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Christianity – Contemporary Christian Pilgrimage and Traditional Management Practices at Sacred Sites

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Introduction

This chapter seeks to explore contemporary pilgrimage experiences, with emphasis on where pilgrimage fits in the life of a contemporary Christian. In so doing, it addresses the changing demands of contemporary pilgrims, as well as the factors that are shaping current pilgrimage patterns. The chapter further discusses how the changing needs and expectations of contemporary pilgrims are altering traditional management practices at sacred sites, and provides examples of innovative management approaches adopted in catering to these needs. It further analyses the implications of such pressures on management at sacred sites and the future of contemporary pilgrimage experiences, and questions where pilgrimage fits in the life of a contemporary Christian, and whether or not traditional pilgrimage practice has really undergone a fundamental change in recent times.

Christian Pilgrimage: A Brief History

Pilgrimages have been performed from time immemorial. The first record of general pilgrimage in the Bible dates as far back as the 4th century before the birth of Christ, when aristocrats and other religious persons, more precisely Jewish males, travelled to the Holy Land of Jerusalem on pilgrimage three times a year, to celebrate Passover and the feasts of Shavu'ot and Sukkot (widely known as pilgrimage festivals – see Deuteronomy 16: 6), as prescribed by their God.

Among the early biblical individuals who left their homes for religious reasons (often called pilgrimages) were Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, his wife, Isaac and Jacob. These characters acknowledged themselves as pilgrims

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on earth as illustrated in the book of Genesis (23: 4) when Abraham recounts 'I am a stranger and sojourner with you' identifying himself as a traveller on pilgrimage. Jacob, speaking to the Pharaoh in Genesis (47: 9), states:

> The days of the years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.

Further reference to pilgrimage occurs in the Book of Psalms (39: 12):

> Hear my prayer and my request, Lord Jehovah, and give heed to my tears and do not be silent, because I am an inhabitant with you and a Pilgrim, like all my fathers.

For Christians, perhaps the clearest demonstrations of pilgrimage are evident in the life of Jesus, as He followed his parents on pilgrimage to Jerusalem:

> Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up for the feast, according to the custom of the feast. When they had fulfilled the days [of the feast], his parents started home, unaware that the boy Jesus had stayed behind in Jerusalem.
>
> (Luke 2: 41–43)

Perhaps pilgrimage is evident when Jesus spent 40 days fasting in the desert: 'Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.' However, some theologians argue that Christian pilgrimage really commenced after the death of Jesus, with the first of such journeys undertaken by an Ethiopian eunuch to Jerusalem where he went to worship, and was confronted by Philip, baptised and conferred with the gift of evangelism (Acts 8: 26–40).

It is in line with the above that we see the foundations of pilgrimage for contemporary Christians. Christian beliefs are deeply embedded in the supernatural, and in keeping with the faith of the believers' predecessors. One such element of belief is the value of embarking on these journeys called pilgrimages where the traveller seeks meaning and a quest for answers to certain concerns, as well as developing their self-identity.

Some scholars are of the opinion that the authentication of Christian sites that marked the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ by Queen (Saint) Helena (mother of Saint Constantine), laid the foundation for the journeys of future Christians. Large numbers of Christians believed in her investigations and visited the churches, which she had built across the landscape (Belhassen *et al.*, 2008, p. 675), treating them as places where Christ had revealed himself in a special way.

In recent times, the number of Christian pilgrimages to the Holy Land and its sacred sites (to include Bethlehem and Nazareth) have seen a remarkable rise, with approximately 700,000 pilgrims making these trips on an annual basis (Collins-Kreiner and Kliot, 2000); and all this, despite our increasingly secularized society. As Jansen puts it:

> In present-day Europe pilgrimage is flourishing, despite trends in secularization and a notable decline in church attendance ... journeys to sacred places for religious

and other purposes have a long, if sometimes marginalised, history, but now such journeys are taking centre stage, attracting new groups and new meanings.

(Jansen, 2015, p. 1)

However, some changes in the traditional practice of pilgrimage are visible among modern pilgrims.

The Changing Nature of Contemporary Christian Pilgrims

Kartal *et al.* (2015) note that a typical faith-based tourist is no longer who they used to be, in terms of their needs, expectations and purchasing behaviour. They have become sophisticated and so are their demands. Among these changing demands is the growing need for entertaining experiences and satisfaction from the spiritual renewal services (Ambrose and Ovesenik, 2011). This is in stark contrast to traditional pilgrimage, which involved leaving behind the pleasures of the earthly world, and instead desiring the supernatural/heaven more than the comforts and enjoyments of this life. None the less, while there is sufficient evidence that pleasure formed an element of early pilgrimage (see commentary on the 15th century Canterbury pilgrimage in Griffin and Raj, 2015), the need for entertainment is identified as taking centre stage during modern pilgrimage journeys. The major shift from traditional forms of pilgrimage ritual to a more sophisticated ritualistic approach, questions the role which pilgrimage plays in the life of contemporary Christians. Concurrently, some scholars claim that in the face of scientific rationality, religion's influence on all aspects of life from personal habits to social institutions is in dramatic decline (Pavicic *et al.*, 2007). Inherent in this overall discussion is the assumption that people have become, or will become 'less religious'.

It is therefore no surprise that Swatos and Christiano (1999) observed people today being in admiration of human achievements, not divine forces, and as such, societies of the future will be constructed around these, not antiquity's notion of the 'sacred'. Such observations reinforce Schnell's argument that a large number of pilgrims are either not explicitly religious at all or only moderately religious. So, why then do they submit to these ancient Christian rituals and what are the longitudinal psychological consequences (Schnell and Pali, 2013, p. 888)? This brings us to the question: what role does pilgrimage play in the life of contemporary Christians, who may be either explicitly religious, or only moderately religious? More importantly, this raises the question as to where pilgrimage fits in the life of contemporary Christians.

It is against this background that current research stresses the importance of what the pilgrims themselves say about their pilgrimage experiences, given that they are the main 'element' in the process (Collins-Kreiner and Kliot, 2000, p. 55). This is important, since recent literature on pilgrimage emphasizes the lack of understanding regarding what these pilgrims are saying about their experiences. The above arguments and observations are testament to the changing nature of the contemporary pilgrim and their pilgrimage experiences, as well as the role pilgrimage plays in the life of the contemporary Christian pilgrim and results in operational challenges for sacred site managers.

Managing the Pilgrim's Experiences at Sacred Sites (From Tradition to Modernity)

The changing nature of the contemporary pilgrim, as well as emerging challenges in the management of contemporary pilgrims' experience, have been highlighted by Collins-Kreiner and Kliot, in their 2000 paper 'Pilgrimage tourism in the Holy Land: the behavioural characteristics of Christian pilgrims', where emphasis was placed on the importance of management awareness for the needs of modern-day pilgrims to Israel. These changing needs and expectations of contemporary Christian pilgrims have significant implications in the management of sacred sites. This is particularly the case when such demands include the need for entertaining experiences, which are often in contrast (and sometimes conflict) with the traditional norms and practices of these sacred places (Shackley, 2001). The original purpose and mission of many such sites was to provide an environment and space conducive to worship, prayer and other forms of activity that provided pilgrims and other religious cohorts with a feeling of closeness to their creator.

Such pressures for 'entertainment', in turn pose operational challenges for sacred site managers, particularly where there is a need to adapt traditional management practices in ways that meet the needs and expectations of these ever-changing Christian pilgrims. A shift is expected from tradition to modernity. There is growing evidence of a need for a shift to a more modernized approach in management at sacred sites that effectively caters to the needs of contemporary pilgrims. This is seen in recent calls for innovative management approaches at sacred sites, exemplified in the promotion of competitive innovative products and services by religious and pilgrimage tourism scholars as espoused at the Bethlehem Declaration on religious tourism that took place on the 15–16 June 2015. Kartal *et al.* (2015) suggest that religion has become a product, witnessing increased competition not just from religions, but from secular leisure activities. Thus, effectively catering for these needs necessitates the introduction of innovative product and service development strategies aimed at fulfilling the contemporary pilgrim's growing desire for entertaining experiences.

Innovative Approaches to the Management of Contemporary Pilgrim Needs and Expectations at Sacred Sites

Innovation has emerged as a recurring theme for the sustainability and competitiveness of the tourism and hospitality industry. For faith-based tourism, the many and ongoing changes within the demographics and purchasing behaviour of the market segment in the past 10–20 years (Wright, 2013), calls for innovative approaches in catering to the changing needs and expectations. Simultaneously, there are demands to maintain the sacred and emotive qualities, and attractiveness of these places. As a result, quite recently, religious and pilgrimage scholars have begun to advocate a shift from traditional to a more modern approach in managing

visitor's experiences at holy places (Bethlehem Declaration, 2015; Wiltshier, 2015). This necessitates that management at sacred sites adapt traditional practices to suit the needs of modern Christian pilgrims, while protecting their core values – and this constitutes one of the most pressing missionary challenges in contemporary holy sites.

Pilgrim trails and routes

In line with recent emphasis on the need to provide sacred site visitors (including modern-day pilgrims) with meaningful and satisfying experiences, administrators are expected to shift from traditional management to a more modern approach. This must consider innovative management strategies and the development of competitive products and services aimed at satisfying the changing demands of the contemporary pilgrim market segment. One innovative approach involves the development of trails (i.e. themed trails in honour of saints, or routes to important/ancient holy sites) which is emerging as a global practice. Some trails (see Table 3.1) are based on well-established ancient pilgrimage routes; however,

Table 3.1. Examples of historical pilgrimage trails (based on ancient routes).

Country	Trail	Description
Ireland	Croagh Patrick Trail	A 61 km trail culminating in the ascent of Croagh Patrick (764 m) which was a pre-Christian site
USA	Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail	A 2092 km route which members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints travelled in the 19th century – now part of the United States National Trails System
Tibet	Mount Kailash	A 52 km trail circumnavigating this mountain which is an important pilgrimage for followers of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Bon
India	Char Dahm Pilgrimage Route	Links pilgrims to India's four sacred sites of Badrinath, Rameswaram, Dwarka and Puri – a pilgrimage trail popular with Hindus
Norway	St Olav's Way	A 1000-year-old, 643 km trail from Oslo to Trondheim
Spain	Camino de Santiago (St James's trail)	This is recognised as a European Cultural Route. This famous Christian pilgrimage trail comprises a range of routes converging on Santiago from multiple starting points in Spain, France, Portugal, Switzerland, Italy and even the UK and Ireland
Italy	Via Francigena	A medieval trail originating in Canterbury, England, and ending in Rome. In recent years, as the 'route' has developed there are linkages to Germany, The Netherlands, Spain and even Jerusalem
International	The Confraternity of Pilgrims to Jerusalem	This is an organisation that encourages and assists individuals who seek to walk or cycle from Canterbury to Jerusalem (and even on to Mecca)

others, while linked to historically important individuals or events, may not have previously existed as identifiable trails, and are developed to serve the modern pilgrim/tourist.

In addition to the international plethora of historic pilgrimage trails (as illustrated briefly in Table 3.1), many of which have been lately revitalized, there is a recent growth of new pilgrimage 'trails' and 'routes' (see an eclectic range of new and old routes recognized by the Council of Europe at www.culture-routes.net). Without entering into a discussion on whether these are being developed as tourism attractions, or as genuine pilgrimage experiences (a debate for another paper), these 'products' seem to be serving a growing public interest in following walking, or driving, trails for pilgrimage or religious tourism motives. Many pilgrimage routes are organized to the highest international standard, with the provision of traditional tourism management tools such as interpretation materials, signage, literature and ancillary facilities including accommodation (see Fig. 3.1).

Fig. 3.1. Selection of 'traditional' pilgrimage trail management tools. (a) Interpretation (Mormon Trail); (b) signage (Via Francigena); (c) brochure (St Olav's Way); (d) accommodation (Camino de Santiago). (From (a) Light, C., 2007; (b) Tørrissen, B.C., 2012; (c) Netpublicator, no date; (d) Bitesizedtravel, 2015.)

In addition to these traditional tools, a range of new technological, digital interpretation and guidance supports are now being utilized to assist in the management and development of holy places.

Technology in the Contemporary Pilgrimage Experience

The use of technological tools in mediating the pilgrim's experience is quickly gaining prominence. Confirmation of this is evident in a burgeoning scholarly investigation into the use of technology in enhancing both the on-site and the off-site experiences of faith-based tourists. Some recent examples include: (i) Marine-Roig (2015) who has evaluated visitors to la Sagrada Famíla using over 1000 online reviews; (ii) Cantoni *et al.* (2012) who have examined the use of online communications during Catholic World Youth Day; and (iii) Prats *et al.* (2015) who have explored the use of social media by religious sites.

Audio guides

A common tool, which has roots in 'pre-digital' technology, is the humble audio guide. Developed to facilitate self-guided visits to important museums, galleries and religious sites, these range from simple audio-only recordings with a linear narrative (Fig. 3.2a), to devices where the visitor can self-select their route by listening to particular tracks (Fig. 3.2b). Many recordings in religious sites include musical content with a variety of professionally written and presented narratives, to establish a more peaceful ambience, and thus assist in the creation of a spiritual environment for reflection and prayer. More recent innovations include the integration of visual technology (Fig. 3.2c), whereby additional archival material, close-ups of particular elements and a variety of viewer-led content is provided. One of the greatest benefits of this technology is the possibility to present information in aural and visual form in a wide variety of languages. This basic form of audio content can also be integrated into modes of transport – the usual example being a city bus tour, but equally these technologies can be bundled with novel approaches such as the Segway tour illustrated in Fig. 3.2d.

Static digital displays

An industry 'standard' in catering for the modern 'pilgrim' is the introduction of static digital interpretation tools at major cathedrals around the world. The growing use of such methods in contemporary pilgrimage experiences is exemplified in an Irish example, whereby €250,000 has recently been invested in technology at Dublin's St Patrick's Cathedral (D'Arcy, 2015). This investment includes the introduction of touch screens and audio-visuals, in addition to a newly developed app that provides a detailed story of the cathedral. This technology has been introduced to bring St Patrick's Cathedral to life, providing interactive insight into 800 years of history and architecture. As evidenced in Fig. 3.3,

Fig. 3.2. Evolution of audio guides. (a) Double CD of St Peter's Basilica; (b) audio 'wand'; (c) multimedia audio guide, St Paul's London; (d) Segway tour of Florence with audio guide. (From (a) Janessmartart, no date; (b) Rouen Tourisme, no date; (c) TessDrive, no date; (d) St Paul's, no date.)

a similar programme of technological innovation has recently been undertaken in Great St Mary's Church in Cambridge, UK.


Fig. 3.3. Technology appealing to all generations at Great St Mary's Church in Cambridge. (From GSM Heritage, no date.)

Apps and location-based technology

Keeping up to date with modern technology is now becoming quite a challenge for managers of religious sites: what digital platform to use, what hardware is required on-site, or does one rely on visitors having downloaded material in advance of visiting (see Fig. 3.4a), or being 'live' online as they walk around a site (see Fig. 3.4b and c)? One of the biggest challenges is receiving objective information, which interrogates the flood of promotional material provided by technological companies. The next wave of such development would appear to be focusing on augmented/virtual reality.

Some sites are now developing data-provision points based on Bluetooth beacons (small, relatively cheap broadcasting units which provide location-specific data to a smartphone via low-energy Bluetooth communication channels); others are providing information via off-line, global positioning system (GPS)-activated software, which has been downloaded before the visitor leaves home; others are providing information via live downloads from open-access wifi networks. The examples, demonstrated in Fig. 3.4, are based on pre-trip downloads, but this technology is set to develop exponentially with more competitive roaming charges for mobile data, in tandem with a booming 'wearable devices' industry. While far from universal, some municipalities, such as Tel
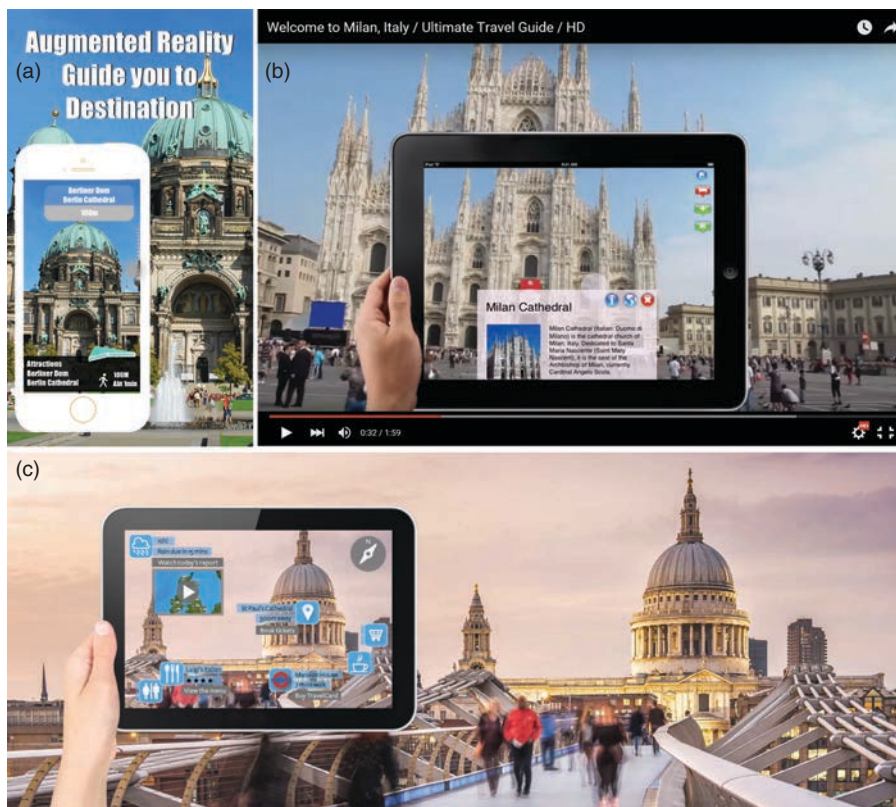
Fig. 3.4. Location-based tools. Downloadable augmented reality guides for (a) Berlin, (b) Milan and (c) London. (From (a) http://media.148apps.com/screenshots/1015419514/us-iphone-2-berlin-travel-guide-and-offline-city-map-beetletrip-augmented-reality-germany-bahn-metro-train-and-walks.jpeg; (b) Screen capture from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kd8ZFStGO48; (c) http://www.createtomorrow.co.uk/en/article/augmented-reality.)

Aviv, Israel (60 'hot spots' introduced in October 2013), have followed the likes of Milwaukee, USA (wifi spots introduced in 2003) in introducing free wifi in public spaces. Many individual sites, hotels, restaurants, etc. provide free, unlimited wifi to all guests. Thus, religious sites, in order to prepare for the pilgrim-visitor of the 21st century, must seriously consider exploring this market. The technological possibilities for visitors entering a site of worship, with suitable digital devices, engaging in tailor-made, visual and aural 'experience' are fascinating. It is posited here that flexibility in terms of content and delivery could mean that linguistically, culturally and religiously heterogeneous groups, following multiple faith paths, could engage in deeply spiritual, individually tailored activities, at the one time, in a suitably managed site. The implications of this for contested sites, which must be managed with the utmost care, is exciting.

Connecting remotely

In addition to on-site facilities, modern technological developments provide a range of engagement opportunities pre- and post-visit. Indeed, the 'pilgrim' may never move beyond their virtual experience. The first manifestation of this is for the 'pilgrim' to look up information on a range of websites, or for a more intimate experience, to watch the chosen site of their faith via webcam. Table 3.2 illustrates just three of the many such sites that exist in the holy cities for the three faiths under consideration in this book.

Table 3.2. Holy city webcams.

Holy city	URL for webcam
Western Wall	http://english.thekotel.org/cameras.asp
Mecca	http://live.gph.gov.sa/
Vatican	http://www.vaticanstate.va/content/vaticanstate/en/monumenti/webcam.html

Virtual pilgrims

A related theme, which illustrates the power of the web in the context of faith practices, is the opportunities which exist online for religious and spiritual engagement. In addition to the multitude of informative and instructional online videos on YouTube and other media-sharing platforms, multi-denominational sites such as www.beliefnet.com/ and www.postaprayer.org/ provide a broad range of religious opportunities for reflection and prayer (see Fig. 3.5a as an example). Islamic-specific websites range from those which provide tuition in the tenets of the faith (www.meaningfulprayer.com/) to apps (such as www.muslimpro.com/) which assist in providing accurate prayer times and a Qibla Locator, to indicate the direction to Mecca for prayer. Jewish Internet users can have an actual bespoke prayer note placed in the Western Wall by logging in to www.aish.com/w/note/ and sending their intentions remotely, or can find their daily prayers online at www.onlinesiddur.com/. At www.sacredspace.ie/ (see Fig. 3.5b), which was founded in 1999, and attracts over 5 million visits on an annual basis, Christians can find prayers and reflections in 23 different languages, which they can follow privately. Alternatively, they can join a global online prayer group such as http://www.prayerchainonline.net. This use of online technologies extends to an astonishing range of religion-delimited activity such as Catholic sites for lighting a candle (www.catholic.org/prayers/candle/), Jewish sites for finding a partner (http://www.jewishsoulsearch.com/) or Islamic sites for entertaining children (www.islamicplayground.com/).

Virtual retail

A further aspect of modernization and 'virtuality' are the attempts made by religious sites to raise much-needed funds via online shops. While many churches,
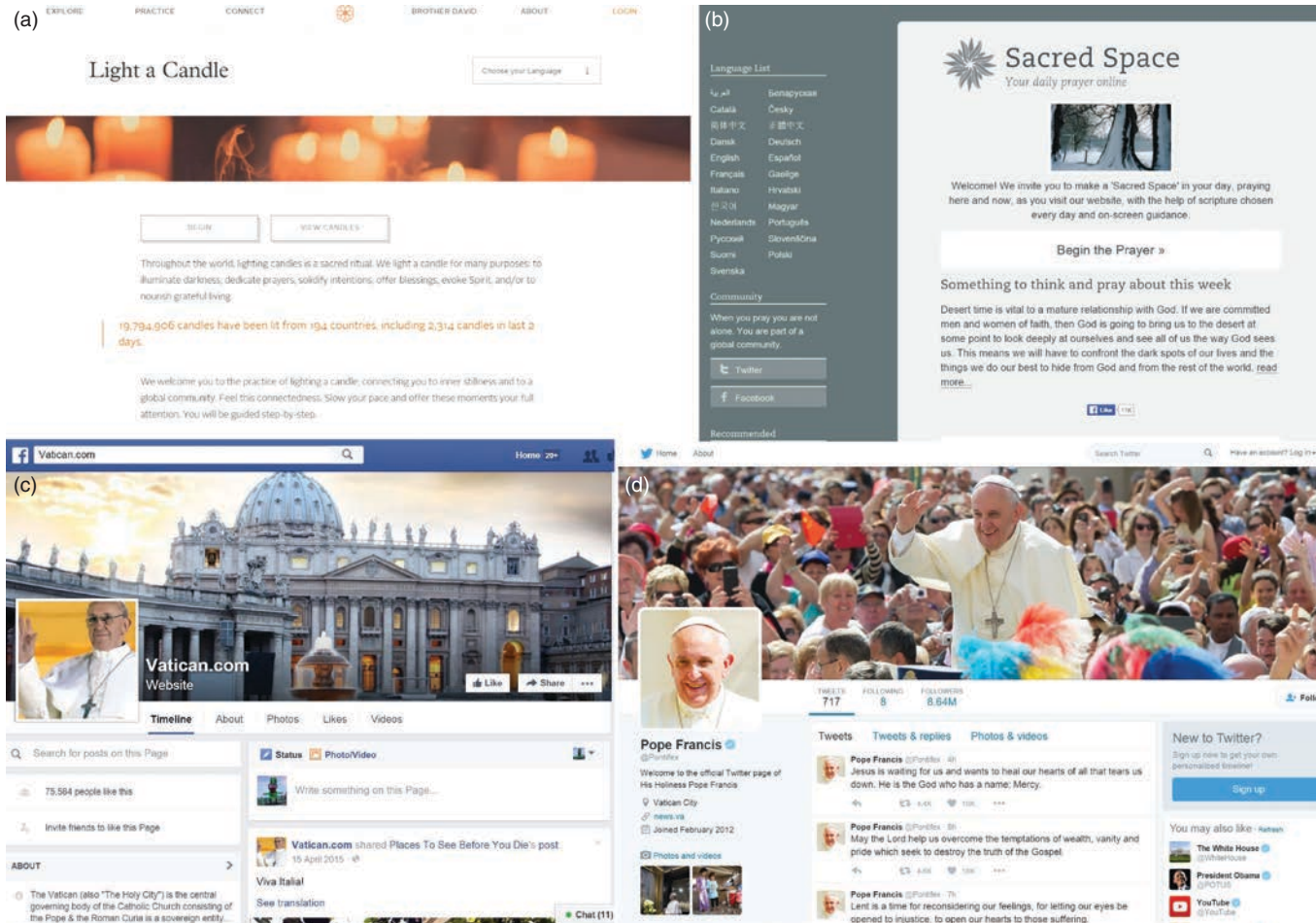
Fig. 3.5. Virtual pilgrimage. (a) Gratefulness.org – light a candle page; (b) Sacred Space, prayer site; (c) Vatican Facebook page; (d) the Pope's Twitter account. (From (a) Gratefulness.org, no date; (b) Sacred Space, no date; (c) Facebook, no date; (d) Twitter, no date.)

cathedrals, monasteries and religious sites have traditionally depended on income from 'entry fees', donations and retail to maintain their properties, many are now moving 'online' with their retail offering (for an interesting paper on the production and resultant online sale of produce by monasteries and convents in Hungary, read Clarke and Raffay, 2015). The symbolic meaning of gifting and receiving these commercial objects, which are imbued with divine presence, is reasonably well understood, but purchasing traditional items virtually, without visiting the site is little understood (see Doney, 2013 for a discussion which deals with this). However, it is suggested here that this remote purchasing is in fact a modern means of engaging in an important pilgrimage practice.

WEB 2.0-sharing

The diverse technological applications outlined above (and many other media platforms beyond the scope of this chapter) are based primarily on one-way data provision, by the holy site itself, or by commercial providers. However, a further fascinating category of user-generated interpretation, evaluation and critique is available via so-called Web 2.0 systems. Online platforms not only provide for the reporting of first-person narratives, they also create an avenue for sharing, responding and reacting to other people's pilgrimage and religious experiences. Many commercial companies are using blog software to engage with their 'customers' before, during and after their pilgrimage (one randomly chosen site – holyland2016.weebly.com/ – provides a range of practical information for clients who will be travelling on pilgrimage in the near future, ranging from the price of postage stamps from Israel to the USA to weather predictions).

True, Web 2.0 systems, however, facilitate the creation of content by the general user, in an organic, and sometimes even anarchic manner – depending on the perspective. Many travellers choose to post their thoughts and opinions online – in fact at the time of writing this chapter, 6468 individuals have posted comments on the TripAdvisor page for the Old City of Jerusalem. While many observations for the likes of Jerusalem and other holy cities focus on the practicalities of travel (accommodation, food and entertainment), there are many submissions containing reflections and thoughts on pilgrimage, faith, prayer and spirituality. Finally, in this regard it is worth noting the use of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, which abound with user-generated content on all aspects of life, with religious travel and pilgrimage to holy places being well represented (see Fig. 3.5c and 3.5d to see the Vatican Facebook page and the Pope's Twitter account, respectively).

The modern church visitor

The use of these many technologically mediated approaches to enhancing the visitor experience at holy places is indicative of a very significant shift in the delivery of pilgrimage experiences away from religious adherence following a strict pattern to what has been pejoratively described as 'a la carte' Christianity. However,

reflecting on the word of God as represented in the Bible ('I was a stranger, and you welcomed me', Matthew 25: 35b), all visitors to Christian holy places should be welcomed without judgement. In fact, 'welcome' and 'invitation' are core gospel values: God welcomes the outsider (1 Corinthians 1: 26–31), seeks the lost (Luke 15), and invites all into the community of the kingdom (1 Timothy 2: 4). Christian theology stresses the depth and breadth of God's welcome, teaching that no one is beyond the reach of God's love (Methodist.org, 2015). Therefore, critically judging these new means of encouraging visitors to engage with 'church' is in fact contrary to the entire Christian message.

Reflection

This leads one to question whether the experience and benefit accrued from undertaking these spiritual journeys in an enhanced manner mediated by technology, or even doing so digitally or virtually, in the comfort of your own home is the same as performing them in a traditional manner. After all, according to Father Svetozar Kraljevic in Medjugorje, pilgrimage is based on introspective prayer, focused on the self. He notes further that another word for pilgrimage is prayer, which can be considered as a cultural way of living, a whole mentality and a whole way of life. Of course, he has set up a website (www.mir.ie/fr-svet.html) to discuss and illustrate his thoughts in this regard.

We are further told by Father Svetozar that 'in pilgrimage we are being thrown into a mill and crushed, our old ways are crushed so that we can receive new ways' (Kraljevic, 2009). How does this fit in the life of contemporary Christians who wish to cling to old habits while at the same time desire increased leisure and entertainment opportunities? Are modern Christians abandoning their traditional faith as they search for meaning via new methods of interpretation? Perhaps, faith is evolving to allow such a technologically mediated experience. And thus, in the context of this chapter, perhaps it is the traditional pilgrimage practices (not the spiritual significance of the holy place) which are being 'crushed' and reshaped, rather than the 'pilgrim'.

The aim of this chapter is to examine the ways in which pilgrimage fits in the life of contemporary Christians. We are especially interested in the changing needs and expectations of these modern pilgrims, with particular focus on how changing demands are altering traditional management practices at sacred sites. It is important to reflect on the long-standing rituals of pilgrimage and the many recently revived and modified ritualistic practices, in order to determine the effect which change has on the management of these sacred resources – especially in view of society's changing perceptions/expectations regarding individual faith.

A form of faith travel, which deserves mention here, is the emerging practice of 'extreme pilgrimage', a title used for and by the contemporary Anglican pilgrim-Vicar Peter Owen-Jones, whose multiple 'celebrity' pilgrimages have drawn attention from around the globe. Described online as 'Spiritual leader, TV presenter, explorer and author', Owen-Jones visits famous places of pilgrimage in an attempt to practice a range of world methods of spirituality and enlightenment.

This 'maverick 21st century priest' has undertaken a global trek to visit a multitude of pilgrimage sites including: (i) the Shaolin Monastery of Henan Province in central China; (ii) the Kumbh Mela festival in India; and (iii) the Egyptian caves of St Anthony in the desert, where he mimicked the desert fathers and spent 21 days in prayerful solitude, all the time being recorded for a very well-received television programme.

What does this say about contemporary Christian pilgrims who now wish to undertake journeys that do not conform to their inherited faith? Essential for a Christian, 'a pilgrimage is the celebration of [their] own faith – a manifestation of a cult which needs to be lived faithful to tradition – with intense religious sentiments and a realization of ... paschal existence' (Papal document *Pellegrinaggio*, No. 32, cited in Kraljevic, 1999). What benefits are there if a pilgrimage fits comfortably into the life of the contemporary Christian, without challenging them in any way? This discussion does not suggest that pilgrimage must be as intense as that undertaken by the Confraternity of Pilgrims to Jerusalem, an eclectic group of 'extreme pilgrims' who travel a combination of ancient and contemporary pilgrimage routes from Canterbury Cathedral to Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

Roth and Steven's view presented in 1985 suggests that:

> Pilgrimages are walking Zen; step by step the practitioner makes his or her way through blue sky temples and white cloud monasteries. Conducted in the traditional manner – on foot, in old-fashioned garb, carrying no money, accepting whatever comes – Pilgrimages are among the most demanding, and therefore most rewarding of all religious disciplines.
>
> (Roth and Steven, 1985, p. 108)

Is it possible for our digitally connected contemporary pilgrim, who is said to be increasingly demanding entertaining experiences, to fit into the traditional pilgrimage practice? Can the armchair pilgrim, in their 'virtual' experience, compete or compare with the biblically prescribed pilgrims who were ordered to 'Take nothing for the journey, neither staves nor scrip, neither bread neither money; neither have two coats apiece' (Luke 9:8) as they search for meaning, peace and love?

The Future of Pilgrimage

Regardless of the diverse claims and perspectives in relation to traditional and contemporary pilgrimage practices, Swatos and Christiano (1999) observed that people today are in admiration of human achievements, not divine forces, and as such, societies of the future will be constructed around these, not antiquity's notion of the 'sacred'. In part, this explains the changing nature and demand for faith-based travel, of which modern-day Christian pilgrims are a subset. Indeed, some of the Christians on the Camino to Compostela in Spain are 'pilgrims' who are not even moderately religious. So where then does pilgrimage fit in the life of contemporary Christians? Why, despite protesting and refuting their engagement with religion, do they submit to these ancient Christian rituals, and what are the longitudinal psychological consequences of such events on them (Schnell

and Pali, 2013, p. 2)? More importantly, what is the future of pilgrimage for the contemporary Christian? According to Barbarić (1999) in his thoughts on pilgrimage:

> Although the basis and primary motive of every pilgrimage is the longing for God, leaving behind everyday life and opening oneself to God, there certainly are secondary reasons for modern pilgrimage – getting to know the world, people and their customs, however, if these secondary motives become the most important, then we are dealing with tourism.
>
> (Barbarić, 1999, p. 1)

Therefore, can the modern Christian activity, which we have discussed at length, be considered as pilgrimage, or is it in fact tourism? Or is it gradually becoming tourism? Will it become tourism? Furthermore, are the traditional ritualistic practices of pilgrimage going to be a 'thing of the past', only to be undertaken by the 'extreme pilgrims'? Considering the factors that are shaping and altering traditional pilgrimage practices as well as the management practices at sacred sites, what are the inherent challenges to ensure that visitors with varying motives are provided with the help they need to have a truly spiritual and rewarding experience of 'pilgrimage'?

Conclusion

An examination of contemporary pilgrimage experiences and their impact on management practices at sacred sites raises concern as to the role pilgrimage plays in the life of contemporary Christians. The observations and discussions presented in this chapter have shed light on the complex nature of present-day pilgrims and their requirements. The chapter also opens a new area of scholarly discourse on the future of pilgrimage, given the identified shift from traditional Christian pilgrimage practice/ritual to a modern approach exemplified in the demand for entertaining experiences at holy sites. The challenge lies in satisfying the needs of these contemporary pilgrims, while maintaining the numinous quality of the holy site. As demonstrated in the discussions throughout this chapter, it is evident that changing pilgrimage patterns, in addition to the needs and expectations of the modern-day pilgrim, will have significant operational implications for management at sacred sites the world over, as well as for future pilgrimage experiences.

Throughout the chapter, significant changes in religious adherence have been highlighted, which in part can be explained by an ever-increasing materialistic and secularized society. The chapter also presents a range of innovative approaches adopted by management at sacred sites to meet the ever-changing needs of contemporary pilgrims. Current trends include the development of walking trails linking prominent pilgrimage destinations, and now technology is transforming the pilgrimage experience, acting as the most valuable tool in bringing these pilgrimage resources to life. To a certain extent, site managers are utilizing such approaches as an attempt to meet the desire for entertaining experiences by modern-day pilgrims and religious tourists. To this end, changes in traditional

management and operational approaches show that site mangers are not static entities, but instead are flexible by responding to the changing nature of the visitor experience being sought.

These contemporary pilgrim demands and the ways in which they are altering traditional management practices emphasize the need for in-depth analysis on the actual role which pilgrimage experience plays in the life of contemporary Christians. The literature reveals a new approach to contemporary Christian pilgrimage (extreme pilgrimage experiences) that is not always in conformity with participants' beliefs and faith. This may be indicative of a shift in traditional Christian pilgrimage practices and values. A substantial literature suggests that society is in constant search for increased gratification in terms of material possessions. However, there is also a clear trend in recent years (perhaps in response to increasing materialism) indicating a search for self-actualization and fulfilment and a desire to belong to a particular social stratum/class. This is a further influence, globally, on the changing nature of Christian pilgrimage.

Globally, there is a growing interest in Christian pilgrimages as well as curiosity regarding the factors that are driving their growth and evolution. The question is: what role is pilgrimage playing in the life of a contemporary Christian, and how are the changing nature and demands of faith-based/contemporary pilgrimage impacting on the traditional management practices at holy sites? We can clearly see that management at sacred sites are adapting their traditional approaches to suit the needs of these modern pilgrims. Through the development of innovative products and services, while not losing sight of the underlying spiritual, historical and ritualistic experiences, site managers are sensitively responding to the changing demands of society. Contemporary pilgrims' needs and expectations are changing when they visit historical holy sites. There is evidence of visitors drifting away from traditional religious practices and rituals. However, being mindful of tradition and heritage, while being open to new methods, tools and practices, Christian holy sites can stand up to scrutiny and be confident for the future, in a world where they are witnessing increased competition not only from religions, but from secular leisure activities (Kartal *et al.*, 2015).

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