2016

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Recommended Citation
doi:10.21427/D7D43F
Available at: https://arrow.dit.ie/ijrtp/vol4/iss1/4

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Ritual Journeys in North America: Opening religious and ritual landscapes and spaces

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The religious landscape of North America is different from other regions of the world in that not only is there a lack of a highly visible religious elements, but also the idea and practice of pilgrimage and ritual travel is not as pervasive as in Europe and Asia. However, there are many human-built and natural spaces marked by Roman Catholics, Protestants, Mormons, Indigenous peoples, and members of other faiths which are subject to either formal or informal pilgrimage-like travel. Visits to these sacred sites have intensified with the rise and expansion of tourism after World War II, conflating pilgrimage-like travel with tourism. As such, there has been an expansion of the term ‘pilgrimage’ to describe the visits of people to sites of historical, political and/or pop culture importance. This paper examines the changing religious and ritual landscapes in North America, and examines the case of tourism and pilgrimage to Martyrs’ Shrine in Midland, Ontario, to show how ritual journeys in North America have become more inclusive over time.

Key Words: religious tourism, North America, ritual landscapes

Introduction

North America is a rather religiously-rich region. Not only does this region - in particular the United States - stand out against other developed regions because of its high degree of religiosity and high, albeit declining, church attendance (Bibby, 2011; Eagle, 2011; Flannelly et al., 2010; Hahn, 2010; Hutchins, 2015; Massey and Higgins, 2011; Wilkins-Laflamme, 2012), but also because it contains many unique and exceptional religious landscape elements (Zelinsky, 2001; see Campo, 1998; Collins and Rhine, 2003; Everett, 2002; Foote, 2003; Santino, 2006). For example, in the United States the ratio of churches to the general population probably exceeds that of most world regions (Zelinsky, 2001). Also, mega-churches dominate the edges of many North American urban centers, religiously-themed billboards line many of the region’s highways, and, according to CNN.com, North America contains at least eight ‘must see’ religious wonders (Beal, 2005; Chaves, 2006; Csomor, 2012; Fentress, 2007; MacDowell, 1982; Olsen, 2015; Thuma and Bird 2015; Warf and Winsberg, 2010; York and Wilson, 2007; Zelinsky, 2001). As well, one forgotten part of the North American religious landscape is the proliferation of religious TV, radio and Internet programming (Abelman and Neuendorf, 1987; Buckser, 1989; Kong, 2001; Lochte, 2008; Ogbonda, 2005).

In the context of pilgrimage and ritual journeys, Campo (1998) suggests that pilgrimage is alive and well in the United States, noting three different types of pilgrimage-like travel. The first type involves religious pilgrimages by organized religious faiths, which type the author addresses shortly. The second type of pilgrimage-like travel involves what Campo labels pilgrimages to sites of American civil religion, where there is an:

inter-connection of God and country,
commemoration of heroes (legendary and otherwise) and martyrs, and the attribution of patriotic significance to the natural landscape (Campo, 1998: 48).

Examples of the types of locations American and international tourists visit that can be described as pilgrimages to historico-religious spaces would include America Civil War sites, the Mount Rushmore National Memorial, the Lincoln Memorial, the Martin Luther King Memorial, the United States Holocaust Museum, Niagara Falls, and national parks in general (Bremer, 2004; Campo, 1998; Chidester and Linenthal, 1991; Downing, 1986; Jackson and Henrie, 1983; Hasian Jr., 2004; Lennon and Foley, 1999; Linenthal et al., 2004; Ross-Bryant, 2013; Shields, 1991).

The third type of pilgrimage-like travel involves natural or historico-cultural institutions, landscapes,
sites, and personalities that have not been absorbed by either an organized religion or by the National Park Service. This type of pilgrimage, like pilgrimage to American civil religion sites, involves an expansion of what we consider sacred space in modern society (see Reader, 2007), where travel to sites of cultural significance is attributed similar significance as given to religious and spiritual pilgrimages. Examples would range from disaster sites such as Ground Zero in New York and the site of the Oklahoma City bombing (Blasi, 2002; Conran, 2002; Foote, 2003) to the sites and markers of the death of great musicians like Elvis Presley, Steve Prefontaine and John Lennon (Alderman, 2002; Davidson et al., 1990; Doss, 2008; King, 1993; Kruse II, 2003; Wojcik, 2008), Walt Disney World (Moore, 1980), sporting events (Gammon, 2004; Norman and Cusack, 2012; Remillard 2015), Star Trek conventions (Porter, 2004), genealogical research (Kurzwell, 1995; Otterstrom, 2008), bike trails (Crawford 2015), music more generally (Intrepid Travel, 2014; Morales 2014; Telegraph, 2014), and even shopping (Cusack and Digance, 2008)! Even travel by U.S. political leaders to speak to distinctly religious audiences or at sacred sites has been termed ‘political pilgrimage’ (Coe et al., 2015). It is interesting to note that much of the academic literature discussing the expansion of what constitutes sacred space and sacred journeys, with a few exceptions (e.g., Hall, 2002; Hannaford and Newton, 2008), seems to use examples from the United States!

Therefore, it is surprising that much, if not most, of the research on pilgrimage or other ritual journeys has focused on regions outside of North America (e.g. Bar, 2003; Bauer, 2001; Egan, 2010; French, 1994; Huber, 2008; Kelner, 2010; Nolan, 1987; Nolan and Nolan, 1992; Olsen, 2013; Reader and Swanson, 1997; Shahshahani, 2009; Shinde, 2010; Shuo et al., 2009; Taylor, 2011; Werbner, 2010). This might be in part because North America lacks the saturation levels of religious elements such as sacred hills, groves, and springs, sites linked to the lives of Saints or miraculous events, roadside shrines, sacred effigies, and hilltop crosses when juxtaposed with places such as Europe or Asia (Zelinsky, 2001). This failure of the United States to develop a similar European or Asian religious landscape may also be in part because of the country’s ‘sheer newness’ regarding its religious landscape due to the late date of European colonization of the North American continent and the lack of a powerful state-related church to create such a landscape (Zelinsky, 2001: 569). Or, it may be because of the fact that the aesthetic exercises to and at major pilgrimage sites that are common in Europe and South Asia are optional or not required, at least within a Protestant North American context. As such, pilgrimage as a mainstream practice has not been fully incorporated into the religio-cultural fabric of North America.

With this in mind, the purpose of this paper is to correct this academic neglect and discuss pilgrimage and ritual journeys within a North American context. More particularly, the emphasis of this paper will be on the trend towards greater inclusivity within the pilgrimage market in North America with a particular focus on how ritual journeys have been ‘opened up’ to include wider publics and ‘glocalized’ traditions (Ritzer 2003), which, the author argues, has come about due in part to both the ‘transplantational’ nature of North America and increased tourism visitation to religious heritage sites. After discussing the transplanting of pilgrimage traditions to North American by immigrant and diasporic communities, the author examines tourism and its relation to pilgrimage and sacred sites. Then, through focusing on the case study of the Martyrs’ Shrine in Midland, Ontario, Canada, the author illustrates how this transplanting of pilgrimage traditions has made this site more inclusive, expanding the site’s original mandate of preserving the memory of Jesuit martyrs to preserving the memory of martyrs from immigrant homelands around the world.

Transplanting Pilgrimage Traditions in North America

North America has long been a region where ideas about the sacred have been transplanted from other regions around the world. Of course, the North American indigenous population had their own ideas of what constituted sacred spaces and sacred ecologies prior to European imperialism and colonization (e.g., Gulliford, 2000; Harrod, 2000; Suzuki, 1992). However, with the migration of European colonists to North America, came new ideas of what constituted sacred space, which led in many cases to the indigenous population being displaced from their sacred lands with their European conquerors either destroying or building over Indigenous sacred and ritual spaces (Prorok, 2003). While Indigenous groups in North America have begun to reclaim their ancestral sacred space (e.g. Beaman, 2002; Carmichael et al., 1997; Lane, 2001; Michaelsen, 1995; Gulliford, 2000), there are many continuing examples of Indigenous
spirituality being appropriated and commodified by New Age groups (Aldred, 2000; Huntsinger and Fernández-Giménez, 2000; Timothy and Conover, 2006; York, 2001). However, there are also examples of cultural blending between Native Americans and Europeans, such as the successful religious syncreticism between Native Americans and the Roman Catholic Church with regards to pilgrimages to the National Kateri Tekakwitha Shrine in Fonda, New York, the National Shrine of the North American Martyrs in Auriesville, New York, and the burial site of Rose Prince near Fraser, British Columbia (Densmore, 1941; Dauria, 1994; Fox, 1994; Holmes, 2001; Greer, 2004; Farley, 2010; The Canadian Press, 2013; CBC News, 2015) as well as to special events such as the repatriation of Huron / Wendat bones in Midland, Ontario (Seeman, 2011:141ff).

The Roman Catholic Church has also successfully transplanted pilgrimage traditions in North America, having established a number of pilgrimage destinations replete with the sacred relics of martyrs, stories of miracles and healing, Marian apparitions and patron saints (Athens, 1989; Calverley, 1980; Hufford, 1985; Horsfall, 2000; Nabhan-Warren, 2005; O’Malley, 2004; O’Neill 2012; Orsi, 1991; Pagliaroli, 2004; Rinschede, 1992; Swatos Jr., 2002; Tweed, 2011; Williams, 2010; Yuhaus and Frechette, 2006). While Protestant denominations, due to the Protestant Reformation and a strong emphasis on ‘the word’ over ritual (Prorok 2003), have not established pilgrimage sites per se like Roman Catholics, they do have, in addition to revivals and Bible camps, commemorative shrines in the United States that play a role in American Methodist expressions of piety (Gunther, 1996; Messenger, 1999; Neville, 2005; Percy, 1998; Tweed, 2000).

In addition to a strong Protestant and Roman Catholic presence on North America’s religious landscape, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Hari Krishnas, Eastern Orthodox Bulgarians and Tamil Hindus have also transplanted pilgrimage traditions and / or sacred spaces in North America (see Mastagar, 2015; Klimova, 2011; Prorok, 1986; Whitaker, 2015), and minority religious groups such as Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists have begun to transplant their religious traditions and sacred spaces onto North America soil to both heighten their cultural identity as well as to in part sanctify the places within the United States and Canada where they reside. For example, Hindus in North America have been active in building temples and establishing pilgrimage networks within the United States (Bhardwaj, 1988, 1990, 1991; Bhardwaj and Rao, 1998; Dempsey, 2006), Muslims have built mosques and community centers in major urban centers (Haddad and Smith, 1994; Schubel, 1996), and Buddhists have established a network of temples throughout the major urban centers of the United States and Canada (Goldberg, 1999; Matthews, 2006; Prebish, 1999; Prebish and Tanaka, 1998; Tweed, 1992).

Immigrant groups from places such as Cuba and Haiti have also transplanted pilgrimage traditions to Roman Catholic and Pentecostal shrines in the United States (see Rey, 2004; Tweed, 1997). However, while there are numerous instances of pilgrimage traditions being transplanted into North America by immigrant faiths and people, transplanting pilgrimage traditions can be a precarious endeavor at best, particularly where host societies may not be receptive to, or outright intolerant of, their attempts (Prorok, 2003). Such is the case with the controversy over the proposed Muslim cultural center to be built blocks from the 9/11 site in New York City (Batstone, 2012; Doss, 2011).

In her article ‘Transplanting Pilgrimage Traditions in the Americas,’ Prorok (2003) noted a number of strategies which immigrant groups to North America have used to recover pilgrimage traditions, some of which the author has alluded to earlier. The first strategy is to co-opt existing religious sites and / or ceremonies, as is the case with Taiwanese Americans who have appropriated the San Francisco Chinese New Year Parade to perform religious rituals related to Mazu (Lee, 2011). The second strategy involves maintaining links with a homeland. Instead of recreating sacred spaces or pilgrimage traditions, immigrant and diasporic groups in North America may instead choose to travel back to their homelands for pilgrimage purposes, such as American Jews travelling to Israel (Cohen, 2003; Cohen Ioannides and Ioannides, 2006; Collins-Kreiner, 2010a; Kelner, 2010), Croatian Americans going to Medjugorje, Bosnia (Jurkovich and Gesler, 1997), African Americans traveling to Senegal and the Gambia (Ebron, 1999), American Muslims traveling to Mecca to participate in the annual hajj (Clingingsmith et al., 2009; Timothy and Iverson, 2006), and American Hindus traveling to India to participate in religious rituals (Kurien, 2002; Singh, 2006). In fact, a number of organizations, such as Taglit-Birthright Israel, Hillel, the Catholic Pilgrimage Center, the World
Religious Travel Association, in addition to local congregations and commercial travel agencies, facilitate this travel of Americans overseas for pilgrimage and ritual purposes (Wuthnow and Offutt, 2008).

The third strategy is to either recreate or reinvent sacred sites. This is done through replicating an image, temple, or other sacred object from the homeland; the (re)recognition of the sacred in the new migrant location using traditional means of interpreting sacred and hierophanic experiences; and creating movable rituals, such as the Hari Krishna Holi Festival of Colors which is performed in various destinations around the United States (see www.festivalofcolorsusa.com). The fourth strategy involves celebrating sites of sacred embodiment, whether that involves travel to see holy men and women or sites where such people are buried or their relics are enshrined. The fifth and final strategy is through ritual historicizing, which

entails the reification of particular historic moments as epitomized in the structures, people, and locational features associated with those moments or periods of time (Prorok, 2003: 295).

These strategies are used by immigrant and diasporic communities and groups, in part to remind ‘[them] selves of [them]selves’ (Prorok, 2003: 298); to create collective selfhoods and identities through making new sacred spaces and ritual performances, and attaching these communities to special places within their new residences while concurrently honouring their former homelands (Eade and Garbin, 2007; Johnson and Werbner, 2010; Prorok, 2003). At the same time, these acts of re-creating and re-inventing sacred spaces means that ritual journeys and spaces that traditionally were authorized and performed in their homelands have been ‘opened up’ in North America, with the potential for new or syncretic interpretations, contestations, and practices to take place within a North American context (Chidester and Linenthal, 1995), particularly in a ‘modern, transplanted, and relatively desacralized [North American] present’ (Prorok, 2003: 285).

**Religious Tourism**

Along with the transplanting of sacred spaces and pilgrimage journeys, the opening of sacred spaces to tourism consumption is another way in which ritual journeys in North America have ‘opened up’ and become more inclusive. This can be seen from both theoretical and practical viewpoints. Theoretically, academics have long discussed the similarities and differences, or the convergence and divergence, between pilgrimage and tourism and pilgrims and tourists (Cohen, 1992). While these two perspectives have been discussed in detail elsewhere (see Collins-Kreiner 2010b; Olsen, 2010), many scholars conflate pilgrimage-like travel with tourism. They argue that pilgrimage and tourism share some structural similarities, where tourists, not unlike pilgrims, are searching for quasi-religious authenticity, truth, and self-actualisation through participating in the ‘ritual’ of sightseeing and sacralising tourist attractions and places - or ‘shrines of modernity’ as MacCannell (1976) puts it. Thus, when tourists travel they, like pilgrims, separate themselves from ordinary life, enter a realm of ‘non-ordinary flotation’ (Jafari, 1987) or a state of hyperreality (Eco, 1983; Holmberg, 1993), experience a non-ordinary sacred ‘high’ (Graburn, 1989), and then return back to their profane life - having had experiences akin to Turner’s (1973) ideas of liminality and communitas in the context of religiously motivated pilgrimage. At the same time, it can be difficult to determine who is a pilgrim and who is a tourist. This was a problem in Chaucer’s **Canterbury Tales**, and it is a problem today, especially when pilgrims and tourists often use the same transportation and hospitality infrastructure and at times seemingly behave the same (Olsen, 2010). As Gupta (1991: 91) notes:

*apart from the devotional aspect, looked at from the broader point of view, pilgrimage involves sightseeing, traveling, visiting different places and, in some cases, voyaging by air or sea, etc. and buying the local memorabilia, almost everything a tourist does.*

For these reasons, Hitrec (1990: 19) suggests that

*modern pilgrims should perhaps be treated as tourists rather than ‘true pilgrims,’ primarily because of the evident fact that religious tourism is combined with elements of ordinary (profane) tourism.*

Thus, the famous phrase: ‘a tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist’ (Turner and Turner, 1978: 20).

From a more practical viewpoint, however:

*tourism and its associated practices interact with religious life and the institutions of religion in virtually every corner of the world* (Bremer, 2005: 9260).
In fact, it is estimated that around 200–600 million people a year travel for religious purposes or visit a religious site or event during their travels, half of whom travel internationally (Jackowski, 2000; McKelvie, 2005; Timothy, 2011: 387). This growth in the religious tourism market has spurred scholars from a number of disciplines to study the interface of religion and tourism (e.g., Badone and Roseman, 2004; Coleman and Eade, 2004; Collins-Kreiner et al., 2006; Collins-Kreiner and Wall, 2015; Gladstone, 2005; Olsen, 2013b; Raj and Morpeth, 2007; Stausberg, 2011; Swatos and Tomasi, 2002; Timothy and Olsen, 2006a; Vukonić, 1996). Government officials and tourism promoters have also noted this increase in the religious travel market, particularly after World War II (Lloyd, 1998), and have begun to commodify religious sites and ceremonies, marketing them - usually without permission of the owning and operating religious organization - to tourists at multiple scales as multi-use cultural and historical resources that simultaneously reach the educational, religious, heritage, and leisure markets (Olsen, 2003). Indeed, tourism promoters, as well as tourism researchers, tend to define religious tourists in two ways. The first way includes ‘those whose impetus to travel combines both religious (dominant) and secular (secondary) motives,’ whereas the second way involves anyone who ‘visits a sacred site during their journeys to other attractions and destinations’ (Timothy and Olsen, 2006b: 272). As such, from a tourism industry perspective, pilgrimage is just another tourism niche market, with pilgrims being a type of tourist who makes visits to religious and sacred sites. However, there are notable sectors of the tourism and hospitality industries that cater specifically to the religious needs of travelers (e.g., Huntley and Barnes-Reid, 2003; Ioannides and Cohen Ioannides, 2002; Henderson, 2010; Olsen, 2010; Weidenfeld, 2006; Weidenfeld and Ron, 2008). This view of pilgrims as tourists and pilgrimage as a form of tourism, of course, differs from those who take a demand-side and / or religious perspective in defining pilgrimage based solely on religious motivation (see Olsen, 2010; Timothy and Olsen 2006b).

The interest by government and tourism officials in directing tourist visitation towards religious sites in particular has resulted in these sites exhibiting a ‘simultaneity of places’ (Bremer, 2006: 25) where parallel geographies of religion and tourism intersect and overlap. This hybridization of religious and tourism space ‘blurs the lines’, so to speak, between pilgrimage and tourism and the pilgrim and the tourist (Kaelber, 2006). This ‘blurring of the lines’ can be problematic for religious faiths that view certain sacred spaces as taboo to the general public; where only adherents or worthy initiates are able to enter. This can be manifested at different scales, ranging from entire cities such as Mecca to much smaller areas such as sanctuaries at Roman Catholic churches (Olsen, 2010). As well, at some religious sites casual tourists have begun to outnumber devout religious believers (Winter and Gasson, 1996; Shackley, 2001a). In these instances, too many tourists not only damage the aesthetics and ambiance of sacred sites - or their ‘sense of place’ (Shackley, 2001a) - due to noise pollution, but also impact the site physically through general wear and tear / erosion and accidental damage, microclimatic change, vandalism / graffiti and theft (Olsen, 2006a; Shackley, 2001a; Woodward, 2004).

At the same time, this ‘blurring’ might be seen in a positive light if religious faiths use their religious sites to meet outreach, pastoral care or proselytization goals (Olsen, 2011). For example, the Roman Catholic Church use their religious sites to reach out to both Catholic and non-Catholic travellers who are ‘on the move’ (Vukonić, 2000). During the 19th Century the Community of Shakers in North America encouraged tourists to visit their communities in an attempt to gain new converts (Sprigg, 1980), and presently, leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints use their historical and religious sites for both proselytizing and pastoral purposes (Bremer, 2001; Hudman and Jackson, 1992; Mitchell, 2001; Olsen 2006b, 2009, 2012a, 2012b, 2013a; Olsen and Timothy 2002). In these instances religious sites are enthusiastically opened to tourists in order to meet these organizational goals. As well, religious sites might be opened to tourists because of the need for tourism receipts - whether gained through voluntary donations or charging an entrance fee - particularly if religious site managers are expected to raise money in order to maintain the site’s facilities and pay for other mundane operational costs (Olsen, 2006a, 2008). Therefore, religious authorities may actively work with government and tourism officials, where collaboration is often seen as a win-win situation for all parties: government and tourism officials see a boost in tourism revenues and local economies through direct tourism expenditures and tourism-related taxes while the extra promotion gets more visitors to religious sites (Tilson, 2001, 2005).
As such, the increasing demand by the tourism industry to include religious sites and ceremonies in their competitive marketing efforts, the growing numbers of tourists who visit these sites, the interest by some faith organizations to increase tourist visitation to their sacred sites, whether to meet organizational or monetary goals, and the theoretical merging of pilgrimage and tourism and the pilgrim and the tourist, have metaphorically and literally ‘opened up’ ritual journeys to a wide range of mobilities and possibilities and raises questions pertaining to both what constitutes a ritual journey and who is a pilgrim.

The Martyrs’ Shrine

To illustrate some of the above discussion, attention is now turned to an example of a site in North America that exemplifies this ‘opening up’ of ritual journeys to become more inclusive regarding immigrant and diasporic communities and tourism. The discussion here of the case study, the Martyrs’ Shrine in Midland, Ontario, Canada, is based on historical sources as well as interviews and observation done by the author at the Shrine and the surrounding area in 2002, 2004 and 2012.

The Martyrs’ Shrine is located about a two hour drive north of Toronto, Ontario. The Shrine was built in 1926 to honour Jesuit missionaries who were killed as they attempted to promote Christianity to the Wendat (Huron) indigenous population during the 1600s. The first Jesuit missionaries, led by Father Jean de Brébeuf, came to Wendake (sometimes referred to in history books as Huronia), as this area of modern Ontario was known, in 1626 to preach to the Wendat population. As missionary efforts produced modest yet promising results, additional Jesuit priests were sent to the area. In 1639 Father Jerome Lalemant, the new Jesuit superior of the region, began construction on a permanent place of residence from which missionary activities would be conducted. A large fortified village was constructed with large stone and wooden walls, and included a hospital, a blacksmith shop, a European farm and numerous other buildings to house the Jesuits, their helpers, and visiting Wendat. Thus, Sainte-Marie, or the ‘Abode of Peace’ (Cranston, 1997: 31), was founded and became the center of Jesuit missionary work in this area.

During the 1640s there was continual warfare between the Wendat and the Iroquois nations, and in 1649 the Wendat were overrun and were forced to migrate from the area. During this decade-long war, six Jesuit priests and two donnés or lay assistants were killed (three in present-day New York, USA), some in brutal fashion, and in later years these were referred to collectively as the ‘North American Martyrs’ (Anderson, 2013). Soon after the deaths of these priests and donnés the decision was made by the remaining Jesuits to leave Wendake and joined a group of Wendat on Chimnissing Island, before migrating in 1650 to Lower Canada (modern-day Quebec), but, not before burning Saint-Marie to the ground so the site would not fall into the hands of the Iroquois (Anderson, 2013; Cranston, 1997; de Brébeuf, 1993; Delaney and Nicholls, 1989; Macdougall, 1992; Shaw, 1999).

It was not until 1844 that members of the Jesuit Order returned to Huronia. The original site of Sainte-Marie was discovered immediately but the Jesuits could not purchase and excavate the site because of ownership issues. In addition, sites of the martyrdom of the Jesuit martyrs and other Jesuit mission sites were sought out. A wooden shrine was built in 1906-1907 on the site thought to be the place of the martyrdom of Brébeuf and the other Jesuit priests (called Martyrs’ Hill), which served as a site of devotion to all ‘Canadian martyrs’ (i.e., the Jesuit priests that died in the service of the faith). However, in 1925 the Martyrs’ Hill shrine was dismantled as the historical authenticity of the location was questioned and because the site was unsuitable for pilgrimage, due to its distance from the railway and its inadequate water supply (Delaney and Nicholls, 1989). During this same year, construction on the present shrine began, its location just northeast of the original Sainte-Marie site. Construction of this shrine took only nine months to complete and was dedicated to St. Joseph, the Patron Saint of Canada and Patron Saint of the Jesuit Mission to the Hurons (1634-1650) on June 25, 1926.

During the next few decades the Shrine grew into a popular pilgrimage destination. This came about because of the canonization of the eight Jesuit martyrs in Rome in 1930. After this canonization, the Shrine saw a surge in attendance, and in order to accommodate the needs of these pilgrims the inn that had originally been built beside the Shrine was enlarged, a series of pageants were created and performed, religious retreats at the Shrine were organized, a gift shop was opened, and a newsletter - The Martyrs’ Shrine Message - was started to keep pilgrims informed of Shrine events and to catalogue the healings and miracles that were taking place at the Shrine. This interest in the Martyrs’ Shrine also stimulated a number of archeological projects related
Figure 1: Photo of Martyrs’ Shrine in Midland, Ontario (used by permission of the Martyr’s Shrine Archives)

Figure 2. Map Showing the Location of Martyrs’ Shrine.
to the graves of the martyrs and their site of martyrdom. Not only was the Huron village St. Ignace, where Lalemant and Brébeuf martyred, found and excavated, but excavation work also began on the site of Saint-Marie, which had finally been obtained by the Jesuits in the 1930s (Anderson, 2013; Shaw, 1999; Gordon 2004).

In the early 1960s there were discussions between the Jesuits and the Provincial Government of Ontario regarding the reconstruction of Saint Marie, where the Provincial Government would pay for the reconstruction and then take over Sainte-Marie as a heritage tourism attraction. These discussions came about in part because of the realization by both parties that the story of the North American Martyrs was part of a common Canadian heritage. To the Jesuits, the story of the Martyrs needed to be shared with the broader public, but only the Province had the money to reconstruct Sainte-Marie. For the Government of Ontario, this was an effort to preserve an important part of Ontario’s history and also would improve tourism to the area (Delaney and Nicholls, 1989; Shaw, 1999; Gordon 2004). The Jesuits were initially reluctant to give up this important historical site to secular interests, and the Government of Ontario had concerns over the financial and political risks of such a reconstruction project. However, in 1963 the Jesuits and the Government of Ontario entered into an agreement, with Saint-Marie being leased to the Government for 99 years at the cost of one dollar. The site (named Sainte-Marie among the Hurons) opened to the public in 1968, and today serves as a popular heritage tourism attraction, complete with 25 reconstructed buildings, costumed first-person interpreters, a themed interpretive museum, a restaurant, a gift shop, and a number of educational programs for visitors, related to fire-starting, historic clothing and medicine, Native games and storytelling, historic cooking, quill pen writing and the making of corn husk dolls (see http://www.saintemarieamongthehurons.on.ca/sm/index.htm).

During, and after World War II the Shrine began to subtly change its focus from honouring the sacrifice of the North American Martyrs. According to one interviewee, during World War II the Shrine was seen as ‘a symbol of hope and a home of peace’ by many Roman Catholics who would travel to the Shrine to pray for the end of the war. After World War II immigrants from European countries, such as Italy and Germany, but more particularly, eastern countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Croatia, would come to the Shrine to pray for the liberation of their homelands or family members who were living under communist rule. Pilgrimages by these Eastern European immigrant groups became a yearly occurrence and eventually they erected monuments on the Shrine grounds in memory of those who suffered persecution under communist rule. In the past two decades, other ethnic immigrant groups from regions such as South Asia, Southeast Asia, Latin America, and China have made pilgrimages to Martyrs’ Shrine to erect monuments for the religious and political martyrs as well as popular saints in their homeland (Anderson, 2013; Shaw, 1999). For example, Italian Catholics have built a Shrine to an Italian Jesuit Missionary Fr. Giuseppe Bressani who lived with the Wendat in the 17th century but who was not one of the North American martyrs, Portuguese Catholics have built a shrine to Fatima, Tamil Catholics have built a shrine to Our Lady of Mudhu, and the Jesuit order has built shrines to honour St. Joseph and other prominent figures in Jesuit history.

At the same time, the Martyrs’ Shrine also became the most popular tourist attraction in the Midland, Ontario area, attracting over 100,000 visitors a year starting in the 1990s. However, even though the site is located in a highly popular recreational area, only an estimated 10% of visitors to the Shrine are classified as ‘tourists’. As well, visitation to the Shrine is highly seasonal. This occurs in part because the Shrine was built so quickly that no heating facilities were installed. As such, the Shrine is only open from May-September / October, and therefore, the majority of visitors come to the Shrine in the summer months with very few visiting in the winter months. However, while tourists make up a small percentage of those who visit the site, the management at Martyrs’ Shrine has long been involved in promoting the site to tourists.

For example, in 1995 a tourism consortium in the Midland area was formed, in which hotels and stakeholders in the recreation and cultural heritage tourism market joined forces to promote tourism to the Midland area generally and to the specific tourism attractions within the region. The managers of Martyrs’ Shrine readily agreed to join this consortium. While many religious organizations are concerned with secular interests in their sacred sites (Olsen, 2003, 2006b), as a self-sustaining shrine the managers here were interested in increasing revenue through gate receipts via tourism. As well, based on the outcome of Vatican II, managers of Catholic religious sites were encouraged to both open their sites to non-Catholics as
a part of a program of outreach as well as to interact more fully with the tourism economic sector to ensure that tourism was developed in an ethical and sustainable way (Vukonić, 1996, 2006; Olsen, 2010). This was made clear in an official document entitled The Shrine (Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, 1999) in which Catholic shrines are considered ‘a meeting place of all humanity’. As such, the managers at Martyrs’ Shrine have made visitation more inclusive, inviting non-adherents to visit the site to gaze at and possibly participate in the worship rituals.

In order to cater to the needs of visitors the managers of the site have over the years built a café, a gift shop, the Martyrs’ Hall Museum and Education Center, the Lalande Hostel, and more recently have begun to offer guided tours of the Shrine and its grounds, provide links from their website (www.martyrs-shrine.com) to surrounding accommodations and recreational / tourism attractions, offer a ‘Walk where they walked’ day program run jointly by the Martyrs’ Shrine and Saint-Marie Among the Hurons, and have created very detailed maps of a new pilgrimage path that leads from the city of Barrie to the Martyrs’ Shrine for those who wish to make a walking pilgrimage to the site (see http://martyrs-shrine.com/visit-us/pilgrim-route-to-martyrs-shrine/). This pilgrim path takes travellers past the site of The Mission of St. Ignace II, the site of the martyrdom of two of the North American martyrs, Jean de Brébeuf and Gabriel Lallement, and also follows traditional Wendat trails, allowing the descendants of the Wendat to make a connection with their ancestors. In addition, because of the emphasis on commemorating martyrs from various ethnic groups, there are special ‘cultural pilgrimages’ where each weekend is dedicated to a specific ethnic group (Anderson, 2013). So, for example, one weekend during the summer months would be dedicated to ‘Korean pilgrimage,’ while the following week might involve two smaller cultural pilgrimages, such as a ‘Chinese pilgrimage’ and an ‘Indian/Pakistan pilgrimage’ (http://martyrs-shrine.com/events-calendar/).

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to consider the inclusive nature of ritual journeys in North America. The religious landscape of North America is unique and quite diverse with a large variety of human and natural spaces marked as sacred by Roman Catholics, Protestants, Mormons, Muslims, Hindus, Indigenous peoples, and members of other faiths which are subject to either formal or informal pilgrimage-like travel. Particularly within a North American context there has been a conflating of pilgrimage-like travel with tourism, with the term ‘pilgrimage’ being used to describe the visits of people to sites of historical, political and / or culture importance (Campo, 1998). However, because the practice of pilgrimage and ritual travel is not as pervasive as in Europe and Asia, scholars have tended to ignore ritual travel and sacred space in the context of North America.

In this paper the author has attempted to rectify this in part by looking at how ritual journeys in North America have become more inclusive over time, partly because of the transplanting of pilgrimage traditions to North America by immigrant and diasporic groups and partly because of the rise of tourism to religious sites and sacred spaces. This ‘blurring of the lines’ between religious and tourism space has in many cases ‘opened up’ religious sites in North America to new types of visitors and new types of interpretations, as governments, tourism officials, and religious stakeholders work together to increase visitation to religious sites. Of course, in North America there are many examples of religious sites where ritual journeys have become more inclusive. One example was discussed in this paper - Martyrs’ Shrine in Midland, Ontario - to show how ritual journeys to this site have become more inclusive over time. Future research on ritual journeys can focus on additional case studies of sacred sites that also exhibit this type of inclusiveness. At the same time, more research on ritual journeys in a North American context are needed, both in terms of how pilgrimage ‘works’ in North America as well as how pilgrimage and ritual journeys in North America fit within the overall theoretical frameworks academics have developed regarding pilgrimage and ritual journeys.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the two anonymous reviewers for their comments on this paper. Also, I am indebted to Steve Catlin, Deputy Curator at the Martyrs’ Shrine for his comments on this paper, and grateful to the Martyrs’ Shrine Archive for the photo of the Shrine included in this paper.
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