
RELIGIOUS TOURISM OR PILGRIMAGE?

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Abstract

This paper proposes scanned contexts where the doublet religious tourism-pilgrimage occurs. In this respect, the structure of the article includes a series of examples selected from the literature, grouped by the nature of the approach of the two terms, namely the economic, geographic, sociological and theological history. The analysis shows that there is a diversity of meanings for the two terms, ranging from minimal distinction, even synonymy between the two, in terms of economic or geographical studies, and up to the maximum accuracy of theological perspective. The findings lead to the need and importance of knowledge and acceptance meanings they acquire two terms depending on the context in which they are used.

Keywords: religious tourism, pilgrimage, specialized context

1. Introduction

Two mentions should be made from the start in regard to the following article. The first concerns the motivations behind this work, which consist of my professional scientific interest in tourism combined with the spiritual aspect, Orthodox belief and its value system that I adopt and profess without reservations. The second observation regards the nature of this work, which aims towards not so much a comparative notional analysis, as a programmatic text on the limits of the religious tourism/pilgrimage synonymy, as well as on the necessity of knowing the different contexts where they operate.

Along the last decades, an increasing number of academic fields met in the research area of tourism trying, repeatedly and systematically, to provide the latter with its own weight. As a result, topics which are completely or only tangentially dedicated to this area today can be found in all socio-humanistic branches, which is only naturally, after all, if we recognize the fact that tourism is, presently, a cultural, economic and social phenomenon with interface characteristics.

Its practical reality can be expressed under a diversity of forms, which also inevitably leads to an analysis based on multiple criteria. The tourist typologies based on factors, manifestations, impact or dynamics become increasingly numerous, religious tourism being, from this perspective, no more or less than one of the tens of types of tourism.

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Alternatively, the resurgence of pilgrimage calls to attention its connections with religious tourism. In the common language, the term 'pilgrimage' connotes a religious journey, a journey of a pilgrim; especially one to a shrine or a sacred place, but its derivation from the Latin 'peregrinus' allows broader interpretations, including foreigner, wanderer, exile, and traveller, as well as newcomer and stranger [1, 2]. The term 'tourist' also has Latin origins, namely 'tornus', one who makes a circular journey, usually for pleasure, and returns to the starting point. According to Smith, today's use of the terms, identifying the 'pilgrim' as a religious traveller and the 'tourist' as a vacationer, is a culturally constructed polarity that blurs the travellers' motives [3].

Although religious travel is not a recent phenomenon [4], religious tourism belongs to modern times. Firstly, this is due to the fact that tourism itself is a post-industrial phenomenon, although, historically speaking and in terms of the most general definition, all journeys, from the oldest times, undertaken for commercial, religious or cultural purposes, can be considered, to some extent, forms of proto-tourism. The distinction between travel and tourism [5] becomes obvious only with the diversification of socio-economic activities, occurring in the past two centuries, when, with the spectacular growth of the population, more and more specialized discourses start to appear. Thus, economy traces its own theoretical guidelines, geography re-defines itself periodically, with each new paradigm entering the scientific world, history is re-written in successive ideological frames, while new areas of study take shape in the field of applied research.

In this context, tourism enters a true mixer of interpretations where old notions coexist with the latest ones, while established terms acquire volatile meanings. Religious travel, in the broadest sense, is one of the examples, being at the origin, as well as at the intersection of tourism and pilgrimage.

In international literature, the distinction between tourism and pilgrimage is not a new topic, and the variety of meanings and directions for analysis generated multiple approaches [6-13].

On the other hand, despite the diversity of the approaches, few studies are concerned with the angles of comparative analysis and with the technical distinction (of approach) between religious tourism and pilgrimage. Actually, to be more accurate, it should be said that the distinction does not stand out equally in all cultures, some times being less marked. However, the topic is pertinent in Romania, where the terms and the practice of the two phenomena sometimes generated misunderstandings or dilemmas.

In what follows, we shall seek to reveal the 'work areas' for the religious tourism-pilgrimage pair, reviewing the characteristics of its main operational frameworks.

Methodologically speaking, although our focus is Romania, for a better contextualization and due to the small number of Romanian quotable studies and authors, we frequently shift between foreign and local references, extracting the most relevant formulations for the comparison.

2. The multidimensional aspect of the topic

2.1. The economic perspective

In what concerns the tourism-religion pair, tourism economy has little sensitivity for the differences in nuance between religious tourism and pilgrimage. Still, if they are to identify differences in the meanings of the terms employed, economists distinguish between tourism generated by sacred edifices (a form of cultural tourism) and religious tourism for specific purposes, assimilated to pilgrimage. The difference between them is that the 'religious heritage tourist' is the one "who visits for cultural and historical interest rather than a search for religious meaning", while 'religious tourists' are defined as those "who set out to visit a destination of religious significance for a specifically religious purpose" [14].

A great part of the economists' interest in religious travel comes from the fact that they realised the growing importance of this niche tourism. Complementary activities and services, from transportation to medical and commercial were immediately included in the 'religious tourism' package. A new direction in the agenda of Romanian economic research, religious tourism drew, in a relatively short time, the attention of those working in the marketing area, in agro-tourism economy, trade and services.

Being generally included in the category of cultural tourism, religious tourism would include, in its Romanian working definition, "the whole range of tourist travels which also have an aspect connected to religion" [15]. As such, pilgrimage is a derivate and constituent form of tourism.

Well-intentioned, but uninterested in notional subtleties, some authors used the syntagm 'tourism of a religious nature', adopting, in effect, the concept launched in Western circles. This would include: a) visits to halidoms; b) religious pilgrimages; c) religious youth camps [16]. In this view, the religious tourism-pilgrimage relationship is one of the nearest genus and specific difference type. The connection among the three forms of religious tourism is only meant as a guideline, the separation being coarse and based mostly on the time allotted to the journey.

However, since in the economic perspective, the finality of any action must be as quantifiable as possible, the terms for the analyses of the phenomena in case are: flux, poles of attraction, market, number of nights, returns, etc.

A recent study on the *dynamics and capacity of the travel to religious destinations market* (our emphasis) among Romanians shows that travelling to sacred destination, especially monastic settlement, is a frequent practice for orthodox population. "Over 90 % of those who answered the survey have made a *trip* (our emphasis) to a religious destination and approximately 70% of the investigated population has also spent one night there, thus becoming religious tourists. The fact that 30% of respondents has had a trip spanning the duration of 2-3 nights, 13% 5-7 nights and 7% over 7 nights suggests that *religious tourism or pilgrimage* (our emphasis) is one of the most frequent types of internal

tourism, if not the most frequent.” [17]. It is quite obvious, in this case, that the authors are too little concerned with the nuanced content of the appellatives.

That the differences are less important in the economic field is also proved by the tourist marketing studies where pilgrimage is a tourist product like any other [18] on a market where demand, supply and the theory of rational choice can also be applied to religion [19]!

2.2. *The geographic perspective*

Due to its integrating nature, geography provides the ideal frame for the complex study of religious tourism, as well as of pilgrimage. In the view of geography, the study of these two aspects is at the border of two sub-branches – tourism geography and the geography of religion.

Tourism geography is concerned with aspects like localization, the human and cultural characteristics of destinations, resources and the natural and anthropic tourist potential, as well as tourist mobility on various scales. On this level, the distinction between religious tourism and pilgrimage as topic of geographic analysis is not always much more nuanced than within economic analyses, the studies coming from the area of Geography revealing that the pilgrimage phenomenon tends toward a blurring of tourism and pilgrimage [9]. The explanation rests in the fact that, today, “the pilgrimage can be considered a traditional religious or modern secular journey. The phenomenon of pilgrimage is currently experiencing resurgence throughout the world with longstanding shrines still attracting those in search of spiritual fulfilment.” [20]

In Romanian geographic studies, the faint distinction or the terminological ambivalence between religious tourism and pilgrimage can be found even in some of the prestigious works [21-23].

Nonetheless, the researchers who wish to understand the spatial relationship – the focus of Geography, after all – underlining the two phenomena must integrate within religious tourism aspects that are cultural, anthropological, perceptive, etc. In addition to their integrative characteristics, geographic studies often focus on the perception of places - a perspective that is especially important in pilgrimage behaviour. Pilgrimages occur because people believe specific places are holy, and, thus, undertake religious journeys so they can worship at those places. What makes a particular place sacred in the eyes of believers? This is a major question for those undertaking the study of pilgrimage, as well as for geographers in particular.

In this context, the radiography of religious sites is also due to geography, by means of the so-called ‘sacred geography’, as well as the connection between nature and religious attitude (‘ecotheology’), and the analysis of the religious landscape in its complexity, under the geography of religion.

The first work on the *Geography and religion*, mentioned in its introductory pages: “we shall limit ourselves only to the geographic implications of the religious acts in a landscape. We shall restrict opinions only to the physiometric aspects of religion, deliberately leaving aside the major field of

inner life.” [24] Naturally, the statement is no longer as actual, Geography assuming, today, multiple dimensions of analysis, the geography of religion entering even the field of ‘inner life’, although, essentially, it remains, in our opinion, at the surface level of the phenomena.

The same cannot be said about religious geography, which, although having the flaw of subscribing to the determinist perspective, comes closer to the new definitions of geography as science progressively opting for an ethical position (if we consider the environmentalist issue and that of the socio-cultural diversity structuring space and territory) [25].

In recent years, two gradating syntagms have become operational – religious geography and the geography of religion. The former analyses the role of religion in shaping the people’s perception of the world, more specifically where and how people integrate and relate to this way of seeing the world. The latter is not concerned as much with religion in itself, as with tracing the different ways in which religion is expressed. The latter is seen as a human institution, whose impact on society, culture and environment is studied by geography. Accordingly, one relevant publication in Romania is the doctoral thesis entitled ‘Religion and development in the Banat Mountains. A study in the geography of religions’ signed by Lazăr Anton, where tourism *of a religious nature* (our emphasis), as part of cultural tourism, can have, in its turn, many forms [26]. Among these are mentioned pilgrimages (...) and monastic tourism (sic!)

The novelty of approaching religious tourism by Romanian geographers also explains the attempts to find the most appropriate expressions for the observed phenomena. For example, another doctoral thesis in Geography uses the syntagm “ecumenical tourism and of pilgrimage”, starting from the analysis of the tourist potential of the Făgăraș hollow “country” [27].

That the field is only in its early days and that there is still no consensus is also proved by the title of one of the subjects newly introduced in the curriculum of secondary schools with an Orthodox theological profile – The Geography of Orthodox Religious Tourism [Ministerial Order no. 3119/2012]! According to it, pilgrimage is one of the forms of tourism, which can be analysed, like any other, in terms of potential, religious-tourist objective, heritage, etc., which, after all, is completely valid in a horizontal analysis.

So as to express the vertical dimension as well, namely man’s relationship with God, it is useful to accept a third syntagm – theological geography –, little-known expression and extremely rarely utilized, but which is closest to the focus of our research. The introduction of the idea of theological geography belongs to the philosopher Immanuel Kant who, in his lectures on physical geography, considers it one of the six branches of the *science of spatial relations*, as geography is called. According to the German philosopher, theological principles can vary greatly according to the environment where they manifest themselves.

Adopting Kant's idea, Dallas F. Bell Jr. states that theological geography means "identifying the cause for human behaviour and, thus, it has the potential to provide the general category for all the sub-fields of human geography" [F.D. Bell, *Theological Geography and Threat Assessments with Geosematics: Synthesizing the Systematic Political Science Subsets of Political and Cultural Geography to Delete Structural Holes*, 2005, <http://systematicpoliticalscience.com/>, accessed 5 November 2010]. In a basic interpretation, one may detect here an eschatological note, of the cause, meaning and finality of human actions. By extension, we could say that theological geography has the potential to explain the choices of various establishments for significant places, as well as the religious landscape resulting from these choices. Craig Dykstra, regarding theological geography from its instrumental perspective, states that "(...) moving beyond method and the mapping of the various theologies in relation to one another, it engages its highest powers in the exercise of mapping theologically the terrain of human existence in relation to God" [28].

Although minimal, these references to the notion of theological geography open the path to connections with a different level of approaching pilgrimage and tourism, namely that of Sociology.

2.3. *The sociological perspective*

First of all, it should be said that, generally, studies on the sociology of tourism are extremely few.

The study of pilgrimage, on the other hand, seems to have been a captivating enterprise for Sociology, perhaps also since it requires an exercise of imagination and of continuous shift between detachment and involvement. Still, if we refer strictly to the Romanian setting, the works of this type are not numerous, and that is because current Romanian society, overly abundant in hot topics, has faced sociologists with a difficult choice – what to study first?!

Among recent sociological approaches, the distinction introduced by Valentin Beloiu caught our attention, defining three types of pilgrimage: the *sacred journey* as an act of covering a road towards a sacred place by a person who establishes a purpose for himself connected to religion or spirituality at the end of this endeavour; *religious tourism* as the journey undertaken for cultural-historical purposes by an individual with no religious reference points to a place considered sacred and the *pseudo-sacred journey* as the action of a person animated by a feeling of veneration (for the new 'gods' or the new 'sacred places' of modern society) of visiting places with no religious value [29]. By comparison with previous definitions, the classification changes, in effect, the relationship between the notional spheres of pilgrimage and religious tourism, turning the former into a nearest genus for the latter.

A new and correct perspective brought by sociological analysis concerns one's position towards pilgrimage. More specifically, its analysis from the outside, objective, or the inside, lived, subjective. "As a result of this perception,

it is now clear that each person may interpret his or her own experience differently, and that it is no longer sufficient to focus solely on the experience offered by the objective. In this way, current pilgrimage research emphasizes subjectivity.” [9]

The study of pilgrimage means more than venting more or less complex statistics; it does not even mean the close involvement, or from a certain distance, recording, eventually through binoculars, some group’s ascension towards a monastery. It is not their number, their age, equipment, nationality or means of transportation that matter. These are peripheral elements. What matters is the personal attitude towards pilgrimage.

Mirel Bănică, the Romanian sociologist working on pilgrimage phenomenon, states that one may speak of a ‘state’ of pilgrimage – “when people enter a communion with one another, they change their state of mind. The body itself switches to it, you sometimes feel it even physically.” [30] This opinion perfectly complements Victor Turner’s views, who considers pilgrimage: *a.* a passage from a known, structured (familiar) state to another (anti-structure) and back (a ‘passage’ or a ‘ritual of transition’, as it was called by some authors) visible, from a social point of view, as a qualitative process of confirming a new identity; *b.* the time period of the process (the liminal period) which generates the existence of a relational state/disposition among the participants (*communitas*/community) [13].

However, Rene Gothoni considers that Turner is mistaken in both statements. According to Gothoni, the difference between pilgrimage and passage depends on their functions and motivations – a passing ritual facilitates, indeed, the transposition of the ‘traveller’ in his new social status, while the function of the pilgrimage is to facilitate the detachment from mundane preoccupations, in a relationship oriented not towards the relationship with those around, but towards God. Secondly, community is not a specific quality of pilgrimage, but, rather, a sub-product [31].

According to Gothoni, the pilgrimage quality of a journey comes from the pilgrim’s experience of spiritual transformation, a mutation from the worldly coordinates towards the spiritual, thus, pilgrimage being a transforming journey artistically expressed by the metaphor of the pilgrimage ellipse. The act of travelling alone or in a group is less relevant. Of relevance are the reflection and the perception of the distance between precept and practice in one’s own existence [31]. Practically, the affirmations exclude any confusion with religious tourism which clearly remains, from this point of view, an external phenomenon.

We might say that this perspective ensures the passage towards a theological approach of religious tourism and pilgrimage.

2.4. The theological and ecclesiastic perspective

Theocentric in its nature, Orthodox pilgrimage has its roots and primary meaning in a theological frame. Pilgrimage means “to walk unto the house of God” (Psalm 55.14), a type of answering, thus, to a permanent call from God to

us, in the same words once used for Abraham: “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee” (Genesis 12.1). In this theological acceptance, that we may call ‘hard’, focused on spirituality, pilgrimage is a relocation which calls towards a land of a superior quality to the one we inhabit daily.

Later, the journey of people of Israel from Egypt to Canaan is also a pilgrimage, whose finality, the Promised Land, represents a return from the land of slavery so as to enter the sphere of liberty offered by God, “a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 33.3).

The story of Exodus, which lasts from the second book of the Pentateuch to the Book of Joshua, is the dramatic and fascinating tale of the journey or wandering of Israel in the desert – a place, by definition, of danger and death – with which all journeys of pilgrimage will come to be associated from this moment on.

In the New Testament, the first key-figures of ‘pilgrims’ that we encounter in the evangelical tale are the Magi and the shepherds at the place of the Redeemer’s birth.

Subsequently, Jesus Christ’s life itself is, in a way, a pilgrimage towards Jerusalem, as the Gospel of Luke particularly underlines (Luke 9.31, 51, 53, 57; 13.22, 33; 17.11; 19.28). However, the Jerusalem towards which Jesus is headed is not so much the city of the old temple as the place of the new Easter, the place where the mystery of His death and rebirth occurs which perfect His incarnation. The path of the Word in time cannot be considered complete until, by going through the mystery of the Cross, He returns to the Father: “I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father” (John 16.28).

After Ascension, the new historic time will gradually allow for a diversity of manifestations of the Christian pilgrimage. Theological debates revealed aspects such as the terminological meanings (proskynima/proskynitis (Greek), peregrination/peregrinus/pelegrinus (Latin)), the motivations of the pilgrimage, the devotional practices, the semantics and the symbolism of the ‘road’, famous pilgrims, etc. Nothing, therefore, about tourism, be it even religious!

The first pilgrimage about which the Church has a written testimony is The Journey of Egeria (*Itinerarium Egeriae*), the diary of a lady (Egeria, or Aetheria) who, probably between 381 and 384 undertook such a journey. Besides the established motives for visiting and praying in the places from the Old and New Testament dedicated to God, others are added which confer to the journey a note of a more complex pilgrimage: the presence of a guide (*deductores sancti*) who accompanies Egeria; the visit to the monastic settlements and the meetings with the monks; the visit to the graves of the martyrs, which constitutes an important characteristic of Christian pilgrimage, be it in the East or West [A. Nan, *Pelerinajul in Biserica primara, Biserica Ortodoxa Romana din Estul Elveţiei*, <http://www.biserica-romana.ch/pdf/pelerinaj.pdf>, accessed April 12, 2014].

On all stages of Egeria's visit, one can notice the close connection between pilgrimage and liturgical celebration, on the one hand, and between pilgrimage and the reading of Christian texts, on the other: "We celebrated here as well (on Mount Horeb) the Eucharist, we raised a very fervent prayer and the appropriate passage from the book of Kings was also read; for us, the greatest wish was that, once reaching the place in question, a passage from the Bible to be always read" [<http://www.biserica-romana.ch/pdf/pelerinaj.pdf>]. It is equally an external and an internal track, which wholly defines pilgrimage as it was to be understood in the centuries to follow as well.

Nevertheless, analysing the variety of forms under which pilgrim devotion is expressed in the first Christian centuries, Alexandru Dan Nan states that "within pilgrimage, notes of diverse nature gather and coexist, from the religious and cultural and up to the spiritual, cultural, psychological, sociological, topographic and economic nuances, which manage to maintain a phenomenon perpetually alive, in a constant evolution and in the degree of interpreting the need and inner impulse of those who practice it" [<http://www.biserica-romana.ch/pdf/pelerinaj.pdf>].

On the basis of this diversity of nuances, the fine distinction between religious tourism and pilgrimage could disappear, an idea which also arises from another study, extremely well grounded technically, coming from the area of historic theology, which associates pilgrimage with religious tourism in its very title: *A few moments in the history of religious tourism: Romanian pilgrims to Mount Sinai (10th -20th c.). The reiteration of a patristic spirituality*. The author of the study, Adrian Marinescu, organizes his impressive analysis of the journeys to Mount Sinai under the sign of the synonymy between the two notions, despite the fact that, outside of the title, the syntagm religious tourism appears nowhere else in the text of the article. Nonetheless, we believe that the observations on the religious journeys made in past centuries also contain elements of an emerging religious tourism. Bearing witness to this is the information recorded on the pilgrimage of the postelnic/chamberlain's wife, Elena, Mihai Cantacuzino, his sister, and Metropolitan Varlaam, who were accompanied to Sinai by a certain Iancu Bulibaşa who led 10 Seymens, all of them accompanied by 40 people and by a retinue made up of trusted servants of the Cantacuzino family. They are sufficient elements to categorize it as the most impressive Romanian pilgrimage to Sinai [2]. Taking into account the structure of the group, it seems clear that not all participants to the travel towards the Holy Land can automatically be considered pilgrims as well, since it seems certain that some of them had clear service-related attributions, which does not keep them from combining obligations with the discovery of the newly visited places.

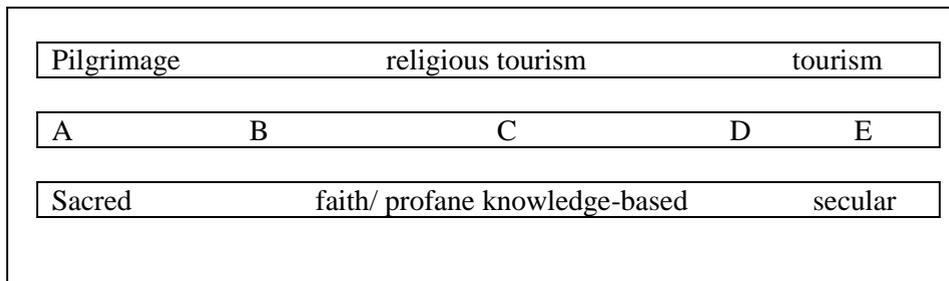
In the same article, another idea with challenging implications is the statement that "early on, pilgrimage becomes also a monastic affair, in the sense that monks participate to it, in most cases being the most able and abilitated guides. Therefore, a discussion of pilgrimage is, essentially, a monastic one or it regards aspects of monastic life." [2] Although he references a bygone age, the meanings of this statement have a certain degree of actuality and they will

become clearer is we add to the list of views on pilgrimage the one coming, naturally, from the Romanian Patriarchate.

In the official position, we may distinguish two levels of approach. The first, expressed by His Beatitude Daniel, the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, presents pilgrimage as an internal spiritual act, one of repentance and of prayer, an occasion to strengthen one's faith and a way towards its missionary profession. On the other hand, as an external act, pilgrimage is recognized as a tourist fact which follows the evaluation, organization and inventory criteria which equally operate in the laic institutions of the state, as well as in those of the Church.

In other words, the acceptations of pilgrimage in the Romanian Orthodox Church are placed on two levels – a narrow one, marked by the Biblical meanings and the historically imposed tradition, a fact which requires the maintenance of the frame of increased spiritual rigor and ecclesiastic rite (blessing, prayer) and a widened meaning, where the various forms of manifestation bring it close to religious, cultural, ecumenical, etc. tourism, the journey itself, no matter its name, being a succession and a sum of states of discovery, knowledge, pleasure and even rest.

In this kind of approach, the Pavicic chart (Scheme 1) [32] seems to express suggestively the sliding scale of every traveller's position.



Scheme 1. Tourism and pilgrimage as a continuum of travel.

3. Religious tourism or pilgrimage – where is the error?

We have shown above the most frequent contexts for the terms pilgrimage and religious tourism. We have seen that, applied to the Romanian Orthodox landscape, the distinction between the two is quite flexible and nuanced, going from neglecting the differences in certain laic settings to their careful separation within the church. It has sometimes been suggested that, as opposed to pilgrimage, religious tourism carries a pejorative note in itself.

Actually, the controversies, when they appear, arise not so much around the religious tourism-pilgrimage opposition, as around the sacred-secular pair which impartially marks both terms. Clearly, there is tension between the great 'operators' of organized pilgrimage, a similar one occurring not long ago even in Romania, between travel agencies and the Patriarchy. Nevertheless, we believe both sides and neither of them to be right!

More specifically, and this is one first idea we deduce from the analysis made, the terms religious tourism and pilgrimage do not belong exclusively to a single approach. At least, when trying to see the meanings provided by the various fields of activity, the use of one term or another answers first to some internal contingencies of these fields, as long as there is no unanimous meaning and unified language.

A second idea regards the place and role of the human being as a first instance vehicle of both phenomena. No matter the name of the journey and the organizer, its nature will be given by what the participants build, either individually, or in a group. A journey is what the participants are themselves.

At the same time, in changeable contexts and on long time spans, the same person can be simultaneously or successively/alternatively in the position of (religious) tourist or pilgrim.

Without managing to cover more of the diverse meanings of the religious tourism-pilgrimage pair, we conclude, irenically, that there is room for both, only time is too short.

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