# Luther and the Trajectories of Western Pilgrimage

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In 'Luther and the Trajectories of Western Pilgrimage,' Matthew R. Anderson asserts that after his long trek from Erfurt in 1510-1511, monk and Protestant reformer Martin Luther's negative remembrances of Rome became one of the catalysts for his influential critique of pilgrimage. Luther's fear of social unrest, Protestant theological attacks on the doctrines of merit, and Luther's own personality solidified his antipathy to the practice. The Reformation led to the near-demise of pilgrimage in Protestant areas and the disruption of travel to those shrines that had an international draw. Because of this temporary eclipse, the rebirth of a form of international travel in the Romantic era that emphasized individualism, experience, and sentiment led to the coming of age of tourism, pilgrimage's transformation in Catholic territories, and the wide variety of contemporary practices now referred to as pilgrimage.

**Key Words**: pilgrimage, history of pilgrimage, Christian pilgrimage, Martin Luther, reformation, protestant, Lutheran, Catholicism, critique of pilgrimage, Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation, Smalcald Articles, shrines, merit, landscape, Romanticism, Lutherweg, 95 Theses, indulgences

**Figure 1 : Young Monk Luther**



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Photo by Author

## Introduction: Luther the pilgrim

Martin Luther, the great Protestant reformer, began the year 1511 as an unimportant Catholic monk on pilgrimage. When he crested the hills north of Rome, he was nearing the end of a walk from Erfurt to the Holy See that had routed him and his companion across the Bohemian plains, over the Alps, and down the spine of Italy. Years later he told dinner guests that at that moment he fell to his knees, raised his hands, and uttered the words 'Hail to thee, O holy Rome!' By that autumn, Luther would have his doctorate and be permanently transferred to the new university of Wittenberg. There he would take up the teaching and public disputations that would lead to the events now known as the Protestant Reformation. Within ten years Luther would be placed under an imperial ban, tantamount to a death sentence, at the behest of the same city he was, at that moment, blessing from his knees.[1]

Luther and another young monk had been sent to Rome by Luther's father-confessor, Staupitz, to intercede with the curia for a ruling on a matter troubling the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt. That, at least, was the official reason. There is some evidence

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1. An early form of this paper was given at the 2016 Annual Symposium for Pilgrimage Studies at the College of William and Mary, Williamsburg VA. That presentation was supported in part by funds from the Concordia University Part-Time Faculty Association.

to suggest that Staupitz, seeing in Luther a great intellect and emotional drive, but someone also not always easy to live with in community life, had chosen Luther in particular for the months-long walk in hopes that the journey might blunt some of his rough edges. If so, it didn't work.[2]

Once he was in Rome, Luther's own motives were those of a pilgrim. He prayed at the spots where the apostles were said to have been martyred. A later, disputed, story relates that when Luther ascended the stairs of the *Scala Santa* on his knees to earn a plenary indulgence for his grandfather, he uttered the words, 'who knows whether it is true?'[3] This is part of Luther's later recollection, subject perhaps to the reinterpretation of the past that is characteristic of those forced by circumstance to make such a radical break with it.[4] Whatever his thoughts at the time, there is little question that the young pilgrim actually did ascend the stairs on his knees. Being the repository of the bones of both Saint Peter and Saint Paul, between them the founding fathers of Catholicism, Rome was only surpassed by the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem as a pilgrim's dream. Almost every street of the so-called Eternal City was a treasure-trove of the surplus merit that could ease one's sojourn both in the flesh and in the life to come.

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2. Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: American Edition* (55 vols; ed. J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehman; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955-86), hereafter *LW*, 54:30: "Three times have I been excommunicated. The first time was by Dr. Staupitz, who absolved me from the observance and rule of the Augustinian Order so that, if the pope pressed him to imprison me or command me to be silent, he could excuse himself." This took place in October 1518.

3. Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation 1483-1521* (transl. J. L. Schaaf; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985), 103.

4. "To overstate the case slightly, if Martin Luther looks back on his 'pre-Reformation' period, he does so with the sense of being right to have left this earlier phase behind. There is thus at least a possibility that he, like other converts, tended to paint his past in the darkest possible colours in order to bathe his present life in that much more light. It is possible that during his actual time in the monastery he did not perceive medieval piety as negatively as he expressed later. Perhaps his development originally was not at all in opposition to the late medieval world of piety, but he instead utilized the helpful aspects that it offered. Methodologically, one must then ask whether the later accounts, particularly when they are stirring, really correspond to the earlier course of events, or did Luther project his later understandings on them?" Volker Leppin, "Martin Luther, Reconsidered for 2017," *Lutheran Quarterly* 22/4 (2008): 376-77.

Although he was heir to an already-long and nuanced critique of pilgrimage,[5] and was not as naïve as later accounts have suggested,[6] Luther travelled to Rome carrying many of the usual expectations of a pilgrim.

> *My chief concern when I departed for Rome,' he is reported to have said, 'was that I might make a full confession from my youth up and might become pious…[yet] In Rome I encountered the most unlearned men. Dear God, what would the cardinals be expected to know when they were so overloaded with business and political affairs?*[7]

It was as a result of this journey that his evaluation of the Holy City, and of pilgrimage in general, changed dramatically. In 1538, near the end of his life, he wrote of the practice:

> *Why would one neglect one's own children, God's Word, spouse and child etc., which are necessary and commanded, and run after unnecessary, uncertain, harmful, demonic apparitions?* '[8]

European pilgrimage was already in a great deal of flux at the time Luther started his journey; pilgrimage was given the *coup de grâce* in much of northern Europe in part due to Luther's negative recollections of it.

In order to explore the effects of Luther's experience of pilgrimage in Rome in 1511, I will first sketch an outline of some of the influences that were already changing European pilgrimage, and which the Reformation simply focused and strengthened. My argument is that Luther's negative experience of pilgrimage became the catalyst for a sustained critique.

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5. As a pilgrim who was also a monk, Luther embodied the tensions of late medieval pilgrimage, between external Christian pilgrimage and the "internal" pilgrimage of monastic life. See Dee Dyas, "Medieval Patterns of Pilgrimage: A Mirror for Today?" in *Explorations in a Christian Theology of Pilgrimage* (ed. Craig Bartholomew and Fred Hughes; Farnham: Ashgate, 2004), 95.

6. For a criticism of simplistic "before-and-after" treatments of Luther, see Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, "What has Erfurt to do with Rome? Ecumenism as Pilgrimage," *Lutheran Forum* 45/1 (Spring 2011): 2. Note that in 2010, Hinlicky Wilson and her spouse walked Luther's route from Erfurt to Rome as a 500th-anniversary ecumenical and academic project.

7. *LW* 54:237.

8. Martin Luther, "The Smalcald Articles, 1538," in *The Annotated Luther, Volume 2: Word and Faith* (ed. Kirsi Stjerna; transl. Kurt K. Hendel; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 434.

In particular, Luther's fear of social unrest, and his and other Reformers' theological attacks on the doctrines of merit led to the near-erasure of pilgrimage in Protestant areas. Because of the wars that followed in the wake of the Reformation, there was a disruption of pilgrimage to international shrines. The forms of travel that arose in the Romantic era were significantly different, anticipating the age of tourism by being more clearly commercial, and emphasizing individualism, experience, and sentiment.[9]

## The Context of Pilgrimage at the Time of the Protestant Reformation

There is no shortage of studies of European religious and intellectual life on the eve of the Reformations, a term used to describe the Protestant, Catholic, and Radical moves to reform Church doctrine and practice, and the societal changes that spilled out from them.[10] It is necessary here only to sketch an outline of where pilgrimage takes its somewhat less-well examined place.[11]

Especially in medieval times, the lure of novelty, the suspicion that many who took pilgrims' vows were escaping something, and the fact that an extended pilgrimage might mean the abdication of responsibilities at home, made pilgrimage suspect in the minds of many. Pilgrimage had long been critiqued as a temptation to sin. Felix Fabri, a Dominican who chronicled his pilgrimages to Palestine in the half-century before Luther, and who undertook his second pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1483, the year Luther was born, counselled that the wary pilgrim should return to ship in the evening, or risk immoral temptations of all sorts, dangers to soul as well as body.[12] Laypeople ridiculed the stock figure of the begging monk, on his way to some shrine or other, but mostly intent on living off the 'real' work of the poor, and warned against the
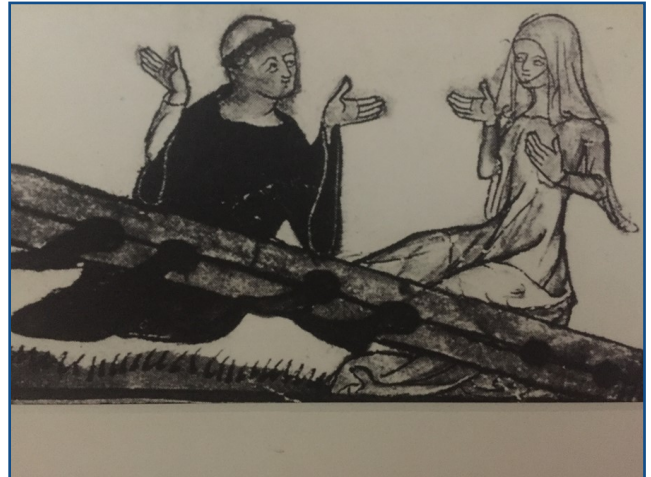


**Figure 2 : Monk and Nun in Stocks**

Photo by Author:

ways in which women who went on pilgrimage might end up seduced by, or worse, contributing to, the immorality often charged against pilgrimage.[13] Chaucer's wife of Bath is such an enduring character precisely because she exaggerates and embodies the well-known stereotype of the pilgrim as a sensuous pleasure-seeker:

> *In felaweshipe wel koude she laughe and carpe.*
> *Of remedies of love she knew per chaunce, For*
> *she koude of that art the olde daunce.*[14]

The leaders of religious orders repeatedly forbade monks from making pilgrimage at all, pointing them rather toward the life of sedentary prayer and reflection.

There was a lively criticism of pilgrimage, even after it came under the control of official church structures. So, in Thomas à Kempis' meditation on the Eucharist, repeating a criticism of pilgrimage dating back to the beginning: 'Many run to divers places to visit the memorials of saints departed . . . But behold, thou art thyself here present with me on thine altar.'[15]    An

9. Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (2nd ed.; ed. H. Hardy; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

10. James D. Tracy, *Europe's Reformations, 1450-1650* (N. Y.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999).

11. Note the comprehensive essays by Dee Dyas on medieval pilgrimage, "Medieval Patterns of Pilgrimage" and by Graham Tomlin on Protestant pilgrimage, "Protestants and Pilgrimage," in *Explorations in a Christian Theology of Pilgrimage* (ed. C. Bartholemew and F. Hughes; Farnham: Ashgate, 2004), 110-125. See also George Greenia's article in this present issue.

12. Felix Fabri, Vol 7/8, *The Book of the Wanderings of Brother Felix Fabri, in The Library of the Palestine Pilgrim Text Society* (N. Y.: AMS, 1971; reprint of 1892 edition), 163.

13. See Dyas, "Medieval Patterns of Pilgrimage," 96; J. G. Davies, *Pilgrimage Yesterday and Today: Why? Where? How?* (London: SCM, 1988), 81; Fabri, *Book of the Wanderings*, VII:163; *LW* 54:422; Jonathan Sumption, *The Age of Pilgrimage: The Medieval Journey to God* (Mahwah: Hidden Spring, 2003), 369.

14. Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales,* "General Prologue," lines 475-478. Vincent F. Hopper, *Chaucer's Canterbury Tales: An Interlinear Translation* (Hauppauge: Barron's, 1970), 31.

15. Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ. Book IV, Concerning the Sacrament: VIII* (transl. John H. Parker; Oxford: James Burns, 1845).
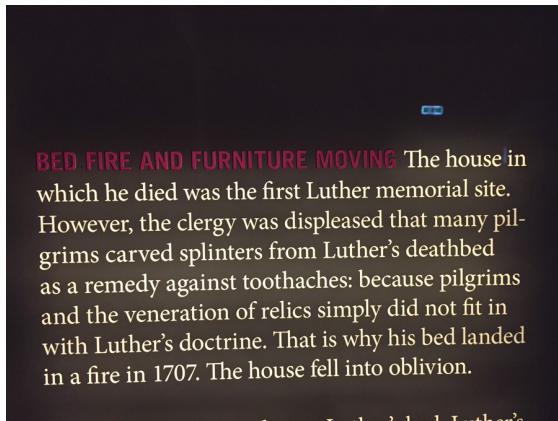
**Figure 3 : Sign on Luther's bed, Eisleben**



Photo by Author:

economic and social critique of all forms of churchly abuse and corruption focused on the specific and often commercial activity surrounding shrines and pilgrimages (a critique sharpened by Protestants, but in fact levelled at popular pilgrimage by popes and religious orders for centuries). Pilgrimage in the late medieval period sometimes represented an expression of faith free from the official programs of priest and diocese. This kind of piety may in some cases have evolved into an allegiance either to the so-called magisterial Reformers (Luther, Calvin, Bucer, etc.), or to the left-wing radical reformation, which was more socially ambitious.[16] Our picture of medieval Christian pilgrimage needs to acknowledge a heterodox and complex social, political, and religious, phenomenon. It was also, long before 1517, a practice suffering from the weight of its own internal problems.[17]

From about 1520, in those territories where the Protestants held control, official pilgrimage ceased. Despite this, the very fact of its inclusion on lists of forbidden activities implies its unofficial survival in those areas, at least for a time.[18] In Catholic lands, despite a long and healthy tradition of critique of

pilgrimage and its problems, many shrines, including Santiago, maintained or even increased their popularity, at least for a century. It was the multiple shocks of the Reformations and, even more, the Enlightenment, that led to their later vicissitudes.[19] The fate of pilgrimage both illustrates and helps to explain the cultural and religious changes that were sweeping Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

## Pilgrimage and the Reformers

*Pilgrimage was rarely the specific target of the Protestant Reformers. Rather, it tended to be included in a grab-bag category of outlawed 'popery.' There is little specific attention paid to pilgrimage in the writings of Luther, Bucer, Zwingli, or others, and no sustained discussion of its specific virtues or faults. Johannes Bugenhagen, pastor at Wittenberg and a close associate of Luther's, is typical of what became the Protestant response to pilgrimage: 'If God would once graciously open our eyes we would surely be ashamed that we all want to be called Christians from our Lord Jesus Christ and yet do not trust with our hearts in Jesus Christ but in cowls, tonsures, seasonal readings, rosaries, monastic orders, St. James pilgrimages, St. Anne's brotherhood, and everything we can accomplish.*[20]

In his 1520 *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation,* Luther recommends against pilgrimage 'not because pilgrimages are bad, but because they are ill-advised at this time.'[21] He goes on to say: 'To eradicate such false, seductive faith from the minds of simple Christian people and to restore a right understanding of good works, all pilgrimages should be dropped.'[22] In most of his early writings, Luther appears somewhat neutral to pilgrimage. His critique was practical and theological: pilgrimages were 'neither commanded nor necessary,'[23] and they caused pilgrims to ignore their God-given responsibilities at home.[24]

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16. R. W. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

17. Sumption notes that, "In the last years of the fifteenth century German and Italian princes were renowned for the unmatched ostentation which surrounded their pilgrimages." *The Age of Pilgrimage*, 382.

18. A display at the museum in Eisleben at Luther's "death house" viewed by the author in 2016 notes that local authorities had to restrict access to Luther's death bed, because so many of his followers were scraping shavings from the wood beneath where the Reformer died, in hopes such shavings would help with cures for toothaches and other ailments.

19. Sumption, *The Age of Pilgrimage*, 438.

20. Matthew R. Anderson, "Post-Reformation Christian Pilgrimage and the Globalization of Sentiment," *Theoforum* 48/1 (2018): n.p. Quote is from: "Concerning the Christian Faith and Proper Good Works against the False Faith and Devised Good Works," in Johannes Bugenhagen, *Selected Writings*, Vol I and II (Transl. K.K. Hendel; Minneapolis: Augsburg-Fortress, 2015), 201.

21. *LW* 44:170.

22. *LW* 44:171.

23. Luther, "The Smalcald Articles," 434.

24. "[The pilgrim] permits his wife and child, or his neighbor at any rate, to suffer want back home." *LW* 44:170.

**Figure 4 : Young monk Luther prepares to tame papal dragon**



Photo by Author

As with so much else,[25] Luther's opinions about the practice hardened and became more vitriolic as the Reformation progressed. With his own unsuccessful pilgrimage to Rome perhaps in mind, he soon lumped all acts of pilgrimage in with the kinds of useless gimmickry that he accused Roman authorities of using to defraud the innocent of their time and money. In so doing he was tapping into a long-time populist (and in his case, specifically German) tradition of criticism. As the Reformation developed, Luther was very much portrayed in the popular mind as the German underdog. [26]

Theologically, the Reformers considered it improper for the church to pretend to sell at pilgrimage shrines what was only God's to give, and what God freely gave in the gospel - forgiveness of sins to all the repentant.[27]  Luther opposed pilgrimage as an 'act' of Christians, a reaching after self-righteousness instead of relying on the free gift of God's grace emphasized in the slogan *sola gratia*.

Perhaps the most seminal of Luther's theological writings was his 1520 tract *On the Freedom of the Christian*. In it he makes a characteristically paradoxical assertion: 'The Christian is the completely imprisoned slave of all, subject to all, and the Christian is the completely free lord of all, master of all.' The outworking of this statement in terms of pilgrimage helps to illustrate why Luther's thought so affected the practice. The idea that the Christian is completely free, including - as Luther certainly meant - a freedom from any control of salvation by church or pope, is an explicit theological critique of pilgrimages and of the spiritual economy that regulated them.

Specifically, it was the sophisticated doctrine of the church's 'treasury of merit' that Luther famously attacked in his 1517 Ninety-Five Theses, and which brought swift attention, and eventually retribution, from the church hierarchy. Although Luther's name is forever attached to the theses, contemporary scholarship has for some time maintained that the Reformer was not in fact stating anything new in his critiques. The profitable and administratively useful link between the church's control of penitence and God's punishment of sin had long been criticized by reforming elements of the church in the late Middle Ages.[28]

The church's 'treasury of merit' was essentially a sort of repository of righteousness. There, the pious Christian, lacking his or her own merits for reasons of the kinds of acts, thoughts, attitudes and tendencies that might lead to confession, could - via the church's sacraments, confessions, indulgences, and acts such as pilgrimage - have access to the surplus merit of the many saints who had lived more virtuous lives and had gone before in the faith. As the holders of this 'surplus holiness,' popes and bishops had the ability to dispense forgiveness, expressed in years off of purgatory, for the consolation of the troubled Christian. Luther opposed this, writing that by making such claims the church was confusing its earthly role (the church under the cross) with its eschatological place (the so-called church triumphant). More importantly, it was usurping and pretending to be able to control the uncontrollable mercy and grace of God.

25. Luther's increasingly vicious and horrific rhetoric against the Jews being the worst such example.

26. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk.* See also Eric W. Gritsch, *A History of Lutheranism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002).

27. Bernt Hamm, *The Early Luther: Stages in a Reformation Reorientation* (transl. Martin J. Lohrmann; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 87.

28. Hamm, *The Early Luther*, 86

**Figure 5 : Demon swallowing peasant Erfurt**



Photo by Author

This theological stance theoretically had (and has) room for pilgrimage as an act of thankfulness, devotion, or prayer. But Luther had no inclination for such subtleties when it came to the so-called devilish acts of popery. After the break with the Pope became irrevocable, Luther was characteristically brusque in his denunciations of pilgrimage, especially to Rome:

> In former times saints made many pilgrimages to Rome, Jerusalem, and Compostella in order to make satisfaction for sins. Now however, we can go on true pilgrimages in faith . . .[29]

Even so, apart from a more sustained treatment in his 1520 treatise 'To the Nobility of the German Nation' and a revisiting of the theme in the 1538 Smalcald Articles, Luther's critiques are passing blasts and do not appear to be systematically thought-through.

Pilgrimages were first believed by Protestants to be dangerous before they were condemned as useless. Calvin's denunciations of pilgrimage are found, among other places, in the section of the Geneva *Ordinances* titled 'Superstitions.' For the Reformers, a superstition meant a practice that may have been efficacious and might exercise real power over the physical world but did so for the wrong reasons. On either side of the growing Catholic-Protestant divide, few doubted the power of the spiritual world to affect the physical and the devil and his demons were seen everywhere, including, notably, at shrines.[30]    Later, under the influence of the Enlightenment, a superstition came to mean a belief that was spurious, neither effective, nor containing meaning. The Reformers' theological division of the world into the spheres of church and society had begun the long and nuanced process of secularization that is often simplistically attributed only to them. Whatever its multiple sources, that secularization did mean a 'disenchantment'[31]   of a whole array of practices, persons, and places, including pilgrimage, that had previously been considered sacred.[32]

## Pilgrimage, Peasants, and the Subversive Body Politic

Although a populist, Luther had in common with the Catholic hierarchy and the princes, Lutheran or Catholic, a deep-seated fear of social unrest and revolution. His essentially supportive view of the governing authorities, and his distrust of popular movements, is well documented. He boasted that he had done more than anyone since Augustine to buttress the secular authorities vis-à-vis the church.[33]

Luther prided himself on his peacefulness, but was quick to invoke censure, and sometimes sword, upon others.[34]   His almost hysterically violent reaction to the 1525 Peasants' Revolt revealed his antipathy to those former allies like Thomas Müntzer, and to a lesser extent, Andraos Karlstadt, who began to take Luther's ideas beyond what he had intended, and to use them, together with a good deal of apocalyptic fear-mongering, in advocating the rising up of the lowest classes.

The extent to which Luther depended - and knew he depended - upon the support of the Saxon princes is evident from even a cursory reading of his 1520 essay *Address to the Christian Nobility*. In that tract, after a general introduction attacking the 'knavery and wickedness' of Rome and its policies, he sets out twenty-five specific requests of the governors. Two of them concern pilgrimage directly. Not surprisingly in a

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29. *LW* 54:238.

30. John M. Headley, "Luther and the Problem of Secularization," *JAAR* 40/1 (1987): 29.

31. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2007), 25-27. The term disenchantment was coined by Max Weber.

32. Headley, *Luther and Secularization*, 28, presents a nuanced explanation of how the Reformation both contributed to secularization but also attempted to "re-sacralize" aspects of the society of its day.

33. See his "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved," *LW* 46:95: "Indeed, I might boast here that not since the time of the apostles have the temporal sword and the temporal government been so clearly described or highly praised as by me."

34. Most infamously, the peasants of his own birth-area, and Jews, whose expulsion from Eisleben was one of his final "pastoral" commissions.

document that describes Rome's policies as 'shameless' and 'devilish' and its church officials as 'ignorant and wicked,' it is pilgrimage to Rome especially that Luther wants discouraged. In item twelve he asks that pilgrimages to Rome either be restricted and tested by parish priests, town councils, and princes, or banned outright. There is no evidence that such a 'testing' was ever implemented as a practical policy. In item twenty he asks that the 'chapels in forests and churches in fields' that have 'recently become the goal of pilgrimages' be destroyed as well.[35]

A combination of social uprising, anti-clericalism, and apocalyptic expectation featured as much in some late 15th-century pilgrimage shrine devotions (and the preachers attached to them) as it later did in the Reformation.[36] Rather than placing late medieval pilgrimage in opposition to the Protestant Reformation, by switching one's lens from theological to social effect, it is possible to see a certain continuity between the phenomena of pilgrimage and the Protestant challenges to church structures. By preaching against pilgrimage, Luther and Calvin were showing their essential social conservatism, while at the same time working against an opposing religious force, one that in fact competed for some of the same allegiances as did the Reformers.

## Conclusion: Pilgrimage's Fates Post-Luther

As I have written elsewhere,

*Medieval pilgrimage had been an historic form of international movement based on important shared narratives of miracles and saints, centred on specific locales, and operating according to a well-established and understood economy of trading prayers and offerings, under the sanction of the church, for the 'surplus holiness' of saints. Eventually, because of the initially disruptive impulse of the Reformations, and then under the pressure of its succeeding movements, tourism, another form of international movement, arose. Tourism was based on the commodification of experience and of sentiment, looked to national, heroic,*

*cultural or personal narratives, was attached to aesthetically pleasing or interesting landscapes which provoked sentiment, and usually exemplified the valuation of individual or of national identity; all of these altering the meanings of pilgrimage.*[37]

At least in theory, the Ascension had made Christ universal. The doctrine of an always-and-everywhere-available Messiah made believers' pilgrimage to any particular specific location problematic. Gregory of Nyssa, who travelled through the Holy Land on ecclesiastic business, wrote

*we derived only this much of profit from our travelling thither; namely that we came to know by being able to compare them, that our own places are far holier than those abroad* [in Jerusalem].[38]

That the resurrected Christ had replaced the Jerusalem Temple meant that from the very beginning, Christian pilgrimage vacillated between two extremes. One ideal was that of spiritual and internal pilgrimage in a world made universally holy, the other the ideal of physical pilgrimage to those places where the life of Christ or of the saints meant that God might be more accessible, or at least more understandable, there.[39]

The Protestant Reformers were heirs of the former tradition: they could profoundly distrust shrines, even to the point of forbidding the physical act of pilgrimage, yet without irony still use the metaphor of the Christian life as a pilgrimage to heaven. The advantage of the metaphor over the actual practice was that, as 'Luther saw it, the medieval pilgrimage industry was both fuelled by, and in turn fed, dissatisfaction with the local church,'[40] the very institution Luther was so concerned to strengthen. In The Smalcald Articles, published in 1538, Luther wrote: 'Let it be preached that they are unnecessary as well as dangerous, and then see where pilgrimages stand.'[41]

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35. Here Luther is contradicting his own claims that he wants no part of such destruction, claims made especially about Muntzer's actions, in Luther's 1524 "Letter to the Princes of Saxony Concerning the Rebellious Spirit": "It must be an evil spirit which has no other fruits than the destruction of churches and cloisters and the burning of images. The worst rascals on earth can do this." *LW* 40:52.

36. Sumption, *The Age of Pilgrimage*.

37. Anderson, *Post-Reformation Pilgrimage*, n.p.

38. Gregory of Nyssa, "On Pilgrimages," in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Vol V: Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic treatises* (ed. Philip Schaff, Henry Wace; N. Y.: Christian Literature Company, 1893), 383.

39. See Jenn Cianca's article in this issue.

40. Tomlin, "Protestants and Pilgrimage," 114.

41. The Latin text adds: "For in this way they will spontaneously perish." Luther, "The Smalcald Articles," 435.

Luther and the other Protestant Reformers changed pilgrimage in the following ways: a) they brought to bear a social critique of pilgrimage, emphasizing the practical responsibility of neighbour for neighbour and of pilgrim for family instead of the personal quest for holiness, or vow fulfilment; b) in an ongoing dialectic that existed from the beginning of Christian pilgrimage, the Reformation's critique reinforced what had already been happening, namely, a swing back to the idealized and spiritualized paradigm of pilgrimage (the so-called 'internal' pilgrimage) as opposed to its physical practice; c) they denigrated the role of saints as mediators, with a corresponding critique of pilgrimage and other devotional practices tied to the veneration of saints;[42] d) they distrusted (as did Catholic authorities) the social consequences of peasant movements not under the control of church or state; and e) perhaps most importantly, by setting up faith as a choice rather than what one was physically born into, they anticipated the ability to not make this choice, preparing society for the advance of secularisms in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Linked to this last factor are the ways in which, by denying the 'particularized holy' and thus the legitimacy of the shrines to which pilgrimages led, Luther and others eventually contributed to the erosion of the entire spiritual power and foundation of Western religious belief. The Protestant Reformers unwittingly set up the anti-spiritualism of the Enlightenment; the iconoclastic smashing of statues of Mary and the saints on the part of the radical Reformers, and their removal by Lutherans and others, becomes an intellectual negating of these figures, not because they were powerfully 'of the devil' or were considered idolatrous (the motives of the first Reformation iconoclasts) but because eventually they came to mean nothing and were considered symbols of backward, empty, and impotent suspicion. The ideological transition forced on western pilgrimage may thus be traced as follows: from anti-idols to anti-superstition to anti-religion. Luther even anticipated the development of secular tourism, which had always been sheltered under the form of pilgrimage, when he wrote, as an exception to his critique: 'if he [the potential pilgrim] wishes to



**Figure 6 : Lutherweg Signs on post**

Photo by Author

make the pilgrimage out of curiosity, to see other lands and cities, he may be allowed to do so.'[43] It is more than slightly ironic that in Erfurt and other parts of Saxony today, local churches and tourist authorities urge pilgrims to follow a 'Luther Way' walking path between towns of the Reformation.

The effects of the Reformation on European pilgrim practice were many and complex. The most obvious was the outright suppression of pilgrimages, especially post-Luther, in Germanic and Scandinavian Europe and, eventually, in the UK. Western Christian pilgrimage survived this Protestant disruption; not only did Catholic shrines briefly see increases in popularity, but many important new shrines such as Lourdes and Fatima arose in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[44] Catholic hierarchy, embattled by secularism and by the Third Republic in France, saw the new religiosity as usable proof of the church's ongoing role in public life. Despite the popular piety that undergirded them, these shrines, and the pilgrims who flocked - and flock - to them still, bear the unmistakable marks of modernity, including tourism and its attendant commercialization.[45]

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42. In the felicitous phrasing of Davies, *Pilgrimage Yesterday and Today,* 170-171: "Devotion to the saints did not commend itself to those who felt themselves freed from middlemen."

*43. LW* 44:171-72. Although he does not mention it, Luther was doubtless aware of, and had perhaps read, the popular *Mandeville's Travels*. See Sumption, *The Age of Pilgrimage,* 373.

44. Sumption, *The Age of Pilgrimage*, 438.

45. Suzanne K. Kaufmann, *Consuming Visions: Mass Culture and the Lourdes Shrine.* Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2005, 62.

In those lands where pilgrimage had been banned outright, the forms of travel that eventually replaced it bore the identifying marks of individualism, a search for authenticity, and often, a spiritualized view of nature characteristic not so much of the Protestant Reformation as of the Romantic movement. Of nineteenth-century Protestant pilgrims Charles Lock writes:

> To English Protestants may thus be ascribed a charge of 'aesthetic idolatry,' a preference for sites of solitude and prospects of beauty . . . That this was not entirely unconscious is suggested by the implicit desire to claim that Jesus himself was something of a Romantic wanderer.[46]

The over-arching importance of landscape in contemporary tourism dates from this time.

The late twentieth and early twenty-first century has witnessed the revival of many ancient pilgrimage routes, which are often resurrected as church outreach, as local tourist development, or as some combination of the two.[47] Websites for such trails may legitimate themselves by reference to medieval routes,[48] but typically feature beautiful landscapes, viewed from a distance. Ironically, the 'surplus of merit' sought by the medieval suppliant at the altar of the saints eventually became the surplus of feeling sought by the modern at the altar of landscape. Such complex and wide-ranging societal developments cannot be laid at the feet of any one individual, even one as pivotal as Luther. But if the idealistic young monk had not been such an unsuccessful pilgrim on his long journey from Erfurt to Rome in 1511, the history of European pilgrimage might have turned out very differently.

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46. Charles Lock, "Bowing Down to Wood and Stone: One Way to be a Pilgrim," in *Pilgrim Voices: Narrative and Authorship in Christian Pilgrimage* (ed. Simon Coleman and John Elsner; N. Y.: Berghan, 2003), 117.

47. See my article on the St. Olaf Way, in Norway, in this issue.

48. The 2018 opening of a website for the St. Thomas Way, from Swansea to Hereford UK, notes that it is "inspired by a real medieval pilgrimage." http://thomasway.ac.uk/explore-the-way/

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