

# SECULAR OR SACRED JOURNEY? CONFRONTING RECENT THEOLOGY OF PILGRIMAGES TO SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA

**Piotr Roszak\***

*Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń, Poland  
Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona, Spain*

(Received 10 September 2024, revised 16 January 2025)

---

## **Abstract**

This article provides a theological analysis of pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostela as articulated by recent Roman Catholic pontiffs. The study begins with an exploration of the medieval *Codex Calixtinus* and its justification for pilgrimage, then examines how successive popes perceive the Way of St. James and the act of pilgrimage itself, delineating its theological value. The paper culminates in a discussion of the profound theological themes underlying the pilgrimage experience, including eschatology, soteriology, virtue ethics, and moral life. The Way of St. James is significant not only for its ethical implications for the individual but also for its capacity to convey truths about the world, reflecting its veritative dimension.

*Keywords:* secular, religious tourism, hylomorphism, cult of saints, sacred geography

---

## **1. Introduction**

An object, whether secular or sacred, can be approached from diverse perspectives. Drawing from the medieval distinction between matter and form [1, 2], one could argue that pilgrimage embodies both a material element, which is quantifiable through empirical sciences that measure its impact on the environment and economy, and a formal, invisible element that imbues the material with meaning - an element primarily manifested in spiritual motivation [3]. Theological reflection on pilgrimage thus becomes crucial, functioning as the 'form' that both preserves and defines its identity [4].

Moreover, recognizing the distinctiveness of pilgrimage as a form demands confronting the position that attributes sacred meaning to all elements of the pilgrimage experience, equating walking, eating, and spiritual life [5]. However, this approach risks rendering nothing truly sacred, as the boundary between the sacred and the profane is blurred. The demarcation between these realms is essential for understanding the essence of pilgrimage [6]. Therefore,

---

\* [piotrroszak@umk.pl](mailto:piotrroszak@umk.pl)

distinguishing pilgrimage from tourism is not merely a matter of identifying commonalities but, more importantly, of elucidating their differences.

This article will explore the theology behind papal endorsements of pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostela, focusing on the eschatological, moral, anthropological, sacramental, and ascetic significance of such journeys. It seeks to answer why pilgrimage matters and whether it should be encouraged.

## **2. *Codex Calixtinus* and the Theological Justification of Pilgrimage. Four ‘theological’ causes of medieval pilgrimages**

The original motivations for the medieval pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, which drew countless individuals from the Iberian Peninsula and beyond, are of particular interest. While a common theological motivation underpins these journeys, it is also evident that the promotion of pilgrimages to Compostela was part of a deliberate effort by ecclesiastical authorities to establish the Way of St. James as a spiritually and theologically significant path. This effort is reflected in the *Codex Calixtinus*, which offers theological justifications for undertaking such a perilous journey.

Drawing on the four causes identified by Aristotle - final, material, formal, and efficient - this analysis posits that four analogous theological causes underlie the medieval pilgrimage phenomenon. In addition to the commonly acknowledged causes of prayer (*causa orationis*) and penance (*causa poenitentiae*), as highlighted by Manuel Díaz y Díaz [7], this study argues for the inclusion of veneration (*causa venerationis*) and imitation (*causa imitationis*) as motivating factors. Pilgrims travelled to Compostela not only to venerate the relics of the Apostle but also to emulate the life of St. James the Greater. The sermons in the *Codex Calixtinus* endeavor to convince readers of the pilgrimage’s worthiness by emphasizing these four motivations.

The primary motivation for undertaking a pilgrimage to Compostela is the *causa orationis* - to engage in prayer at the tomb of the Apostle. The vigil held before the saint’s body is often likened to a vigil held before a deceased body. Simultaneously, the vision of pilgrims assembled around the altar of St. James during a ‘perpetual eve’ is invoked to explain the purpose of their pilgrimage: “It causes joy and admiration to contemplate the choirs of pilgrims at the foot of the venerable altar of St. James in perpetual vigil: the Teutons on one side, the Franks on another, the Italians on another; they are in groups, they have candles burning in their hands; thus, the whole church is illuminated as if by the sun on a clear day” (*Codex Calixtinus*, p. 221, author’s translation).

In addition, the *causa poenitentiae* - associated with the granting of indulgence and forgiveness to the pilgrim - plays a significant role. Before delving into the cultural circumstances surrounding this practice of penance, it is crucial to contextualize it within medieval theology, where penance was understood not as an emotion but as a virtue. The aim of penance was to detach oneself from sin and to ‘train’ the will, which is the subject of this virtue. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, penance is an attitude of constant rejection of the evil done so that it no longer enslaves the individual (*poenitens doletens de peccato commisso*

*inquantum est offensa Dei, cum emendationis proposito* - *Summa Theologiae* III, q.85, a.3c), with a distinction made between internal and external penance [8]. In essence, penance was practiced to ensure that nothing in the Christian's life would hinder their following of God, thereby restoring relationships and reorienting life (here, the term *ordo* is significant, implying the ordering of oneself toward a proper goal). Penance, therefore, served as a method for regaining freedom after committing evil, which inherently deprives one of such freedom.

It is noteworthy that Christian theology treats penance as a virtue, as it is not merely an individual, emotional, spontaneous act but rather a *habitus* - a principle guiding other human acts toward the achievement of their ultimate end. Remarkably, this penitential motivation remains relevant today, characterizing modern pilgrims who embark on the Way of St. James to 'escape' from everyday life for a purpose more serious than mere enjoyment, often seeking liberation from various difficulties or addictions (e.g., electronics, drugs, etc.). In essence, while the terminology may differ, the underlying expectations and motivations remain consistent. Pilgrims also pursue penance as a means of seeking full freedom [9].

The *causa poenitentiae* is described in the *Codex Calixtinus* as the power of the pilgrimage road, which resembles the 'narrow way' of the Gospel: "...it keeps away succulent delicacies, it removes voracious obesity, it restrains voluptuousness, it restrains the appetites of the flesh that fight against the strength of the soul, it purifies the spirit, it invites man to the contemplative life, it humbles the high, it exalts the lowly, it loves poverty; it hates the census of those who are dominated by greed: He rewards those who are austere and do good; but he does not snatch the greedy and sinful from the clutches of sin."

After delineating the fruits of penance, the *Codex* mentions the staff and the scarcel as penitential signs (forms of external penance). Beyond these two reasons for pilgrimage, however, there exists another motivation related to visiting the saint's tomb - in this case, the Apostle St. James [10, p. 50-56]. The *causa venerationis* emphasizes the significance of the Apostle's tomb, and as is well known, early Christians considered the burial sites of martyrs as their 'trophies'. Pilgrimages to these sites were undertaken to participate in their intercession and strength. The focus is not on emotional admiration but rather on the transmission of grace through these saints. God often bestows grace through others, making them participants in its transmission, for it is a greater good when accomplished 'through others.' This is why the *Codex* highlights the 'power of St. James', which, while not an absolute power, is participatory and dependent on God. This spiritual empowerment was sought by the saints who visited sanctuaries. For medieval pilgrims, the motivation for pilgrimage was to venerate the saint, symbolically connecting with the source from which they originated and to which they return, as later articulated by John Paul II.

Moreover, the veneration of a saint should lead to the sacrifice of praise, that is, to give thanks to God for a saint whose life embodied the Gospel. Theologically, the intercession invoked when visiting the tomb of a saint does not replace God in mediating grace nor compel God to alter His will. Rather, it involves the 'patronage' of a saint who intercedes for the devotee through a bond of love [11]. A sign of this bond is love - expressed in the veneration of their relics,

where, as St. Thomas Aquinas would assert, the first fruit of love is *unio*, leading to participation in the victory of the saints [12, 13]. This concept motivated medieval pilgrims. It is also noteworthy that the holiness of saints is participatory: God is holy, and others participate in that holiness, highlighting the exemplary nature of God's holiness, which is both metaphysical and moral in nature [14, p. 94]. Furthermore, veneration reinforces the notion that Christianity is not an illusion; it is grounded in historical facts, flesh, and blood, capable of reviving the faith of those who visit saints.

In response to the question of why one should go to Santiago, medieval pilgrims would also cite the imitation of the saint as a motivating factor. The *Codex Calixtinus* underscores this in various ways, revealing another dimension of papal theology, which interprets the *Compostelan iter* through the lens of *causa imitationis*. In Pope Callixtus's sermon, pilgrims are encouraged to journey to Santiago and experience what is 'adored' there - the readiness to leave behind what one possesses, as was exemplified in the life of the Apostle, creating space to receive something greater: "they left little things and found great things... they despised..." (*Codex*, V, 54). The etymology of *Iacob* (supplanter) and *-us* (comforter) indicates that those who come to James experience the uprooting of wickedness: "...those who invoke him... he usually uproots from the wicked, like a gardener throwing out useless weeds and planting good plants (vices and virtues), which lead to the life of God". The pilgrimage is thus seen as a cleansing of the heart's temple so that God's grace may dwell within it. Another sermon recalls that the Apostle restored health not only to the body but to the entire person. This 'therapeutic' dimension of the Way is analyzed in detail, emphasizing that one embarks on the pilgrimage to Santiago to "break down the accumulation of our vices and persevere in good works" [15, 16].

Following Leo the Great's sermon in the *Codex Calixtinus*, St. James is portrayed as the patron of spiritual pursuits. In alignment with Chrysostom, the faithful are encouraged to imitate St. James in various actions, such as abandoning what hinders, avoiding attachment to earthly things, and embodying charity, exemplified by kindness towards enemies [17]. Sermon XII, in turn, enumerates the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit in the context of pilgrimage and the life of St. James. Thus, the *Codex* emphasizes St. James as the advocate, helper, and defender of pilgrims. Furthermore, Pope Leo underscores the identification of St. James as a symbol of hope, encouraging pilgrims to Santiago, as those who arrive sorrowful return joyful (*Codex*, p. 191). Accessories such as chains (signifying liberation) and crosses left by the 'Greeks' are mentioned as external manifestations of the internal experience. Ultimately, the pilgrimage is undertaken not only to imitate the Apostle but also to embrace the promise of salvation in Christ, which the saint's life testifies to, confirming its possibility: "Let the pilgrims rejoice who come to his shrine, and who will receive with the protection of the same the crown of glory for their labours" (*Codex*, p. 216).

The *Codex Calixtinus* places significant emphasis on the universal dimension of the pilgrimage to Compostela. The Apostle's cult is presented as one that transcends social classes and national boundaries: "Here we have the venerable apostolic feasts, sacrosanct, to be celebrated by all, to which the whole

world must worship, in which heavenly rewards are given by God to the just; sinners are promised eternal health” (*Codex*, p. 177, ch. XVII).

### **3. Why does pilgrimage matter? The Contemporary Relevance of Santiago de Compostela**

The significance of pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela has been affirmed in the speeches and messages of recent popes, who consistently encourage the faithful to undertake this pilgrimage, highlighting its unique value. From St. Paul VI to Pope Francis, each pontiff has articulated distinct reasons for making the pilgrimage to Compostela, emphasizing its importance through their particular theological perspectives.

#### **3.1. Paul VI**

Although Paul VI did not visit Compostela, he addressed the significance of the pilgrimage in radio messages delivered during the Holy Years. These messages encapsulated a theology of pilgrimage, recognizing Santiago as a site of ‘spiritual irradiation’. In a radio message broadcast on July 25, 1965, and directed to “the Spanish faithful on the occasion of the Jacobean Holy Year”, Paul VI described the pilgrimage as an opportunity to transcend borders and cultivate Catholicity. He referred to it as “a pilgrimage which, like that of other times, does not resist the narrowing of lineage, homelands, or frontiers, in the broad sense of ecumenicity”.

Paul VI emphasized several dimensions of the Jacobean pilgrimage. First and foremost, he highlighted the reception of the apostolic message, viewing the pilgrimage as an opportunity to rediscover apostolic tradition. He described it as “a hymn of fidelity to the Catholic tradition, which leads us precisely to the cult of an Apostle, marking a return to the authentic and living sources of that same tradition”. However, the Pope insisted that this return to tradition must not be passive but rather engaged with contemporary challenges. He called for this heritage to be “synchronized with the soul of the modern world”. For Paul VI, the Way of St. James offered a means of deepening faith and providing a robust defense against ideologies that challenge it. The pilgrimage thus becomes a means of reaffirming and defending the faith, both internally and externally, and recognizing that Catholic life is inherently apostolic and militant. In essence, one embarks on the pilgrimage to Santiago to rediscover one’s roots and defend the faith.

The second dimension emphasized by Paul VI is the construction of unity, which is grounded in a shared religious ideal. He spoke of the “powerful bond of unity” that the pilgrimage fosters, manifested through hospitality toward pilgrims and the development of necessary infrastructures. The Pope noted that the monks of Cluny were particularly renowned for their contributions to this effort, not merely by providing comforts, but by improving logistical conditions to “leave the spirit freer”. For Paul VI, the focus on what truly matters and the construction of unity are central to the pilgrimage to Santiago.

Finally, the third dimension Paul VI highlighted is the practical application of Catholic principles to social life through the realism of the Jacobean pilgrimage. He viewed it as a laboratory where these principles could be practiced. Pilgrims were called to express their faith through love and concrete actions, taking responsibility for the universal mission of the Church. Upon reaching Compostela, the pilgrim gains a sense of *possumus* - the ability to persevere in the face of adversity - and says 'yes' to Christ 'in the spirit of pilgrimage'. For Paul VI, this 'yes' involves embracing divine providence in the life of the believer, a theme that resonates throughout the entire Way of St. James.

In a similar message delivered via radio in 1971, Paul VI revisited these themes, but this time he emphasized the greater objectives of pilgrimage such as reconciliation with God and communion among humanity, which he described as true and fruitful brotherhood. He referred to the Holy Year in Santiago as 'a new promise of spring', destined to guide humanity toward salvation. The Pope also addressed the theme of 'Christian progress', which he associated with the experience of 'a call to conversion' along the pilgrimage route. This time, Paul VI focused on the emerging tension between the secular experience of the Camino and the broader context of incoherence and opposition between the World and the Church. He encouraged the Camino to serve as an opportunity to reveal the 'hidden riches of the Church', urging bishops and priests to become prophets of faith and spiritual guides for those walking the Camino [Radiomensaje del Santo Padre Pablo VI con motivo del Año Jubilar de Santiago De Compostela, Sábado 24 de julio de 1971, available online at [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/es/speeches/1971/july/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_spe\\_19710724\\_anno-giubilare-compostela.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/es/speeches/1971/july/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19710724_anno-giubilare-compostela.html)].

Paul VI also addressed the topic of pilgrimages to Santiago during his speech at the United Nations Conference on Tourism on August 31, 1963 [Address of Pope Paul VI to the participants of the United Nations conference on tourism, Saturday 31 August 1963, available online at <https://holyseemission.org/contents/statements/address-of-the-holy-father-paul-vi-to-the-united-nations-organization.php>]. At that time, he emphasized that modern tourism had its roots in pilgrimages, including those to Santiago. He remarked that "this tourism not only receives its driving force from religion, but also draws its moral and spiritual value from it: faith sustains the traveler, prayers console him, penances strengthen him, and religious fervor makes the journey memorable". The Pope encouraged tourism to transcend mere visits to places and to instead become a vehicle for moral, pedagogical, cultural, social, and international values. Quoting Pius XII on tourism, Paul VI recalled that it is about "...the ennoblement of the senses, the expansion of the spiritual domain, and the enrichment of experience" [Discurso del Santo Padre Pablo VI a los participantes en El III Simposium del Turismo, Sábado 6 de junio de 1964, available online at [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/es/speeches/1964/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_spe\\_19640606\\_turismo.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/es/speeches/1964/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19640606_turismo.html)].

### **3.2. John Paul II**

Pope John Paul II made numerous references to Santiago de Compostela and the pilgrimage to the Apostle's tomb throughout his papacy. These references appear in various forms, such as the messages addressed to the Archbishop of Santiago during the Holy Years—specifically noted as being “on the occasion of the opening of the holy door of Santiago de Compostela” [Carta del Santo Padre Juan Pablo II a Mons. Julián Barrio Barrio con ocasión de la apertura de la Puerta santa de Santiago de Compostela, available online at [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/es/letters/1998/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_19981129\\_compostela.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/es/letters/1998/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_19981129_compostela.html)]<sup>1</sup>—as well as in speeches directed toward the Spanish bishops. However, the most significant references come from his visits to Santiago in 1982 and 1989. These visits were seen as programmatic for John Paul II, particularly within the context of the Europeist Act. The French liberal media even referred to this vision as a ‘dream of Compostela’, perceiving in the Pope a desire to restore medieval Christianity. This aspiration was further explained by the Pontiff in his book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, where he elucidated the true meaning of the pilgrimage to Santiago and its cultural impact on European identity.

During his apostolic pilgrimage in 1982, Pope John Paul II, in his homily at the Pilgrim's Mass, characterized pilgrimages as both a search for forgiveness and an encounter with the Lord. Reflecting on the path of pilgrims, John Paul II stated: “the Way of St. James created a vigorous spiritual and cultural current of fruitful exchange among the peoples of Europe. But what the pilgrims were really seeking with their humble and penitent attitude was that witness of faith” [Viaje apostólico a España, Misa del peregrino, Homilía de Juan Pablo II, Santiago de Compostela, 9 de noviembre de 1982, available online at [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/es/homilies/1982/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19821109\\_santiago-compostela.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/es/homilies/1982/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19821109_santiago-compostela.html)]. Through this encounter with apostolic faith, the Church itself grows, fostering a dialogue between different generations of Christians who are part of the living Church [18, p. 170-182]. In conclusion, the Polish Pontiff encouraged pilgrims to live the pilgrimage with adoration and praise for the living God.

As part of his 1982 pilgrimage to Spain, the Pope also delivered the ‘Europeist Act’, emphasizing the unity fostered by the pilgrimage to Santiago. He posited that the pilgrimage's encounters, centered around the memory of St. James, reveal the shared values that unite people and contribute to the construction of a European identity. For John Paul II, the pilgrimage thus serves a greater purpose, becoming a fifth cause - *causa unitatis* - following the four mentioned in the *Codex Calixtinus*. The Way of St. James, according to the Pope, is essential because it acts as a school of unity.

Several years later, at the 1989 World Youth Day vigil on Mount Gozo, John Paul II further described pilgrimage as a means of renewing faith through self-giving, modeled after Christ. He remarked: “You have come to rediscover here, in Santiago, the roots of our faith, to commit yourselves, with a generous heart, to the ‘new evangelization’ on the threshold of the third millennium.” The Pope emphasized that “the journey expresses a profound spirit of conversion. A

desire to return to God. A path of purification and penance, of renewal and reconciliation". Thus, the pilgrimage culminates in an encounter with Christ through the sacraments, particularly penance and the Eucharist. The Way yields both personal (purification of the heart) and communal benefits. The Pope highlighted the essence of the pilgrimage as a search, where the pilgrim embarks on a journey to meet God, who is also searching for us, to reveal the direction of the way to follow. The fruit of this search is the discovery of truth, leading John Paul II to declare: "This is the deepest meaning of the Way of St. James: to seek the truth and proclaim it." He contextualized this search for truth as a response to the contamination of ideas and lies, from which the pilgrim seeks to escape. The Pope particularly connected this profound search for truth with the youth, stating that the "truth about love... is a demanding truth, which often contrasts with current opinions and slogans. But it is the only truth worthy of human beings, called to be part of the family of God."

John Paul II revisited these themes during his address to young people in Lucca on September 22, 1989, where he reiterated that the pilgrimage to Compostela serves as a process of liberation and reordering in a world threatened by disorder [Parole di Giovanni Paolo II in ricordo del pellegrinaggio a Santiago de Compostela, Lucca - Sabato, 23 settembre 1989, available online at [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1989/september/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19890923\\_ricordo-santiago.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1989/september/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19890923_ricordo-santiago.html)].

In subsequent messages delivered during holy years or meetings with bishops, John Paul II consistently pointed to the pilgrimage as a means of appropriating the Christian faith and addressing the challenges of contemporary life [Address of Pope John Paul II to Spanish Bishops on their Ad Limina Visit, Monday, 24 January 2005, available online at [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2005/january/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_20050124\\_spanish-bishops.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2005/january/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20050124_spanish-bishops.html)]. Thus, the pilgrimage to Compostela becomes a form of 'defense', not through retreat from the world, but by healing one's spiritual roots and enabling the individual to bear *witness* to the faith. For John Paul II, the key term is witness: public and credible witness. Santiago remains "a privileged land because it is the goal of a journey that leads to joy, to gladness, to Jesus Christ". On the eve of the Holy Year 2004, the Pope wrote: "the pilgrim is therefore not only a wayfarer: he is above all a believer who, through this experience of life and with his gaze fixed on the Apostle's fearlessness, wishes to follow Christ faithfully". [Mensaje del Santo Padre Juan Pablo II a Mons. Julián Barrio Barrio con ocasión de la apertura de la Puerta santa de Santiago De Compostela, available online at [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/es/speeches/2004/january/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_20040119\\_compostela-2004.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/es/speeches/2004/january/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20040119_compostela-2004.html)] For the Pope, the essence of the pilgrimage to Compostela is "conversion to the living God through an encounter with Jesus Christ". The Botafumeiro, a massive censer used in the cathedral, symbolizes this objective: to purify oneself and become an offering of one's life lifted up to God. It reflects the orientation of one's entire life towards God, to whom we 'return' (in line with the neo-Platonic scheme present in works such as Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*, where humanity originates from God and ultimately returns to Him). Therefore, the central concern in the papal theology of

pilgrimage, as articulated by John Paul II, is the existential orientation and revitalization of faith.

### **3.3. *Benedict XVI***

In Pope Benedict XVI's addresses, particularly during his apostolic journey to Spain in November 2010, he emphasized that undertaking a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela provides an opportunity for profound reflection on human existence, in contrast to the superficiality that often characterizes contemporary society. For Benedict XVI, the pilgrimage to Santiago embodies an existential dimension: it enables the pilgrim to situate themselves on the path of life, seeking truth and beauty, and experiencing the grace of forgiveness [19, 20]. The pilgrimage fosters a healthy detachment from worldly desires, redirecting one's focus toward what truly matters.

The Pope acknowledges the 'hidden motivations' that drive many to undertake this journey, yet he identifies the cross as a common denominator: "a cross that welcomes and guides at crossroads". The difficulties encountered along the Camino acquire theological significance. Whereas earlier theological perspectives, particularly under John Paul II, emphasized the destination or the goal of the pilgrimage, Benedict XVI introduces a shift by focusing on the journey itself as a means of experiencing theological value. Nevertheless, he remains faithful to traditional pilgrimage theology, asserting: "Those who make the pilgrimage to Santiago do so above all to meet God who, reflected in the majesty of Christ, welcomes and blesses them upon reaching the Portico of Glory." [Benedict XVI, Visit to the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, 6 November 2010, available online at [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/november/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20101106\\_cattedrale-compostela.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/november/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20101106_cattedrale-compostela.html)].

These reflections are further developed in his address at the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, where he centered the pilgrimage on the virtue of faith, affirming its purpose as the strengthening of one's spirit through the Apostle's testimony of faith and love. The spiritual fruits of the pilgrimage, according to Benedict XVI, include confirmation in the faith and participation in a 'school of universality'. [Benedict XVI, Visit to the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, 6 November 2010, available online at [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/november/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20101106\\_cattedrale-compostela.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/november/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20101106_cattedrale-compostela.html)].

In a letter addressed to Archbishop Barrio at the conclusion of the Holy Year in 2010, Benedict XVI highlighted two fundamental aspects of the pilgrimage: 'sharing' and 'encountering'. The pilgrimage, he argued, involves sharing one's concerns, challenges, and hopes, ultimately leading to the discovery of the authentic meaning of life in Santiago. Concurrently, the pilgrimage offers an encounter with Christ, particularly through the sacraments of the Church [Letter of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Archbishop of Santiago de Compostela on the occasion of the Solemn Closure of the Holy Year of

Compostela 2010, available online at [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2010/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_let\\_20101218\\_compostela.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20101218_compostela.html)].

### 3.4. *Pope Francis*

Pope Francis has also offered significant reflections on the meaning of pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, as seen in his letters to the Archbishop of Santiago during the Holy Year. For Francis, the essence of pilgrimage lies in ‘welcoming’ the voice of God, which involves attentive listening, from which the search and encounter naturally follow. He frames the pilgrimage as an experience of conversion and mercy, wherein human frailty is overcome. His reflections emphasize the deeply spiritual dimension of the pilgrimage, as it creates opportunities for individuals to become neighbors to one another, thereby fostering social relationships [18, p. 35-42].

Francis underscores the value of ‘going beyond oneself’ and forming bonds with others along the way [Francis, Letter to Bishop Barrio (Message on the occasion of the opening of the Holy Door), 17 December 2020, available online at <https://anosantocompostelano.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Mensaje-del-Papa-Francisco-en-la-Apertura-de-la-Puerta-Santa.pdf>]. Pilgrims, he notes, begin their journey with only the essentials, gradually filling their hearts with the richness of shared experiences with fellow travellers from diverse backgrounds. For Pope Francis, this dynamic becomes a paradigm: through gratitude for the encounters along the way, pilgrims carry the so-called ‘road effect’ back into their daily lives. He asserts that the pilgrimage to the Apostle’s tomb becomes a call to mission, inviting everyone to journey toward the homeland that awaits them.

The theological manifestations of this pilgrimage are visible in the pilgrims’ gestures upon arrival at the Cathedral of Santiago: contemplation of the Portico of Glory, embracing the Apostle, and participating in the Eucharistic liturgy.

Pope Francis also referenced the medieval Camino de Santiago during his apostolic trip to Portugal, speaking at the World Youth Day 2023 at the Catholic University of Lisbon. He drew from the ancient tradition of pilgrims greeting each other with the words ‘Ultreia’ and ‘et Suseia’, encouraging one another to ‘keep going’ in their search and journey. In this context, Francis urged young people to continue their quest for meaning, embodying the spirit of pilgrimage in their lives [Francis, Apostolic journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Portugal on the occasion of the XXXVII World Youth Day (2-6 August 2023). Meeting with young university students. Speech of the Holy Father. Portuguese Catholic University, Lisbon, Thursday, 3 August 2023, available online at <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2023/august/documents/20230803-portogallo-universitari.html>].

## 4. Major Theological Themes

From a historical perspective, beginning with the *Codex Calixtinus* and extending to contemporary pontiffs, the theology of pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in papal thought can be summarized along three key thematic lines.

First, the pilgrimage serves as a means to draw closer to salvation and uncover the ultimate meaning of life (soteriological/eschatological) (1). Second, it fosters communion with the Church and fellow pilgrims (relationality) (2). Lastly, the pilgrimage brings about moral transformation in the life of the pilgrim (moral/dogmatic) (3).

#### **4.1. Soteriology and Eschatology**

Regarding the first theme, the popes have historically framed pilgrimage as a journey toward the ultimate destiny of the human being, focusing on its soteriological significance. Undertaking a pilgrimage was, and remains, a means of seeking salvation. The concept of *salvatio* refers to the eternal fullness obtained beyond the temporal limits of life, a fullness that is intrinsically tied to the complete liberation from the obstacles that hinder the human soul [21]. The Hebrew understanding of salvation, which depicts escape from imminent danger - such as an army surrounded by enemies suddenly finding a way to safety - captures this profound experience [22].

In the context of pilgrimage, a comprehensive vision of human life is restored [23]. Pilgrimage serves as an interpretative framework that allows the individual to discern the present through the lens of ultimate ends [24]. This perspective resonates with the medieval understanding of *religio*, a moral virtue aligned with justice that orients the individual towards their ultimate goal [25]. The pilgrimage seeks to establish a connection between every aspect of the Christian life - daily obligations, family, work - and the transcendent end [26].

#### **4.2. Relationality**

The second key theme in the papal theologies of the pilgrimage to Santiago is its relational or social dimension, which establishes and strengthens connections between pilgrims and the Church. This relational dynamic is not merely a practical aspect of the pilgrimage but is deeply rooted in theological reflection [27]. Encounters with fellow pilgrims, visits to sanctuaries [28], and engagement with communities along the way offer profound opportunities to relate to the Church at multiple levels [29].

This relational dimension is grounded in a theological anthropology that views the human person as *esse in fieri* - a being continually journeying toward fullness. The social impact of pilgrimage is thus notable for creating spaces for exchange, following the model of *admirabile commercium* seen in the Eucharist [30]. Pilgrimage expands horizons and reveals a shared foundation, fostering a sense of common identity that transcends divisions, particularly within a European context. The papal tradition highlights this communal aspect of pilgrimage, underscoring the ‘ecclesial gene’ manifested along the Camino.

### 4.3. Moral and Dogmatic Dimensions

The moral transformation experienced through pilgrimage is another essential aspect of its theological significance. Since the *Codex Calixtinus*, it has been emphasized that pilgrims return from Santiago changed, both symbolically - through the change in their attire - and practically, as they embody new virtues. The transformative power of the pilgrimage stems from the encounter with the sacred [31], symbolized by the apostolic tomb, which acts as a new organizing principle in the pilgrim's life [32].

Remarkably, the pilgrimage to Santiago has historically been understood not solely as a place of miraculous healing but as a space where freedom is regained [33]. This transformation impacts daily decisions and one's relationship with God and others [34]. Thus, the popes have viewed the Camino as a reminder of the shared dogmatic foundation that unites Christians. Pilgrimage is also seen as a means of cultivating virtue, particularly those embodied by St. James. The *Codex Calixtinus* emphasizes imitation of the Apostle's virtues - his obedience to the divine call, evangelistic zeal, availability, and closeness to Christ - as lessons for Christian life.

## 5. Conclusion

Reviewing the theological reflections of the popes, from the *Codex Calixtinus* to Pope Francis, it becomes evident that the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela represents a mature theological project with both individual and communal implications. The encounter with the apostolic tomb is framed in a soteriological context, focusing on the restoration of freedom and recognizing the pivotal role of the apostles in the Church's faith. The popes have encouraged the pilgrimage as a means of reconnecting with the historical and rational foundations of Christianity [35]. The power of St. James extends beyond the sanctuary of Compostela, as evidenced by the miracles experienced along the pilgrimage route, thus emphasizing the relational aspect of pilgrimage rather than its geographical specificity.

In contemporary thought, the theology of pilgrimage has shifted from an external focus - where pilgrimage was seen as a unifying force for the peoples of Europe [36] - to an internal focus, where personal transformation, the search for meaning, and the reaffirmation of Christian identity are paramount. The Way of St. James serves as a model of human life, offering a comprehensive anthropological framework to explore the transcendental dimension of existence, symbolized by the idea of '*plus ultra*' - there is always more beyond [37].

## References

- [1] W. Jaworski, *Res Philosophica*, **91(2)** (2014) 179-201, doi: 10.11612/resphil.2014.91.2.2
- [2] A. Marmodoro and B. Page, *Vivarium*, **54(1)** (2016) 1-21, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24775521>

- [3] S. Brumec, *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion* **21(5)** (2024), 550-573, doi: 10.51327/CHQK8773
- [4] P. Roszak, *Pastoral Psychology* **72(5)** (2023) 647–657, doi: 10.1007/s11089-023-01099-3
- [5] I. Platovnjak and V. Zovko, *Nova prisutnost* **21(3)** (2023) 541-556, doi: 10.31192/np.21.3.4
- [6] J. Goodnow and K. Bloom, *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*, **5(2)** (2017) Article 4, doi: 10.21427/D7H708
- [7] M.C. Díaz y Díaz, *De Santiago y de los caminos de Santiago*, Xunta de Galicia, Santiago de Compostela, 1997, 290, ISBN 8445320998
- [8] J. Vijgen, *Nova et Vetera*, **13(2)** (2015) 601-616, ISSN 1542-7315
- [9] B. Serczyńska, *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage* **7(5)** (2019) Article 7, doi: 10.21427/h4jv-sx59
- [10] K. Herbers, *Jakobsweg. Geschichte und Kultur einer Pilgerfahrt*, C. H. Beck, München, 2006, 128, ISBN 9783406535949
- [11] P. Roszak and S. Tykarski, *Religions*, **11** (2020), 658, doi: 10.3390/rel11120658
- [12] A. Mullins, *International Philosophical Quarterly*, **62(1)** (2022) 83-98, doi: 10.5840/ipq2022719191
- [13] P. Roszak, *Scripta Theologica*, **50(1)** (2018) 167-183, doi: 10.15581/006.50.1.167-183
- [14] J. Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1997, 299, ISBN 9780898706239
- [15] A. Sørensen and H. Høgh-Olesen, *Culture & Psychology* **29(1)** (2023) 27-44, doi: 10.1177/1354067X2211313
- [16] B. Serczyńska and T. Duda, *Pastoral Psychology*, **70** (2021) 541–556, doi: 10.1007/s11089-021-00959-0
- [17] A.M. Leyra Faraldo and M. Leyra Curia, *Biblica et Patristica Thoruniensia* **15(4)** 25-38, doi: 10.12775/BPTh.2022.017
- [18] I. Platovnjak and T. Svetelj, *Listening and Dialoguing with the World: A Philosophical and Theological-Spiritual Vision*. Založba Univerze v Ljubljani, Ljubljana, 2024, 207, ISBN 9789612973506
- [19] M. Oleksowicz and T. Huzarek, *Religions* **12(9)** (2021) 756; doi: 10.3390/rel12090756
- [20] L. Oviedo, *Scientia et Fides* **12(1)** (2024) 89-105, doi: 10.12775/SetF.2024.005
- [21] P. Roszak and F. Mróz, *Journal of Religion and Health* **63** (2024), 4861–4875, doi: 10.1007/s10943-024-02108-2
- [22] M. Guibert Elizalde, *Scientia et Fides* **11(2)** (2023) 233-250, doi: 10.12775/SetF.2023.024
- [23] P. Furia, *Continental Philosophy Review* **55(2)** (2022) 193–214, doi: 10.1007/s11007-021-09554-9
- [24] P. Regan, *Meta: Research in Hermeneutics, Phenomenology and Practical Philosophy*, **4(2)** (2012), 286-303, ISSN:2067-3655
- [25] J.A. Berry, *Religions*, **14(7)** (2023) 855, doi: 10.3390/rel14121465
- [26] L.G. Soto, *Anuario Filosófico*, **55(2)** (2022) 297-327, doi: 10.15581/009.55.2.004
- [27] M.M. Garre Garre, *Cauriensia. Revista Anual De Ciencias Eclesiásticas*, **18** (2023) 163-178, doi: 10.17398/2340-4256.18.163
- [28] F. Mróz, *Geneza i typologia sanktuariów Pańskich w Polsce*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UP, Kraków, 2021, 360, ISBN: 9788380845992
- [29] F. Mróz, *How has Camino developed? Geographical and historical factors behind the creation and development of the way of St. James in Poland*, 59–80, in *The Way*

- of St. James: Renewing Insights*, E. Alarcón and P. Roszak (eds.), Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona 2017, 186, ISBN 9788431332020
- [30] P. Marti-del-Moral and M. Biedron, *Scripta Theologica*, **56(2)** (2024) 345-375, ISSN 0036-9764
- [31] M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, Harcourt Brace and Co., New York, 1959, 256.
- [32] D. Dyas, *Medieval Patterns of Pilgrimage: a Mirror for Today?*, 92-109., in *Explorations in a Christian Theology of Pilgrimage*, C. Bartholomew and F. Hughes (Eds.), Ashgate, Aldershot, 2004, 238, ISBN 9780754608554
- [33] T. Huzarek, *European Journal of Science and Theology*, **17(6)** (2021) 29–38, ISSN 1841-0464
- [34] K.E. O'Reilly O.P., *European Journal for the Study of Thomas Aquinas* **40(1)** (2022) 45-77, doi: 10.2478/ejsta-2022-0003
- [35] F. Mroz, A. Rucquoi and P. Roszak, *European Journal of Science and Theology* **18(3)** (2022) 43-57, ISSN 1841-0464
- [36] W. Łużyński, *Studia Gilsoniana* 13(2) (2024) 443–463, doi: 10.26385/SG.130219
- [37] S. Abbate, *Scientia et Fides* **11(1)** (2023) 105-120, doi: 10.12775/SetF.2023.012