identity and on the visitors’ desires.\(^7\)

We have also said before that people coming to shrines are varied and include pilgrims, religious tourists and cultural tourists. The difference lies in their motivation. The presence of visitors with mixed interests in sacred places leads to new forms of exchange and interaction between shrine rectors and visitors. New technologies open up new opportunities to do it in a way both individualized and flexible, adjusted to information needs of every visitor.\(^8\)

For many years the printing press was the sole tool of communication with visitors and friends of shrines. For example, Lourdes Magazine, which no longer appears in paper form, was a monthly published in five languages. It provided information about the shrine and offered Christian formation in the spirit of Lourdes’ revelations. Moreover, it was a way of promoting the pilgrimages to the Shrine of Lourdes.\(^8\)

Christian hospitality is not limited merely to pilgrims, but is extended also to journalists, who arrive at the shrine to seek information. The shrine’s communication office deals with answering journalists’ questions, accompanying them at the shrine, assisting in taking photos or footage, and ensuring they keep the rules of the shrine, such as respect for the elderly, respect for sacred places and the limitations of access. A good welcome to journalists also requires an access to information, which means invitations to events, and preparing accessible and understandable materials on the religious activities of the shrine. In the case of the Shrine of Lourdes, the communication office has also a task of archiving information of events held in the shrine in order to fulfill requests for their repetition.\(^8\)

At present, one of the forms of proclaiming faith is the use of online tools. For this reason, the websites of the shrines are also a place of communication of faith. Its accessibility in different languages is a decisive factor. The website of the Shrine of Fatima is available in seven languages and, consequently, it is accessible for almost everybody. Another good example is provided by the website of the Shrine of Czestochowa. It is available in seven languages, including Hungarian, which is very helpful as there are many pilgrims coming from that country. Other shrines mostly have websites in two languages – English and the native language.

The shrine websites abound in information on sacramental and spiritual ministry offered in the shrine, there is plenty of news and invitations to religious events. The website visitors may get acquainted with the history of the sacred place and the main message of the shrine. Besides, there is practical information on receiving pilgrims.
The websites of the Shrine of Fatima, Our Lady of Guadalupe and Jasna Gora in Czestochowa provide live broadcasts of events held in the shrine churches.

The economic aspect of shrines is also important. Therefore the websites inform how to make donations. On the websites of the Shrine of Lourdes, of the Immaculate Conception in Washington and of the Holy House in Loreto, one can make an online donation. This option seems to be an answer for those who—being accustomed with the internet banking—desire to make a prompt donation after their visit to the shrine.

Since the mission of the Church is to evangelize the entire world, the shrine websites provide links to social networking services. Today many people virtually live in social media, hence the shrines attempt to answer the needs of a new communication world by conducting the New Evangelization in social networking services. Many religious sites have their Facebook accounts, whose content depends on the character of the place, whereas the number of followers depends on the level of piety and the area. Apart from Loreto and San Giovanni Rotondo, all the other important shrines have at least several channels in social media, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. The analysis of the website of the Lourdes Shrine shows that it is well present in the Net, as it has also an Instagram account. The Facebook account is used by the Shrine of Lourdes mainly for evangelization by images and short films about the shrine. This channel also presents the interior of the shrine, thus making the shrine available for ‘online pilgrims’. Twitter serves Lourdes mainly for inviting people to events organized in the shrine and for publishing announcements. Even though Instagram is a relatively new channel, it has hundreds of followers and contains very expressive images of the shrine. Finally, the YouTube channel serves for broadcasting prayers from the shrine’s churches.

In the Shrine of Fatima the Facebook account supports formation by providing reflections on the word of God, gives information about Church activities and presents pilgrims’ testimonies. Twitter is used for publishing condensed versions of Facebook messages in order to reach other recipients.

The Shrine of Santiago de Compostela also has two channels, Facebook and Twitter, where it publishes information about the shrine, announces the upcoming events, but first of all, serves to share the content of faith with others. In Assisi, the Facebook account serves for presenting history as well as cultural and religious heritage of the Franciscan Order. The Twitter account spreads current announcements. Perhaps this is the reason why the Assisi account on Facebook has considerably fewer reactions to their posts than Lourdes and Fatima. It is worth noting that every Facebook post of Lourdes and Fatima Shrines has virtually more than a thousand reactions of followers.

A special way of conveying faith is shown in blogs concerning the pilgrimage of Santiago de Compostela. Most of them are started spontaneously by pilgrims who have either walked the way already or are currently preparing to do so. The majority of blogs do not concern faith, but there are many testimonies that encourage others to get on the way which leads not only to Santiago de Compostela but also to the Christian faith.

Finally, only the Shrine of Lourdes offers an official application of the shrine to be downloaded from the Internet. The application is available for devices with iOS and
Android systems. It offers users updated information about the shrine and a chance to follow the events in the grotto on TV Lourdes. You can also leave a prayer request, make an online donation, see the photos and films of the shrine, and share your own experience as a pilgrim or tourist.

**Variety of pastoral and new media experiences at shrines**

Religious tourism is a fairly recent phenomenon in modern history. Instead, pilgrimages to sanctuaries are a centuries-old tradition present almost from the beginning of Christianity. They serve to practice popular piety and to carry out Christian faith formation in the Church. In general, the holy sites have become today the meeting place of pilgrims and tourists—two types of visitors which include sometimes both believers and nonbelievers.

This article has analyzed a great variety of pastoral and new media experiences in communicating the faith at international shrines to tourists. Shrines are special places of contact between God and man. Mostly believers meet there, but also those who are in spiritual quest, even if far from Christian faith. For this reason, the Church offers in sanctuaries different kinds of faith communication through hospitality, art, architecture, music and works of charity. Currently, the Internet with its websites and social media channels is even increasing the communicative opportunities to bring the manifold identity of sacred places closer to tourists.

Further research on religious tourism in sanctuaries would be helpful to understand better the recent trends on these sites. Above all is the question of a permanent formation for the responsible persons at the shrines: clergy, religious, lay people. Moreover, research on how the artistic and cultural heritage is used in pastoral care in Christian sanctuaries is urgent.

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2. Ibid.
3. Agarwal, Busby, and Huang (2018)
4. Pope Francis (2013, no. 14)
5. Code of Canon Law (CIC) (1983, can. 1205–1234)
6. Mazza (1992, 31)
7. Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (1999, no. 4)
8. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (2001, no. 263)
9. Pope Francis (2017, no. 3)
10. Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (1999, no. 6)
11. Pope John Paul II (1999a)
12. Giuriati and Masferrer (1999, 26–27)
13. Lavarini (1997, 573–618)
14. Cristino (2001, 194)
15. Pach (2001, 181)
16. Mazza (2007, 95)
17. Rodriguez (2001, 52–53)
18. Mazza (2007, 98)
19. Mazza (2007, 102)
20. National Conference of Catholic Bishops (1992, 119)
21. Pope John Paul (2000b, no. 5)
22. Congregation for the Clergy (2011)
23. Pope Francis (2016)
24. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (2001, no. 271)
25. Lanci (1990, 103)
26. Ostrowski (2003, 58–60)
27. Pope Francis (2013, no. 14)
28. O’Callaghan (2001, 138–140)
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33. Dolan (2013)
34. Pach (2001, 183–184)
35. Rodriguez (2001, 71)
36. O’Callaghan (2001, 145–146)
37. Lavarini (1997, 29–30)
38. Italian Bishops’ Conference (1998, nos. 15–16)
39. Jankowski (2012, 50–51)
40. Bacik (2003, 771–781)
41. Herntrei and Pechlaner (2011, 202–204)
42. Norman (2011, 118–119)
43. Mazza (2007, 75–77)
44. Norman (2011, 112–113)
45. Norman (2011, 52–59)
46. Hall (2006, 72)
47. Jankowski (2012, 55)
48. Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (2011)
49. Estivill (2012, 102–103); Vatican Council (1965b)
50. Mazza (2007, 116–117)
51. Roseman (2004, 75)
52. Bühren (2008, 401–449 and 542–601)
53. Bühren (2014a, 2014b)
54. Pope John Paul II (1999b, no. 10)
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