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# Contemporary Trends in the Theological Understanding of Christian Pilgrimage

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This paper analyses the historical changes that have taken place in the Christian theology of pilgrimage from Patristics to the present time. Against that background, it identifies the core parameters of the theological debate on pilgrimage, including its foundation in the truths of the faith and its key dimensions. In view of attempts to reduce the essence of pilgrimage to phenomenological descriptions in contemporary analyses, the author proposes to take advantage of the explicatory potential of hylomorphism as a theory that differentiates between matter and form. When applied to pilgrimage, hylomorphism makes it possible to integrate theological perspectives with the sciences that describe the anthropological experience. The paper concludes with an attempt to create a map of the contemporary theology of pilgrimage, including a proposed thematic taxonomy.

**Key Words:** history of pilgrimage, Camino de Santiago, incarnation, soteriology, religious tourism

## Introduction

The concept of pilgrimage has undergone a long evolution from general to specific religious meaning, a process which has recently resulted in significant semantic inflation. Today, the term is no longer unambiguous: there are pilgrimages to musicians' birthplaces and graves (e.g. Bach's home) and to football stadiums (e.g. Camp Nou) as well as 'atheist pilgrimages' and 'heritage pilgrimages' (The Times, 2020). On the one hand, this comes as no surprise, since every historical period has faced its own challenges with regard to identifying the true pilgrim and asked questions *de vera peregrinatione*, the reasons often being quite mundane rather than theological or spiritual: making sure that the visitor was not a spy, verifying whether or not they were exempt from taxes, etc. On the other hand, many have prophesied the end of the pilgrimage movement (Berger, 1967; Luckmann, 1963), and yet providence – in its wisdom and sense of humour – has allowed them to witness the movement's rebirth. Others, such as Bauman (1996), have claimed that it is not pilgrimage but the pilgrim that has disappeared, that the species is now extinct (or at least needs to be protected) and has been replaced by strollers, vagabonds and players. In other words, it has been argued that people are no longer headed for a destination – which is the essence of pilgrimage – but take short walks instead.

At the same time, it needs to be noted that the term 'pilgrimage' has historically encompassed many cultures and religions and revealed anthropological truths; it has been a 'common denominator' that provides a fixed point of reference even as the numerator changes. Therefore, the word 'pilgrim' has both a broader meaning and a narrower meaning. Originally describing a person who was not a Roman citizen, a passer-by, the term has evolved to reflect one's freedom and ability to bear witness (to those who live on the Camino). A person going shopping cannot bear the same witness as a person walking to Santiago, presumably on account of the transcendent goal (Barrio, 2013).

In this paper, I would like to analyse the contemporary approaches to the understanding of pilgrimage in order to discern the theological essence of this phenomenon and reflect on what theology of pilgrimage is needed to describe the Camino in all its richness.

## *Pilgrim, Where Are You? A Few Words about the Value of Being on the Way'*

Against the multitude of sociological and historical descriptions, there is relatively little 'theological' reflection that goes beyond what people think about their Camino experiences. Why does it make sense – from the perspective of the Christian faith – to make a journey to

a holy place? The *pro iter agentibus* masses in mediaeval liturgies (Janini, 1987; Roszak, 2010) can shed much light on this issue. These masses emphasised the truth about God as the One who looks after the person who embarks on the journey and ensures that the purpose of the journey transforms into a spiritual benefit, bringing that person closer to salvation – for example by revealing that one may not predict many things on one's own. Thus, what a person discovers on the way to a holy place with the intention of meeting God, strengthening the relationship and growing in piety is the experience of being guided by God (hence the invocation for help from angels).

As demonstrated above, the current trend is to convey the meaning of pilgrimage in a completely different way, describing phenomenological manifestations or motivations rather than asking about the core issues. Today, any attempt to discover the theological dimension is faced with certain cultural difficulties. On the one hand, authors describe a variety of material phenomena (such as the hardship of the journey) for which ample source material can be found in diaries, blogs or accounts – all containing factual information. On the other hand, this approach lacks a formal aspect that would provide the right key to the interpretation of any given phenomenon. Finding that key is not easy, especially in a time when little is being said about true motivations. For example, the film *The Way* clearly shows that while all the characters walking the Camino give various reasons (such as losing weight, quitting smoking, etc.), they are in fact not telling the truth and instead hiding their motivations; in other words, their true motivations are in fact broader. It comes as no surprise, then, that discussions of the 'Camino effect' often omit the most in-depth descriptions and instead focus on superficial aspects. This can be compared to describing a painting and talking for hours about the technicalities of paint or canvas without ever referring to what the painting actually depicts.

Before I outline the theology of pilgrimage and the 'theological' reasons that have shaped the pilgrimage movement associated with the tomb of the apostle, I would like to offer a brief summary of contemporary divisions based on sociological descriptions, and then explain the essence of pilgrimage in the following sections. This is consistent with the Thomistic tradition: when Aquinas wanted to present some truth, he always

began with arguments which were *contra* to his thesis, explaining the situation in question.

Today, the word 'pilgrim' is considered to encompass many types of individuals who combine the traits of a tourist and a pilgrim, which is why there is a general impression that the predominant type is the *tourigrino*, a hybrid of the two. In fact, there has been a long-standing debate regarding the difference between a tourist and a pilgrim. Bauman, as noted above, pronounced the end of an era in which pilgrims had clear goals and undertook their journeys for religious reasons, building their identities step by step (as in a drawing made by joining dots, a popular game among Polish children in the 1980s). A modern wayfarer makes his or her journey in stages, but these stages – according to Baumann – no longer lead to a specific destination; the wayfarer roams around the world, 'strolling' at most, and thus wanders without a purpose among beautiful sights (Bauman, 1996).

Some equate pilgrimage with an anthropological quest for one's own self, thus attempting a 'secular' appropriation of the idea of pilgrimage without ever mentioning God or Saint James and instead focusing on the journey itself and on the pilgrim's experiences. In that sense, a secular pilgrim is a narcissistic type who is convinced that the pilgrimage is all about him or her. This approach can be broken down into a number of specific attitudes which emphasise, for example, various forms of therapy based on the escapist mechanism that many associate with the Camino: an escape from everyday life, problems, etc. (Plichta, 2017; Seryczyńska, 2019). In this secular theology, the pilgrim is self-centred and undertakes the journey for his or her own benefit. And while it is true that pilgrimage has a therapeutic effect (after all, grace is based on nature, so it comes as no surprise that nature reaps many benefits from the presence of grace!), it has to be noted that for a secular pilgrim, this is the main goal rather than a side effect.

While the contemporary research literature mentions many possible typologies of the 21st-century pilgrim, two proposals made in the last decade are worth highlighting as shown in Table 1.

Is the secular theology of pilgrimage the 'only one', however? Should we not take a cue from the question

Table 1: Sample Typologies of 21st Century pilgrims

Gamper and Reuter (2012)	Kurrat (2019)
'Tourigrino'	Balance pilgrim
'Sportpilger'	Crisis pilgrim
'Spasspilger'	Time-out pilgrim
'Traditionell religiöse Pilger'	Transitional pilgrim
'Postpilger'	New start pilgrim

that God asked in Paradise, 'Adam, where are you?' (Genesis 3:9), and ask: 'Pilgrim, where are you?' In view of the above, I would like to offer a brief summary of the changes that have taken place over the centuries in order to convey the essence of pilgrimage and the key theological elements that describe a pilgrim. Then, I would like to propose a contemporary theology of pilgrimage that is needed to interpret the phenomena being described in this paper – from *tourigrino* to escapism.

### Theologies of Pilgrimage: A Historical Perspective

It is important to note that for many centuries, the criterion for identifying a pilgrim in Santiago has been the expression *pietatis causae*, which in a sense defines the original theology of pilgrimage — that is pilgrimage on account of piety. The Latin word *pietas* denotes one of the virtues associated with justice, similar in sense to religiousness, which consists of worshipping the One to whom we owe our existence. Hence, in aretalogies<sup>1</sup>, it was typically used to describe respect for God and parents, although the word *devotio* was often used in reference to God as well. For Saint Thomas, piety is a relational virtue which – like the virtue of religiousness – describes the *ordo ad Deum* that directs everything in a person's life towards God (Roszak & Gutowski, 2021). Any activity can be performed in a pious manner as long as such performance is not limited to the activity itself and opens the person to something or someone else, thus gaining a supernatural meaning. In other words, it is not important what a person does; what matters is how the person does it and whether the action guides that person towards the ultimate goal. In my view, in order to understand the Compostelan notion of *pietatis causae*, it is necessary to draw from the Thomistic tradition,

1 An aretalogy is a form of sacred biography where a deity's attributes are listed, in the form of poem or text

which is far removed from the Jansenist sentimentalism and the contemporary tendency to associate piety with 'feeling'. Piety is a lifestyle: those making the journey to Compostela in the Middle Ages were driven by that connection, and it was of secondary importance whether they walked or sailed and whether they slept in one place or another. This is a slightly different kind of piety, but it shares a great deal with the quest for the sacred – the essence of pilgrimage – in the reality known as post-truth.

From this perspective, it is worth offering a brief summary of the history of theology of pilgrimage in terms of what theological aspects have been emphasised over the centuries and how the value of pilgrimage to holy places has been justified on theological grounds. In addition, it is worth identifying, or rather outlining, some of the most important characteristics.

In the early centuries of Christianity, that is in the **Patristic period**<sup>2</sup>, descriptions of pilgrimages emphasised the sacredness of the destinations, hence the focus was on visiting tombs of martyrs or reaching the Holy Land as a way of coming into direct contact with traces of the Saviour or the saints. This veneration (Latin *veneratio*) of the saints as victors and intercessors was built upon the 'remembrance' of their lives and achievements. The Church Fathers encouraged such veneration of holy figures and the quest for their intercession. In Eastern Christianity, the key was the saint's icon, and in Western Christianity – the saint's tomb. Thus, for Patristic theology, the central concept was a connection with the Church of the Redeemed in Heaven, and therefore a sense of unity with the martyrs and the realisation that a

2 Patristics or patrology is the study of the early Christian writers - the Church Fathers. This period is generally considered to run from approximately AD 100 to either AD 451 (the Council of Chalcedon) or to the Second Council of Nicaea in 787

Christian is a visitor or passer-by. A pilgrimage – as in the case of Egeria – was not about satisfying one’s curiosity but about strengthening one’s faith in places associated with the Saviour’s life (Walker, 2004). However, there was also a strong Platonist trend to focus attention on spiritual outcomes and, from a Christological point of view, on the ‘ascension of Christ’.

The **mediaeval** theology of pilgrimage put God and the quest to reach Him at the centre of pilgrims’ motivation. Hardship was accepted for the sake of salvation and revealed a communion with the Mystical Body, as evidenced by the desire to visit relics; other benefits included strengthening one’s piety and progressing in faith. As Brown (1981) has noted, Christianity differed from Judaism and Islam in that it permitted the touching of a deceased person’s body, which was unacceptable in the latter two religions. This difference is exemplified by the existence of relics and their circulation across Europe. It is only within the above frame of reference that ideas such as pilgrimage by proxy can be understood: the concept only makes sense when a pilgrimage builds on the communion between the Church of the Redeemed and the pilgrim. While pilgrimage is an expiatory act that amends for sins, such expiation does not occur through external punishment but through spiritual liberation (hence the role of indulgences or the search for miracles). The mediaeval theology of pilgrimage pays attention to external manifestations: from the attire, which is deeply symbolic (or Christological, as can be seen in the sermons intended to encourage prospective pilgrims), to the pilgrim’s testimony towards others. This stems from the anthropological premises of the Aristotelian–Thomistic movement with its belief that the ‘entire human being’ (rather than the soul alone) is present on the pilgrimage. Hence, it is not surprising that the Christological reflection focuses predominantly on the ‘suffering’ Christ and that the mediaeval sermons portray Him as the model pilgrim. Another prominent feature of this pilgrim mentality is the fact that the journey to a shrine was undertaken *ex voto*: under a vow that expressed faith and spiritual progression (Mróz *et al.*, 2022).

The **modern-era** theology of pilgrimage – with its *devotio moderna* – emphasised a different dimension, underlining the inner experience of the pilgrim’s journey. Here, the external circumstances did not matter since

the spiritual aspect was key. There was a perceptible influence of Protestant theology with its belief that the only meaningful pilgrimage was a person’s journey from sin to grace. In fact, it was in this period that the emphasis on the journey taken by Abraham as the father of faith (with his trust and gift of grace) emerged in theology. The resulting interiorisation focused the pilgrim’s attention on the benefits that resulted from the perilous journey. This idealist trend was later reinforced by the Cartesian turn, which strongly juxtaposed spirit and matter, focusing attention on thought as the key anthropological element. Thus, the nineteenth-century Romanticism reformulated the purpose of pilgrimage, stating that it was no longer about reaching a shrine but instead about a person’s journey towards his or her own self (e.g. *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, 1812–1818), about any human activity (Antonio Machado). Upon this template, allegorical works such as J. Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678) or C.S. Lewis’s *Pilgrim’s Regress* (1933) were created – depicting life as a pilgrimage but, at the same time, conveying an orientation towards salvation that can be attained through perseverance and struggle on the pilgrimage of life.

The **post-modern** theology of pilgrimage attempted to restore the importance of physicality and the ‘purpose’ of pilgrimage after the Cartesian turn. Nevertheless, it retained the tendency to put a greater focus on the pilgrim than on God: the core theme of that theology was the outcome of the pilgrim’s journey, and in particular the assistance that the pilgrim obtained in resolving his or her problems or difficulties. In other words, the post-modern pilgrim walked the path in order to find solutions to his or her dilemmas, seeking the strength to do so in the journey itself rather than in reaching the destination (as was the case in the Middle Ages). This stems from the fundamental difference between the pre-modern and modern perspectives; between perception in the context of the whole and in the context of the isolated self. This distinction is consistent with Taylor’s (2012) differentiation between the ‘porous self’ (integrated with the religious meaning) and the ‘buffered self’ (flexible, without requiring integration with the surrounding reality).

Marked by the emergence of **post-secularism**, recent years have seen a slow revival of interest in the ‘purpose’

and a return to a more comprehensive perspective: the religious theme is not an ‘addition’ (i.e., one of many options) but a factor that infuses the entire endeavour with meaning, whether it is accepted by the pilgrim or not (thus creating a hermeneutic horizon in reference to which the pilgrim’s experience can be understood). However, this is not the ‘old’ traditional religiousness but instead a new one, marked by eclecticism. The emphasis has been shifting to processuality as seen from the perspective of the purpose and effects of pilgrimage, to the dynamics of becoming, to orientation towards transcendence and authenticity, and to connection with the mediaeval past that gives rise to meaningful relationships. Another important part of the experience are the ‘gifts’ that the pilgrim receives. This is a search for a common language with the modern culture that would enable the religious meaning to be conveyed in comprehensible terms (Gonzalez & de la Calle, 2020). At the risk of simplification, one could venture to suggest the following breakdown (Table 2) of the main themes of the different theologies of pilgrimage:

Patristic period	Place-centred
Middle Ages	God-centred
Modernity	Self-centred
Post-modernity	Problem-centred
Post-Secularism	Process-centred

The configuration of each of these theologies largely depends on the predominant cultural mentality and philosophical trends. At the core, however, they remain bound to certain essential features present in every kind of pilgrimage in the Christian tradition. These features are discussed in the following sections.

### **Theologies of Pilgrimage: The Fundamentals**

The core components of the different theologies of pilgrimage can be compared to a ‘supporting structure’. A theology of pilgrimage defines what makes pilgrimage valuable from a theological point of view, what justifies it, and what elements it has to contain in order to be classified as such. Often referred to as a ‘journey to a holy place’, pilgrimage appears to focus on the search

of the sacred along the way, although in classical theologies, it involves growing in faith, bearing witness, and building a communion. The biblical format of the theology of pilgrimage, the imitation of Christ who walks as a pilgrim in His earthly life, emphasises the encounter with God (which is the role of the shrine), the act of ‘ascending’ to the holy city only to ‘descend’ to day-to-day responsibilities.

In theological discourse, there are certain key truths that orient the reflection and provide a foundation for specific claims, which is a fundamental methodological difference in comparison to anthropological or ethnological approaches. Still, a theology of pilgrimage integrates such approaches by setting them in a broader context, since anthropological experiences are an important ‘material’ component that gains meaning when the ‘formal’ component appears: the same hardships and experiences are possible during an ordinary journey and a pilgrimage, just like the same piece of wood or stone can be the basis of any sculpture, but it is the form that makes it a statue of Athena. So, what are the components of the Christian understanding of pilgrimage?

#### ***The Biblical Format: [Revelation–Exodus–Incarnation–Redemption]***

Theologies of pilgrimage have traditionally been built in what can be described as a ‘top-down’ manner, that is, inscribed into a biblical paradigm, and have differed from one another in terms of the truths being emphasised (Herescu, 2021). Thus, the incarnational theology was similar to the patristic and modern theologies, and the redemptive theology shared certain features with the mediaeval theology. In addition, all these approaches have recognised the need to refer to salvation history and the eschatological dimension of human fate (Tułodziecki, 2021). They all build upon the truth about God who becomes a man and binds Himself to matter, making it possible for us to experience Him through the mediation of that matter (Ostrowski, 2014). This explains why contact with relics of saints is important: while they possess no magical properties and have no effect in and of themselves, each of them invokes the respective saint’s presence in a certain sign to remind the pilgrim of the communion of saints. ‘Seeing and touching’ and thus strengthening one’s religious identity are the advantages

of pilgrimage cited by the Church Fathers (although there have also been critics of pilgrimage, such as Gregory of Nyssa), in a sense constituting its ‘apologetics’.

In view of the above, the idea of pilgrimage to holy places draws its inspiration from a belief in the importance of a ‘geography of faith’ that characterised certain biblical figures. These figures wanted to be close to Christ, as exemplified for instance by the mothers who brought their children to Christ so that he would lay His hand on them – not from afar, but in direct physical contact (cf. Mark 10:13). A pilgrimage signifies the willingness to ‘prolong’ such physical contact (*barakah*).

According to Tertulian, it was similar with those who wanted to find Jesus, as did Mary and her family, but were prevented from doing so by the crowd (cf. Mark 3:31n). For the early Christians, this was the image and meaning of pilgrimage: to reach Christ by breaking through the cordon of all the things that stood in their way. The biblical sense of pilgrimage, especially in the New Testament, is clearly shifting towards worship ‘in spirit and in truth’ (as in the conversation with the Samaritan woman), putting the encounter with Christ in the centre of the theological meaning of pilgrimage regardless of place. As a consequence, the meaning of a shrine has to be interpreted in terms of the sense of faith possessed by God’s people who experience the closeness of God in specific places (Perszon, 2012).

Pilgrimage is made possible by the fact that God is the One who reveals and lends Himself to humans in a specific place and time. This sense of ‘visitation’ and God’s presence, His tangibility, so to speak, in the events that are taking place manifests itself in the departure from Egypt: God’s name points the way to the discovery of being guided, to the validation of trust. This is the ‘place of God’s name’, materialised but not restricted to a single location. God makes Himself known through the Exodus: He is present in the experience of the departure as an opening event; this is similar to the Eucharist, which concretises God’s presence in a specific place. The experience of the Exodus as the way to freedom translates into the liminality that, through the rite of separation, created the *ordo peregrinorum* (Paczkowski, 2014). Going on a pilgrimage meant setting out on a

journey towards the marginal and the distant, moving ‘beyond’ in search of God; it meant venturing forth in order to strengthen one’s faith.

### *The Matter and Form of Pilgrimage*

Many models of pilgrimage built upon anthropology, ethnography or sociology can be questioned in terms of their theologicality. In other words, what needs to be considered is the extent to which the descriptions provided by these models meet the criteria of a theology of pilgrimage. Such models represent a ‘bottom-up’ approach to building a theology of pilgrimage that first collects experiences and then gives them a theological meaning.

To explain the interrelationships between the different components of pilgrimage, it may be useful to refer to hylomorphism – a theory which establishes the identity of a created being on the basis of the matter and form of which that being is composed. In the context of pilgrimage, the material component is the way that is travelled, including the associated hardship, and the ‘formal’ aspect is the motivation. Only a combination of the two creates the sense of pilgrimage whereby form shapes matter and makes it unified. Therefore, ‘material’ participation in a pilgrimage does not in itself guarantee any outcomes; there is no automatism, which means that a formal approach is needed – as expressed by the pious motivation (*pietatis causa*). This makes pilgrimage a journey of prayer and a theological experience.

The contemporary attempts to establish a theology of pilgrimage (e.g. those made in English-speaking countries) focus on different aspects of the material side:

**Victor and Edith Turner** (1978) point to liminality and *communitas*.

**John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow** (1991) identify three ‘coordinates’ of pilgrimage: person, place, and text.

**Simon Coleman and John Elsner** (1995) focus on the ‘movement’ itself.

**Richard LeSueur** (2018) identifies ten parameters: reverential journey, taking time, sacred geography, inner summons, many others, risk and hardship, physicality, embrace of uncertainty, soulful anticipation, and prayer.

**Dee Dyas** (2021) describes the pilgrim experience as ‘a state of openness to spiritual engagement through place and journey.’

**Peter Margry** describes pilgrimage as ‘a complex of behaviours and rituals in the domain of the sacred and the transcendent, a global phenomenon, in which religion and *a fortiori* religious people often manifest themselves in the most powerful, collective and performative way’ (2018: 14).

**Lawrence Taylor**, perceives pilgrimage through the lens of its outcomes – as a way of maintaining a ‘moral geography’ thanks to which personal and collective goals are reconfigured (2012).

Finally, **Judith King** proposes a relational view of pilgrimage that is linked to the experience of corporeality and, at the same time, open to transcendence and to other human beings through rituals and bodily gestures.<sup>3</sup>

These aspects are relevant to theological reflection but do not exhaust it, since they are a matter that needs form. For inclusivistic theologies, this will be the key issue: to progress from the ‘material’ description of pilgrimage to its ‘formal’ aspects. And regarding the formal aspects that define the walking activity known as pilgrimage, they can be formulated as in Table 3.

<b>Table 3: Formal Aspects that Define Pilgrimage</b>
Faith in God who reveals Himself in the created world
Experience of communion with the Church of the Redeemed
Eschatological dimension of time
Reclamation of freedom – mercy (indulgences)
Motivation – piety
Submission to God during the journey

<sup>3</sup> ‘Contemporary pilgrimage as a personal but relational process involves an intentional setting out on a journey to very particular places, deemed sacred, special or holy; and while there, or on route there, or both, embodying significant physical endurance and participating in a spectrum of non-ordinary, bodily gestures. In such places, this combination of movement and ritual, for many pilgrims, and including explicitly religious ritual for some, alone and with others, facilitates the pilgrim to become more attuned in their bodily selves, more rooted to the ground beneath their feet, yet simultaneously more alive to others and to the firmament of transcendence’ (King, 2021:109).

The problem is that the formal side does not always reveal itself and the pilgrim’s faith is often implicit, covert or vague: it inspires a range of behaviours towards others and acts as a source of motivation but does not itself become apparent. In other cases, it appears in an explicit form, in clear signs. Therefore, the challenge is for the theology of pilgrimage to pave the way from the ‘implicit’ to the ‘explicit’ form.

### *Sacramentality: The Way to the Sacred*

A separate discussion is perhaps needed on the notion of ‘sacrament’ that shapes Christians’ theological imagination and points to a sign that actualises what it denotes. This sign does not exhaust itself in its external description and instead carries a reference to something greater. In some respect, it is about external manifestation, but sacramentality also contributes to a communion between human beings and God and acts as a channel for grace. N.T. Wright (2012) has noted that pilgrimage makes theological sense when it is sacramental, when it is an icon of a more profound reality. What this means is that together with the physical journey, a spiritual journey is also being made – as illustrated in the context of the Camino by the Portico of Glory that opens a different dimension of the journey to the pilgrim.

To underline the importance of material details, the contemporary theologies of pilgrimage invoke sacramentality as a way of reaching what is sacred to humans, a process which takes place thanks to materiality. A human being has no other way of reaching the spiritual than through the material.

Sacramentality involves noticing signs on the pilgrim’s way that act as carriers of memory (Doburzyński, 2021). This has always been the role of relics: while they possess no magical power, they do have the ability to invoke remembrance. In any case, sacramentality gives rise to a dichotomy between the internal and the external, conveying the relationship between the two.

## **A Taxonomy of Contemporary Theologies of Pilgrimage**

What theologies of pilgrimage are being developed today that affect the understanding of the Camino de Santiago? It seems that in the broadest sense, a division into ‘material’



and ‘formal’ theologies can be adopted. The former focus on defining pilgrimage in terms of measurable, external behaviours that can be observed by particular sciences, whereas the latter focus on what distinguishes pilgrimage from the common practice of traveling. Some people define pilgrimage in terms of its external aspects alone, thus reducing it to one of its manifestations. While true, this description is incomplete. Others argue that pilgrimage can be described, for instance, in terms of political science, but to say that pilgrimages have been organised for political reasons would be methodologically incorrect. Still, this is an important material aspect when it comes to understanding the theological essence, since it represents an attempt to find a common denominator for pilgrimage (as in mathematics). What remains key, however, is the discovery of ‘theologicality’ – something that is now generally overlooked in literature. What theological criteria can be used to differentiate the approaches to pilgrimage represented by these descriptions? How do they differ from one another? In the following subsections, I would like to present several divisions that illustrate the scope of the ongoing theological debate.

### ***Soteriological vs Anthropological***

On the one hand, attempts have been made to describe pilgrimage in the context of the salvation to which humans are invited. According to that interpretation, the journey on foot to a holy place (*loca sancta*) points to and anticipates the experience of meeting Christ. The goals of the pilgrimage are not cognitive in character; instead, the importance of the pilgrim’s journey stems from the fact that it makes it possible to anticipate salvation. This category encompasses all theologies of pilgrimage that emphasise transcendence in the pilgrim’s experience as the primary motivation for undertaking the journey and the criterion that distinguishes pilgrimage from tourism. A theology of pilgrimage configured in that manner invokes the transcendent purpose of human life. Here, all aspects of the pilgrimage are subordinated to that purpose, and the outcomes of the journey – including the strengthening of love – are interpreted from that perspective. Such theologies mainly recount salvific events such as the Exodus in order to remind us that pilgrimage is about timeless salvation. From the pilgrim’s perspective, they emphasise the notion of *orationis causae*, that is,

of prayer as the purpose for which one undertakes the journey to a shrine in an attempt to plead for grace.

At the opposite end of the spectrum from the above soteriological theologies of pilgrimage lie the anthropological theologies that put the human being in the centre. In line with the nineteenth-century shift in perception, their main focus is the ‘journey’ rather than the ‘destination’. They define the purpose of pilgrimage from an earthly perspective in terms of the benefits reaped by the person who undertakes the religious challenge. In consequence, they stress the gains that come from participating in pilgrimage and the changes that occur in the pilgrim, including growth of virtue. Such theologies of pilgrimage are oriented towards measurable aspects and, at the same time, focused not so much on the ‘purpose’ (as was the case with the earlier salvation-oriented theologies) as on the ‘journey’ itself.

There have also been attempts to provide a theological description in the spirit of secular thinking, excluding transcendent references and reducing pilgrimage to

*a ritualised sequence of leave-taking from one’s normal life and social network, then during the trip an immersion in an altered state* (Greenia, 2018:7).

Such approaches represent a purely horizontal view that is typically limited to escapist explanations in which pilgrimages play a purely psychological role in which the religious factor is discounted.

### ***Inclusivist vs Exclusivist***

Theologies of pilgrimage also differ in the extent to which they recognise the formal aspects of pilgrimage, that is the degree to which a particular theological interpretation of this phenomenon requires explicit religious manifestations or accepts them in an implicit form.

Inclusivist theologies underline the signs of transcendence that show through the pilgrim’s everyday existence, which – although not named – constitute the religious landscape of pilgrimage. In addition, they look for an ‘anonymous’ pilgrim – to borrow K. Rahner’s famous expression – who accepts the religious background of his or her journey without always being conscious of it. By

walking the Camino de Santiago, taking part in the rituals, praying, listening, and seeing the catecheses inscribed in stone, the pilgrim makes his or her faith more distinct (Mróz, 2017). It seems that this group of pilgrims finds great help in the letters written by Archbishop Barrio, who builds his ministry on the hermeneutic plane (as did Saint Paul on the Areopagus when he went out of his way to explain to the Athenians what they were worshipping as unknown – cf. Acts 17:23). For many pilgrims, the sacred appears to be silent because they do not speak the language. As the days go by, however, they begin to grasp the basics of the alphabet and become capable of fostering their faith in an increasingly distinct manner. A reflection of this process can be found in the Mystic Mill from Vézelay<sup>4</sup>, which transforms the grain of everyday life into the flour of supernaturality.

The next category comprises exclusivist theologies, which – as a starting point – expect an express declaration concerning religious affiliation, observance of religious practices, participation in the liturgy, and conscious experience of pilgrimage; in these theologies, implicit forms are believed to dilute the religious identity. Here, the difference between a pilgrim and a non-pilgrim is clear and based on unambiguous religious gestures or motivations. Contrary to the inclusivist theologies that integrate the cultural heritage, anthropological dimensions and transcendent religious goals, exclusivist theologies separate these dimensions and opt to highlight religious themes.

### *Penitential vs Therapeutical*

Differences can also be observed between theological explications of pilgrimage in terms of how they approach the motivation behind the pilgrim's journey. It seems possible to isolate a group that emphasises the penitential character of pilgrimage in its traditional form – as seen, for instance, in mediaeval pilgrimages undertaken as expiation for one's wrongdoing, where the journey to Santiago was part of a penance imposed by a confessor. At the core of this understanding of pilgrimage as a penitential practice lies the recognition of hardship as an expression of love through which human sins are covered. The purpose of a penitential pilgrimage was to regain the

freedom lost as a result of a transgression, reintegrate into the community and return to a life unburdened by sin. The contemporary forms of this penitential interpretation include pilgrimages undertaken in response to an experience of wrongdoing (e.g. abortion) or in order to take responsibility for one's own transgressions (e.g. in a prison environment). This theology encompasses those attributes of pilgrimage that focus on its therapeutic character, that is, on the benefits which the grace received during the journey brings into pilgrims' lives.

The opposite of this penitential theology of pilgrimage is a transactional theology that focuses on the good that the pilgrim is asking for in exchange for the physical and spiritual hardship involved in the journey undertaken with that intention. Despite the connotations of the term, transactional theology does not involve a 'commercial' exchange (i.e., giving one thing in exchange for another). Instead, it emphasises the power of the acts of kindness being performed – as seen in the sacrifices of the pilgrim's life – to bring forth further graces granted by God who always acts on account of good (which is the idea of 'making amends' from a theological point of view).

### *Transformational*

Associated with the therapeutical approach and yet distinct from it, the next category encompasses theological interpretations of pilgrimage which underline the transformation that occurs in the pilgrim – not so much in the sense of a departure from evil and a healing of the wounds that the evil has caused (therapeutical) as in the sense of a renewal and transformation of one's life. In this context, pilgrimage has been described as a 'journey of intentional transformation' (Terreault & Anderson, 2015): a transformation that expresses itself in the new identity that the pilgrim gains after returning home. The experience of a fresh outlook on life is associated with an encounter with God that enables the pilgrim to experience being a person to the fullest extent, to expand his or her personal life.

The key term in these theological definitions of pilgrimage is spiritual transformation. Some authors, however, tend to reduce this interpretation to what can be described as 'aestheticisation', perceiving all the things associated with a pilgrimage as beautiful and thus failing to notice

<sup>4</sup> A carving on the south aisle of the basilica of Marie Madeleine at Vézelay in Burgundy

any hardship or expiation (Post, 1994:92–93). In that sense, this theology of pilgrimage stands at the opposite end of the spectrum from penitential theology, rejecting any sense of suffering and any possibility of expiation for one's wrongdoing, accepting everything as a purely positive message.

### *Sacramental*

Another type of theology of pilgrimage emphasises the relationship between the material aspects and the spiritual/religious aspects from a sacramental point of view, interpreting the material side of pilgrimage as a sign (Dobrzyński, 2021) or as a door to the sacred (Wright, 2014). This theology draws from Patristic inspirations (adopted from Platonism) that underscore the value of a sign not as something important in itself but as a token that invokes something greater, a source reality. The pilgrim's external experiences conveyed in the anthropological description become integrated with the internal, religious experience of pilgrimage. In that sense, the sacramental theology of pilgrimage rejects the dualist approach and attempts to harmonise all the components of pilgrimage (which makes it a derivative of the inclusivist theology, the difference being the fact that it recognises a clear religious motivation). The sacramentality of pilgrimage emphasised by this approach expresses itself in a number of dimensions: as revelation, since the sacrament as a sign reveals a deeper reality; as transcendence, since it shows the transcendent dimension of human life that cannot be reduced to 'here and now'; and as a vehicle for communion with God and humans, which translates into the definition of the role of the Church as a companion on the way to complete mystagogy. This approach requires a certain amount of sacramental imagination (Godziewa, 2014: 206) in order to see how the finite can mediate the infinite.

### **Conclusions**

It can be argued that in the theologies of pilgrimage discussed above, the main criterion of classification is not the presence of anthropological or soteriological elements as such but rather their interrelation, a certain hierarchisation. Furthermore, a clear predominance of anthropological approaches over soteriological ones can be observed when it comes to theological explanations, which is not surprising if one considers the 'anthropological turn' that took place in the twentieth century. Nevertheless, it is important to notice the shifting balance in the theological community as it searches for a differentiator in relation to the strictly phenomenological description whereby salvation – defined as the ultimate gift of freedom in both dimensions (that is 'from' and 'to') – explains the experience of pilgrimage. In this context, the rapid development of psychological or sociological research demands a theological complement in order to produce a complete view of reality. What would be beneficial is a more in-depth interaction between the two ways of interpreting the phenomenon of pilgrimage.

A possible recipe for such a convergence of classical concepts and new theologies of pilgrimage would be to adopt a hylomorphic approach. This approach would make it possible to understand that while the phenomenological (ethnographical, sociological, psychological, etc.) description constitutes the 'matter', it requires the inclusion of a theological 'form' as well. At the same time, it would underline the fact that the two components form one whole rather than two 'parallel worlds', which means that there is no need to choose one or the other and that these components can in fact be unified. The inclusive and integral character of such a theology seems to offer a promising way forward, making it possible to approach the 'soul' of pilgrimage and articulate the experiences of pilgrims who, in some cases, are materially but not formally present on the pilgrimage.

It appears that this has always been the meaning of the expression that identifies the motivation to make a pilgrimage rather than a trip to Santiago: growing in the kind of piety in which the figure of Saint James plays a key role. For centuries, *pietas* as the virtue that brings structure to earthly life and binds all its manifestations to

the ultimate purpose of human life has been synonymous to the Camino de Santiago: a way of integration rather than division; a way of the profound rather than the superficial; and finally a journey to God without stopping halfway (Frey, 2004). It cannot be an ‘additional, extraordinary pastoral form’, since it does not consist in physically covering the distance from point A to point B and does not end once the pilgrim reaches the shrine; instead, it carries with itself the dynamism of ‘ascending’ and ‘descending’, both of which are very important.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, it is not enough to refer to pilgrimage as a ‘meaningful journey to a sacred place’, since the image must also include the vertical direction of the pilgrim’s efforts.

In the field of theological studies, there is a visible tendency to transform pilgrimage into religious tourism, but there are also opposite trends that aim to sacralise tourist events by describing them in terms previously applied to pilgrimage (Steil, 2017:178). This brings to mind the biblical scene in which Jacob attempts to gain his father Isaac’s blessing by disguising himself in animal hides that imitate his older brother Esau’s skin (cf. Genesis 27). Old as he is, Isaac notices that the voice he hears is Jacob’s but the skin he touches seems to be Esau’s. Arguably, a similar situation can be seen with respect to pilgrimage and tourism.

5 For Turner and Turner (1978), the tripartite processual structure is easily transferred to the study of pilgrimage: 1. separation from what is familiar or common; 2. the liminality of a ‘theophany’ or what he calls a *communitas* experience; and 3. re-immersion into society, changed (Carrasco, 1996; Turner and Turner, 1978; Van Gennep, 1960).

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