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## Religious Pilgrimage: Experiencing Places, Objects and Events

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# Religious Pilgrimage: Experiencing Places, Objects and Events

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## Reverend Ruth Dowson

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This article explores the concept of the Eventization of Faith (Pfadenhauer, 2010) through application of three case studies, to identify learning that might be applied to a traditional pilgrimage destination, such as Jerusalem. This Holy City is held sacred by the three Abrahamic religions, and faith-based tourism is central both to the Holy Land and to the city of Jerusalem (Leppakari & Griffin, 2017).

This paper builds on research that identifies processes and models that provide insight into the developing concept of the Eventization of Faith. The work examines outcomes from three different perspectives:

The impact of traditional church-led pilgrimages to places in the Holy Land, on participants and their local church communities.

The successful eventization of the Lindisfarne Gospels as part of their release to Durham University in 2013, and the impact on local historical, cultural and religious identity and heritage (Dowson, 2019).

The shared pilgrimage experience of thousands of Christian women participating in the annual Cherish Conference in Leeds, Yorkshire, held in a secular event venue (Dowson, 2016).

In analysing these three case study examples, this paper aims to identify factors that might enhance our understanding of the concept of Eventization of Faith. Utilising face to face interviews and online survey results, the research focuses on the aspects of community, identity and authenticity. Events enable shared experiences in a faith context (Lee *et al.*, 2015), and so this research develops a model that captures and expresses approaches that might encourage pilgrimages to traditional destinations, through the medium of events, adding insight into the development of the academic concept of Eventization of Faith.

**Key Words:** Eventization of Faith, Jerusalem, Holy City, events, pilgrimage

## Introduction

This paper considers aspects of the developing concept of Eventization of Faith, an idea that has emerged from Pfadenhauer's initial research into the 2005 World Youth Day (2010), an international Roman Catholic event. This regularly occurring event was interpreted by Pfadenhauer as the appropriation by the Catholic Church of contemporary marketing tools. This approach built on the increasing popularity of events in society in order to grow the membership of the church, especially amongst the youth. In critically analysing this theory and building on our understanding of what Eventization of Faith might mean from a more nuanced and detailed perspective, this paper considers three different case studies:

- The impact of traditional church-led pilgrimages to places in the Holy Land, on participants and their local church communities;
- The successful eventization of the Lindisfarne Gospels as part of their release to Durham University in 2013, and the impact of local historical, cultural and religious identity and heritage (Dowson, 2019);
- The shared pilgrimage experience of thousands of Christian women participating in the annual Cherish Conference in Leeds, Yorkshire, held in a secular event venue (Dowson, 2016).

The research aims to explore how learning from the Eventization of Faith (Pfadenhauer, 2010), through spiritual and religious events, can be transferred to a

traditional pilgrimage destination, such as Jerusalem. This Holy City, held sacred by the three Abrahamic religions, is vital to faith-based tourism across the Holy Land and in the city of Jerusalem itself (Leppakari & Griffin, 2017).

In analysing these three examples, this investigation aims to identify factors that enhance our understanding of the concept of Eventization of Faith. Utilising face to face interviews and online survey results, the research focuses on the aspects of community, identity and authenticity. As events enable shared experiences in a faith context (Lee et al, 2015), this research develops thinking that captures and expresses approaches to encourage pilgrimage in traditional destinations, through the medium of events, adding insight into the development of the academic concept of Eventization of Faith.

### Eventization of Faith

The development of the concept of the Eventization of Faith stems from a growing trend across the globe (Dowson, 2018; Becci, Berhardt & Casanova, 2013; Pfadenhauer, 2010), as events encapsulate leisure activities and religious practices. The theory of Eventization of Faith includes historical religious festivals, in addition to the widespread promotion of sacred sites. In 2010, Pfadenhauer introduced the concept, having observed the introduction by the Catholic Church of large festival-like events for young people. Pfadenhauer concluded that their purpose was to recruit and retain faith adherents, and that these events form part of the marketing mix. The trend to include events within corporate marketing strategies is well-documented (Crowther & Donlan, 2011; Wood, 2009). In the secular world, experiential marketing (Berridge, 2007; Bowdin *et al.*, 2011) aims to engage with potential customers and persuade them to make a purchase (e.g. of a product or service), through enabling an immersive experience – which may or may not include the actual product. This value creation process applies equally to faith-based organisations, and many churches have embraced the introduction of regular and one-off events within their planned programmes of activity.

The term ‘Eventization of Faith’ is growing in use (Dowson 2018; Becci, Berhardt and Casanova, 2013), although many researchers of religious tourism and pilgrimage clearly demonstrate the role of events within contemporary practice without explicit reference to the concept (Belhassen, 2009; Duff, 2009; Levi & Kocher, 2012; Olsen, 2008; Platt & Ali-Knight,

2018; Ron, 2009; Ron & Timothy, 2019; Shepherd, 2018; Tamma & Sartori, 2017; Zhang et al, 2019).

Eventization of Faith and the extended use of churches for events may be demonstrated in any of the following ways:

- Surrounding a sacred object or space with events, to engage a range of stakeholders (such as the temporary release of the Lindisfarne Gospels from the British Library to Durham University in 2013);
- Hire of sacred spaces as event venues to commercial and charitable organisations as well as to individuals for personal events and celebrations - this includes the hire of churches and cathedrals as well as their associated buildings;
- Churches developing events activity programmes for their own church members and the local and wider community, in church premises and elsewhere;
- Thematic event development to follow the liturgical year, or for other purposes (for example at Christmas there are ‘Blue Christmas’ carol services for the bereaved, Christmas Tree Festivals, Christingle services, Crib services, Nativity processions, outdoor Nativity dramatisation and Nativity services, Candle-lit carol services, Carol concerts and other Christmas services, e.g. for schools).

This paper seeks to build on the current understanding of the concept through application to three different aspects: places, objects and events. In theological study, the concept of ‘thin places’ is well explored across a range of denominational perspectives and traditions (Balzer, 2007), with many such places becoming a destination for pilgrims, whilst religious objects and artefacts have been studied in the contexts of archaeology, museum and religious studies and history (Brown, 1993; Sadgrove, 2013). Religious events are relevant because they enable us to examine theology and motivations as well as rituals and practices (Dowson, 2014).

### Shared Experience, Identity and Community

The characteristics of an event bear consideration here, in enabling an understanding of religious pilgrimage through the lens of experiencing sacred places and objects. Events that provide access to these experiences, including religious events, aim to present a transformational, interactive encounter (Dowson & Lamond, 2017).

In common with religious events, researchers studying contemporary music festivals affirm that these also possess spiritual dimensions. Robinson observes the inherent mystification that sets the scene for 'ritualised performances and practices' (2016:107) in contemporary music festivals. She also recognises the growing element of the spectacle in festival culture, engaging participants in contributions to the creative production of the event, rather than simply observing as consumers. In this way, it is not only historical religious and ethnic festivals that promote cultures of 'belonging and unbelonging' (Gordziejko, 2015:74), building 'community identity' (Brettell, 1990:74). Traditional event studies researchers such as Getz (2012) argue that events contribute to cultural development and community building, within a unique shared experience. From an anthropological perspective, Turner's (1969) analysis of cultural and religious celebrations concluded that they produced shared understandings and common experiences.

### Authenticity

In a world dominated by popular cultural establishment supra-organisations such as Disney, the concept of authenticity can be critiqued in the light of 'insatiable consumerism' (Robinson, 2016:178) that has become evident in many contemporary music festivals, highlighting the spectacular, with 'a limitless demand for novelty and the somewhat unflattering human drive towards what Boorstin branded the 'synthetic happening'' (Robinson, 2016:178; Boorstin, 2012). In the 1960s, Boorstin presented an argument that in order to fill the burgeoning pages of newspapers, businesses and other organisations, including governments, were developing a raft of 'pseudo-events' chasing publicity and profit.

In the context of religious events, the concept of authenticity is explored here, in order to gain an awareness of the possibilities and, indeed, temptations of developing inauthentic activities in the religious and sacred spheres. With regard to pilgrimage and events of a religious nature, it is notable that Islamic tradition interprets authenticity of sources more strictly in comparison with the other Abrahamic religions. Islamic sources considered to be authentic would include primarily, The Qur'an, which maintains primacy over all other sources; and secondly, the Hadith (sayings of The Prophet) and Sunna (accounts of The Prophet's daily practices) (Sebag Montefiore, 2011). In contrast, sources such as other historical documents, translations or academic documents,

discussions and debates would not be acceptable as providing authentic evidence about Islam and its history, theology, traditions and practices.

Boorstin (2012) critiqued the American state and businesses for creating inauthentic occasions, in which to promote policies, products and messages. He called these 'pseudo-events' in a time before the overwhelming domination of leisure and business by what we now know as 'events'. For Boorstin, events were an occurrence, a happening, something that appeared in the news. His work is relevant in enabling a new critique of contemporary events, with application to current definitions and research trends. As events fill our daily lives both in secular and religious contexts, in what might be seen as the eventization of life as well as the Eventization of Faith, Boorstin's critique applies today. As critical events theory moves the study of events management beyond logistics, consideration of the nature of authenticity in religious and spiritual events becomes more relevant.

Influenced by the printing revolution that translated the Bible into languages other than classical Latin along with the politically democratic revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries, democratisation continued in the late 20th and early 21st centuries through widening participation in the events experiences available. Whereas previously, many events had been restricted to the rich and powerful, 2010 saw the introduction of 'Vodafone VIP' ([www.vodafone.co.uk/vip](http://www.vodafone.co.uk/vip)) whereby a mobile phone operator is offering event access to all its mobile phone customers. This provides a unique and individual experience at music festivals, the British Grand Prix and high-profile fashion events simply as a reward for continued mobile telephone custom, much like the points collected on a supermarket shopping trip.

Extending accessibility to the arts, Boorstin suggested, resulted in a lowering of standards to enable popular appreciation of the subject matter, from cinema to high art, and thereby reducing the authentic nature of the productions. The mid-19th century witnessed the 'democratization of the book' (Boorstin, 2012:123), and these technological developments in printing in turn influenced art reproduction, as Old Masters became available for anyone to purchase, no longer the purview of museum staff or interested art tourists. Movies popularised story, and actors became celebrities, while The Reader's Digest summarised works of literature, turning the reading of books into a second-hand experience (Boorstin, 2012:133). In contrast, events and eventization restores the individual

experience. Yet, Boorstin identified a downside: the creation of pseudo-events to publicise movies and enhance the careers of their stars, creating a cult of celebrity and a permanent requirement for more events to buoy up the personalities they create. Boorstin observed in 1961 that ‘until recently, every performance was unique’ (2012:171), but, the creation of new technologies to enhance, reproduce and record sound and visual elements, incrementally changed the game, as films and other performances could be recorded, transforming themselves into their own genres of pseudo-event.

On examination of newspapers and other sources it is noticeable that they are full of news about events as we define them today. Such events are often organised by professionals, in what might be viewed as a socially-constructed reality (Gilmore & Pine, 2007). Boorstin (2012) defines pseudo-events as having a public relations purpose, with an element of misleading or deception, even in celebration events. This indicates a consideration of implicit and explicit event purposes – some of which may be openly acknowledged whilst others may be hidden, intentionally or otherwise. This aspect is especially relevant to faith events, in the sense that it might be expected that such events retain their authenticity, with an overt sacred purpose. Indeed, of all events, surely religious events should be most able to be considered ‘authentic’?

The emergence of experiential events (Pine & Gilmore, 2011) as a prime element within the marketing mix begs the question: would Boorstin view these as pseudo-events? Almost certainly. But does this also apply to church events as well, and what is it that differentiates pseudo-events from authentic events today? Boorstin identifies a number of characteristics of pseudo-events (2012:11-12):

- Firstly, they are not spontaneous, they are ‘planned, planted or incited’;
- Secondly, they have a purpose of being ‘reported or reproduced’ in some way; therefore we might ask, ‘is it a ‘real’ event?’;
- Thirdly, they are of an ‘ambiguous reality’; the event has been created solely for the purpose of promotion in the interests of the event propagator, rather than something that existed anyway;
- Fourthly, in some cases they are effectively a ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ - by celebrating something through an event makes the reason for celebration real;

By the 21st century the Internet facilitated another paradigm shift, and today we can re-watch on YouTube or satellite and online channels to our heart’s content. The merchandise and ticket sales at music gigs can be worth more to performers and artists than sales of recorded songs. Live streaming is a recent technological change to influence sales, as listeners can create their own playlists rather than be subjected to a whole album by one band, or the dictates of radio station approved programmes, or piped muzak in a building. The result, according to Boorstin, in a prescient observation, is that ‘music becomes a mirror of moods. Experience becomes little more than interior decoration’ (Boorstin, 2012:180).

The problem today is whether it is still possible to distinguish between what is a real event and what is not real. This issue is consolidated by the developments in technology, from newspapers that originally drove the creation of pseudo-events to fill their pages with news, to the current role of social and other online media in promoting messages. Today we might equate experiential events with Boorstin’s pseudo-events, but does this also apply to some religious events, or to events promoted by faith organisations? What is it that makes the difference between an authentic events experience and a pseudo-event, particularly in a religious context?

Boorstin was concerned about the role of technology in influencing the news cycle, in the days dominated by print media and television; the internet age has brought influencers into a whole new realm on social media platforms. The era that witnessed the development of televised events has been far outstripped by the manipulation of actuality (Boorstin, 2012:28), that is enhanced by immediate and constant visibility online through multiple modes of communication. The era of Instagram creates eventised moments (Greenia, 2020). For example, the removal of an inconveniently raucous pregnant pig to a nearby deserted cay in the Bahamas transformed into ‘the’ obligatory tourist activity, an event not to be missed, along with posed photographs (taken on what must be the most crowded beach in that island nation), and posted online, to match those of social media celebrity influencers.

Even in the 1960’s Boorstin recognised the benefits to politicians, journalists and businesses of such manipulation, as television re-enacted events, sometimes with different outcomes from the originals. Boorstin’s initial characteristics were developed and nuanced (2012:39-40). Planned pseudo-events were more dramatic than unplanned encounters, because

they were easier to disseminate and vivify; they were repeatable and therefore easier to reproduce, reinforcing intended messages; they could be cheaper than paying for advertising, with more effect; they were intelligible and thereby more reassuring to audiences; they were more sociable, encouraging conversation; the audiences would feel informed about the subject; and the number and scope of pseudo-events was rapidly increasing.

Boorstin anticipated the rise of the false celebrity culture that dominates our lives, a culture that is even replicated in the context of church where the number of social media followers can indicate the power and reach of influence. Writing decades before the era of 'swimming with pigs', Boorstin concluded that 'our experience tends more and more to become tautology – needless repetition of the same in different words and images' (2012:60). Even in the 1960's, Boorstin was able to conclude that travellers would see staged versions rather than living culture, stemming from the introduction of international expositions such as the World's Fairs in the 1850s, described as a 'pseudo-event for foreign consumption' (2012:102). He accused these events and exhibitions of promoting consumerism, whereby 'earnest honest natives embellish their ancient rites, change, enlarge and spectacularise their festivals' (Boorstin, 2012:103).

Meanwhile, tourist destinations take advantage of the democratisation of travel, 'to provide a full schedule of events in the best seasons and at convenient hours, they travesty their most solemn rituals, holidays and folk celebrations – all for the benefit of tourists' (Boorstin, 2012:103-104).

Writing the Afterword to the 50th anniversary publication of Boorstin's critique, Rushkoff notes that Boorstin's definition of the concept of 'pseudo-event' described the 'public-relations-driven, overdramatized media moment' (Boorstin 2012:265) that bears resemblance to Debord's (1967) *Society of the Spectacle*, whereby 'synthetic events distracted us from the issues that mattered' (Rushkoff in Boorstin, 2012:265).

In the Internet age, we experience choice as our own, perhaps electing to create our personal moods through the music we hear, and yet we should also acknowledge that social media is clearly open to manipulation, not only in politics. The question of authenticity in events emerges strongly, as our social media echo chambers are invaded by influencers with 'unprecedented power to make things 'true'' (Boorstin, 2012:216). The prevalence of 'experiential events' as core to the marketing mix for businesses and public sector organisations including government, as well as

**Figure 1: Swimming with pigs, Exuma, Bahamas: observing the Instagram moment**



(Photo by Author, 2020)

for faith organisations such as churches, leads us to question whether it is feasible to create authenticity – and to ask whether authenticity is even possible in such an environment. Boorstin's observations appear relevant today, as his critique of 'current events' (in the news sense) as representing his definition of pseudo-events leads us to consider how authentic our eventized world is – and even to ask ourselves whether authenticity is possible any longer. If 1962 was described by Boorstin as 'the age of contrivance' (2012:253), how much more appropriate is this assessment today? Boorstin critiqued the fledgling marketing and PR industries, but how much has changed in the past 60 years? As individuals and communities, we seek meaning, and authenticity is vital to this search. For churches, as much as any institution (if not more), it is vital that authenticity be achieved, in our worship and in our events.

### Methodology

In keeping with a traditional approach to researching churches and their communities, Geertz's 'thick description' (1973) influences the method in this paper, integrating the research into a specific context and environment of the Holy Land and pilgrimage. The research takes an ethnographic qualitative empirical research approach. The siting of the researcher within the environment of the research also fits with Weber's 'thick descriptions' (Morrison, 2006) approach, and according to Simons (2009), this deep level of description makes it ideal for the case study approach. The primary research is underpinned by my own observation analysis, attending and participating in events at a range of churches and observing the way that events are planned, communicated and received within different church organisations. The emerging practice of autoethnographic studies within events management research challenges the 'significance of ... [an author's] own emotional subjectivity' (Wright 2011) in any research.

Few social science researchers would today argue for an objective, independent form of research, and in this study, there is a strong personal involvement and connection, not only as an 'insider' (Koens & Fletcher, 2010:33) as a member of the Church of England, but also as a priest. It is argued that the integration of such personal knowledge with participant observation in a study is of benefit (Bryman, 2010). From a theological perspective, the value of recognising the researcher's hermeneutical lens is formed by the development of philosophical understanding, underpinned by Ricoeur, Gadamer and Heidegger, 'placing the human

experience at the centre of the research or reflection process' (Fawkes, 2010:6).

This hermeneutic principle has a strong link to theological activity in interpreting Biblical texts, for example, with 'commitment' and 'engagement' as a condition of understanding social life' (May, 2001:15). The fact that the researcher has a personal relationship with the Christian church generally, is therefore not viewed as an 'impediment' (ibid); indeed, it could be regarded as a 'necessary condition' (ibid) for such research. This type of approach to social research readily draws on methods such as participant observation and focused interviewing, both of which have contributed to the primary research in this paper.

The close relationship of the researcher is a 'practical' (May, 2001:53) consideration of the ease of carrying out the study. The danger of such a close relationship is that the researcher may not consider – or even recognise – certain issues, or may refrain from examining issues arising that might cause embarrassment to the church, or be detrimental to the researcher's relationship with or in the church. It should also be recognised that without such relationships, the levels of access gained would be unachievable.

However, as a priest, the researcher is not only a member of the church, but also a member of its hierarchy, irrespective of personal views about such matters. From both spiritual and organisational perspectives, the priestly role is imbued with perceptions of influence, which may affect potential participants, whether church members or leaders, and may also influence their responses to questionnaires or in interviews. Combine that with the role of an academic, where personal experience indicates that some people regard any opinion as speaking with the voice of the expert, great care is needed in attempting to maintain an appropriate distance with potential research participants. It should also be noted that being in the position of a researcher within an academic environment also enables access to additional avenues for potential research.

### Case Studies – Rationale

According to Swanborn's (2010) summary of research design, case studies have an intensive approach, focusing on a small number of instances in depth, further suggesting that comparisons between different cases are of secondary importance. Swanborn describes the 'usual' process for selecting case studies



as ‘design[ing] a tentative model based on the results of the first studied case’ and then ‘adjust[ing] the resulting model’ (2010:3).

This research aims to develop a deeper understanding of the concept of Eventization of Faith, and therefore each case study contributes to a review of the meaning of this developing concept, and extends the depth through multiple layers of meaning gained from each case study. The case studies have been selected for their difference and for their connection to the Holy Land and to pilgrimage. The three themes of Places, Objects and Events have been identified as contributing different perspectives to the development of the concept of Eventization of Faith.

### **Places – Traditional Pilgrimage to the Holy Land**

This aspect of Eventization of Faith considers the impact of traditional church-led pilgrimages to places of religious meaning and importance. Visits to the Holy Land, for example, may have an impact both on participants as well as on their local church communities. By using as a case study, a visit by members of All Saints Parish Church Bingley, West Yorkshire, England to the Holy Land in October 2018, it is possible to consider how the place and the experience was of significance, from the perspective of the authenticity of a shared traditional religious pilgrimage experience. In this case, the experience also influenced the identity of the wider church community, including those who did not take part in the pilgrimage.

This case study’s pilgrimage to the Holy Land was initiated by the Vicar of a local Anglican church, several years into his parish role. Church members were encouraged to join the pilgrimage group, along with associated clergy (including an active retired Vicar with experience of working and studying in Israel and Palestine), and members of other nearby churches. The group formed closer relationships through the visit, through shared religious and touristic experiences.

In many contexts, such pilgrimage experiences can lead to the development of a close-knitted group, often to the exclusion of those not participating in the journey. However, the use of social media and online communication channels such as WhatsApp enabled the sharing of experiences between the group and those ‘back home’. This mediatization (Urry, 1990; Jansson, 2002; Lundby, 2009; Hoover, 2009) can have positive and negative outcomes. Jansson argues that touristic

mediatization reinforces the desire of non-tourists to experience the tourist encounter for themselves, whilst the contemporary acronym FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out) often leads to continual checking of social media (McGinnis, 2004). On this pilgrimage, mediatization enabled the development of a bond, connecting the two groups (those on pilgrimage and those back home), thereby meeting their informational needs. For those church members who participated in the pilgrimage, as their holy scriptures were brought to life by being in the places inhabited by Jesus and the disciples, they shared their experiences with each other and with their friends and families who had not joined the trip. The value to the church grew on their return, and rather than alienating ‘non-participants’, the church provided opportunities to hear and see their stories, enlivening their own faith experiences, through formal events and informal conversations. As a result, the church’s connection to a real, lived faith gained authenticity from the pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

### **Objects – The Lindisfarne Gospels**

The early medieval Lindisfarne Gospels are housed in a protective environment in the British Library in London. The book comprises the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and is the oldest surviving translation of the New Testament Gospels into English (Sadgrove, 2013). The Gospels book was written and embellished by Eadfrith, Bishop of Lindisfarne (Cartwright & Cartwright, 1976; Brown, 1991), between 715-720AD (Brown, 2003a; Brown 2003b). The Lindisfarne Gospels were created to honour St Cuthbert (Brown, 2011), the best-loved saint of Northern England.

These Gospels are acknowledged as amongst the most beautiful of medieval Christian treasures, despite having endured a 1,000-mile trek around Northern England to avoid Viking raids. In 1753, the Gospels were placed for safekeeping in the British Museum in London (Backhouse, 1981). Despite their continuing ‘mystique’ as a holy relic (Backhouse, 1981, p90), the Gospels are rarely seen, except by scholars and other visitors to the British Library.

The study of religious tourism and heritage helps us to consider the implications of the treatment of such precious objects, often hidden away, to ‘protect’ them from environmental damage. But although the 20<sup>th</sup> Century witnessed the central protection of such religious heritage objects, including the Lindisfarne Gospels, to be kept in the sanctity of a museum, such moves are not universally welcomed. We often choose

**Figure 2: Pilgrimage group from All Saints Parish Church, Bingley, participating in a Holy Communion service on the ‘Good Samaritan’ Road, in the Holy Land, led by the Vicar, Revd. Martyn Weaver**



(Photo taken by All Saints Bingley, 2020)

to hide our cultural and religious heritage behind doors that are closed to most people, despite any local or regional importance. The stories that these objects represent express our history and identity, our sense of belonging and placemaking (Timothy & Boyd, 2003; Timothy, 2011). Whilst the recognition of national treasures is vital in a world where, in some countries, threats are made to destroy ancient heritage, their control by central authorities can restrict not only their access and visibility, but also limit their interpretation.

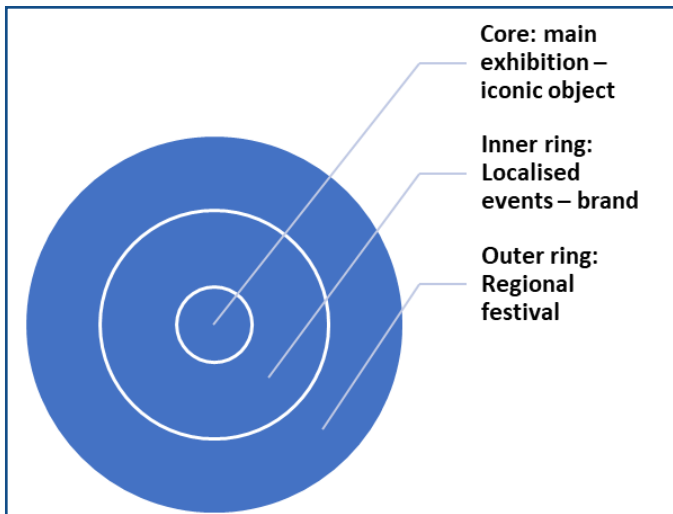
In the case of the Lindisfarne Gospels, usually stored in the British Library in London, an opportunity arose in 2013 for their display in their historic home in North East England. A partnership developed to relate the specific environmental conditions in the Durham University Library, for a ticketed three-month exhibition, open to the public. Supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Durham University, Durham Cathedral and Durham County Council created an imaginative approach to enhance the display, with the aim that ‘the exhibition had to be much more than a book in a case’ ([www.lindisfarnegospels.com](http://www.lindisfarnegospels.com)). In

order to engage with the public, the organisers eventized the exhibition as shown in the diagram in Figure 3 below.

Based around the core exhibition event that displayed the Lindisfarne Gospels book and recounted its history in the newly-constructed world-class exhibition facilities, the local organisers widened the scope of the event by:

- Embedding the Lindisfarne Gospels in the regional Schools National Curriculum, hosting and delivering a varied programme of workshops and events for schools and families
- Focusing the visual representation in communications and social media on the Lindisfarne Gospels ‘cat’ logo
- Using Ticketmaster to promote and sell timed tickets
- Beginning to develop events management expertise that can replicate the event delivery and planning process for other heritage objects.

**Figure 3: Interpretation hierarchy of events with a core event at the centre surrounded by an inner ring of ancillary events and an outer ring of wider regional and associated events.**



(Dowson, 2019, p 114)

From a religious heritage perspective, interviews with the team that developed and delivered this project suggest that there is potential for collaboration with other cultural industries and heritage organisations, and from an events management perspective the team could professionalise their event management skills, enhancing the capacity for staging future events. It is noteworthy that in interviews, the religious nature of the book and special sacred characteristics were highlighted as having special significance, even in the secular setting of a university.

In interviews with the exhibition organisers it became evident that there were experiences of the numinous by staff. Such experiences have been studied elsewhere; according to research by Cameron and Gatewood, museum visitors often experienced the transcendent, or found themselves in ‘spiritual communion’ (2003:67) with historical and religious objects. Latham (2013) also discovered museum visitors who reported similar encounters.

**Figure 4: Cherish Conference, First Direct Arena, Leeds, UK**



(Photo by Author, 2019)

The Holy Land and Jerusalem in particular, are home to a vast array of culturally-significant religious objects and places with high spiritual value, across the three Abrahamic religions (Eliade, 1958). Whilst some artefacts remain in place, others are moveable and might be open to the eventization process, both *in situ*, or as travelling exhibitions.

### Events – Cherish Women’s Conference

The Cherish women’s conference is organised and promoted as part of the community contribution of a local independent church in Yorkshire, England. Having outgrown their home church location in Bradford, the conference moved to a commercial event arena in the neighbouring city of Leeds. The FirstDirect Arena’s capacity of 13,500 still offers potential for growth, from the 9,000-plus audience achieved in 2019. Many of the women who attend, do so year after year, making physical geographical journeys from places far beyond Yorkshire, across oceans and continents, as far away as Australia, South Africa, the United States, and Europe. Like more

traditional pilgrims, the women encounter a spiritual space for their shared pilgrimage, building strong ties that bind the sisterhood together to achieve inner transformation.

Despite the new location being a secular event venue, the participants still experience the divine, creating a holy space in worship together, learning from international speakers (most of whom are also women), and developing strong relationships with charities that support children around the world as well as others that fight modern slavery and human trafficking.

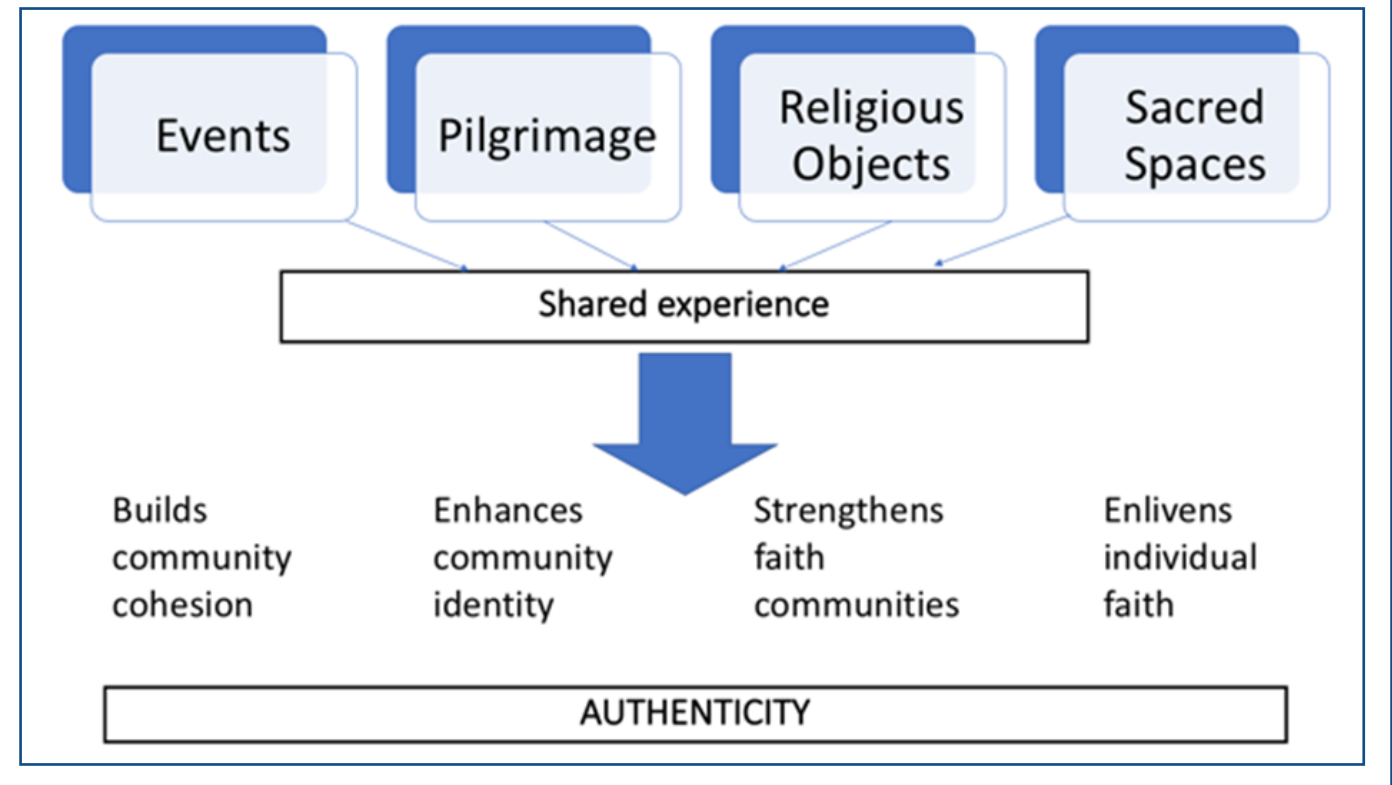
Similar regular annual events are found in different churches around the world, and whilst not all will present the high production values of a professional music event as Cherish does, these events make a contribution to the Eventization of Faith (Figure 4).

Jerusalem and the Holy Land are not without such event activities. A short walk from the holiest Jewish site in Jerusalem, the Western Wall, is an outdoor event space that is available for commercial hire. It is

**Figure 5: Commercial event space adjacent to the Western Wall, Jerusalem, Israel.**



(Photo by Author, 2020)

**Figure 6: Model – Religious Pilgrimage: Experiencing Places, Objects and Events**

located adjacent to the Temple Mount, the third holiest site in Islam. Located among the ruins of the Temple walls (see Figure 5), it provides a convenient space for the celebrations that follow on from religious rituals and services that have been held at the Western Wall.

The very existence of this space reflects the concept of 'venuefication' (Dowson & Lamond, 2017), by which spaces and buildings are utilised as event venues, although they have a different primary purpose, largely unconnected with events, such as a church, or a school, or a park. The connection between venuefication and the Eventization of Faith is demonstrated by the existence in close proximity, of a sacred holy site (the Western Wall), that is used for traditional religious purposes, such as a Bar Mitzvah, and an adjacent space in which to party afterwards.

### Discussion

If tourists today are looking for more than a standard package (Aulet, 2020), this requirement applies equally to pilgrims travelling to the Holy City of Jerusalem. The question is, how can pilgrimage organisers and event planners provide engaging and immersive yet authentic and transformative experiences? As with the Lindisfarne Gospels exhibition, ostensibly promoted as a secular historical exhibition, such events are not

always explicitly (or implicitly) religious in nature, intent or outcome (Dowson, 2014). It is not only historical (religious) objects that are eventized in this way. Communities and nations have commemorated anniversaries over an extended period of time (Zammit, 2020). The centenary of the First World War was memorialised across Europe and beyond, over a period of four years. For the Holy City of Jerusalem, a place that abounds with sacred objects and opportunities to commemorate historical moments filled with religious meaning to the Abrahamic faiths, the potential exists to apply the theory of eventization to encourage extended religious tourism and pilgrimage visits. Some religious sites and objects are so overwhelmingly popular with pilgrims and tourists that queues form for hours, and yet there are other areas, even within the same site that remain virtually empty. For example, in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the empty Tomb and the site of the Cross at Golgotha draw unending crowds, queuing at all times of the day, whilst a separate entrance to the Ethiopian rooftop monastery and chapel offers a quiet space for silent contemplation (Sebag Montefiore, 2011). But many visitors stay for less than a day, ticking off the sites on their bucket list, barely pausing to take in the surroundings or breathe in the holy atmosphere, shepherded from one place to another by expert tour

guides who tailor the itinerary to perceived preferences: ‘evangelical Christians don’t want to see the same things as Catholics’.

The model shown in Figure 6 presents a picture of the potential relationships between the shared experience offered by visitors to holy places and sacred spaces such as found across Jerusalem—pilgrims and tourists mingling together in shared experiences. Whether attending an event or setting your eyes on religious objects and artefacts, these experiences can facilitate the building of community cohesion, enhancing group and community identity and strengthening faith, both individual and communal. A key factor in all this is the authentic nature of the experience, which is more likely to take place in an extended stay, spending time in each place, rather than rushing from one iconic place to another.

## Conclusion

This paper considers a range of activities within the Eventization of Faith, in order to explore in more detail this emerging concept. The study uses case study examples that include traditional church pilgrimages to the Holy Land, the addition of an events perspective to visiting and promoting sacred sites and objects, and bringing worshippers together in a shared events experience. Jerusalem, the Holy City, hosts an overwhelming quantity of sacred objects and holy spaces, valued by adherents of the three Abrahamic faiths, and visited by pilgrims and tourists alike. The evidence suggests that extending these visits beyond the bucket list tick box will encourage a more transformative experience. Benefits include heightened religious faith, both personally and corporately, and an enhanced sense of belonging and group identity. The authentic nature of such shared experience is a key factor in the depth of engagement. Boorstin’s critique of ‘pseudo-events’ (2012) provides a relevant and timely perspective on authenticity, equally valid today as sixty years ago.

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