


**Please cite the Published Version**

Hurlock, Kathryn  (2022) Peace, politics, and piety : Catholic pilgrimage in wartime Europe, 1939–1945. *War and Society*, 41 (1). pp. 36-52. ISSN 0729-2473

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/07292473.2022.2021754>

**Publisher:** Taylor and Francis

**Version:** Published Version

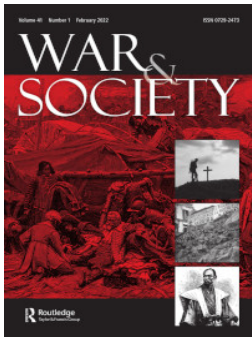
**Downloaded from:** <https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/628500/>

**Usage rights:**  [Creative Commons: Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

**Additional Information:** This is an Open Access article published in *War and Society* by Taylor and Francis.

**Enquiries:**

If you have questions about this document, contact [openresearch@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:openresearch@mmu.ac.uk). Please include the URL of the record in e-space. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our Take Down policy (available from <https://www.mmu.ac.uk/library/using-the-library/policies-and-guidelines>)



## Peace, Politics, and Piety: Catholic Pilgrimage in Wartime Europe, 1939–1945

Kathryn Hurlock

To cite this article: Kathryn Hurlock (2022) Peace, Politics, and Piety: Catholic Pilgrimage in Wartime Europe, 1939–1945, *War & Society*, 41:1, 36-52, DOI: [10.1080/07292473.2022.2021754](https://doi.org/10.1080/07292473.2022.2021754)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07292473.2022.2021754>



© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 08 Feb 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 484



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

# Peace, Politics, and Piety: Catholic Pilgrimage in Wartime Europe, 1939–1945

KATHRYN HURLOCK 

*Department of History, Politics and Philosophy, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK*

During the Second World War, the disruption and shortages of wartime life had a significant impact on the ability of Catholics to engage with their usual practice of pilgrimage in many parts of Europe. Transport was difficult, accommodation and sustenance lacking, many sites inaccessible, and some pilgrims viewed with suspicion. Yet wartime pilgrimages were popular, as people prayed for peace, appealed for aid for their friends and family, sought spiritual support, maintained the bonds of the Catholic community, and even promoted political messages. Despite the widespread nature of these pilgrimages, they have only been considered in a local or national context. This article examines wartime pilgrimages across Europe for the first time to determine how and why they were affected by war, and how this reflected wider debates about the impact of war on religious belief and practice.

**KEYWORDS** war; pilgrimage; Catholicism; piety; community

During the Second World War, the practice of Catholic religion met with a number of obstacles due to political, ideological, or practical reasons: as Chandler noted, when war broke out in 1939 the various governments of Europe were either hostile (Nazi Germany) or largely indifferent (Britain) or, as in France, secular and tolerant but no supporter of the Catholic Church.<sup>1</sup> Despite this, one area of Catholic faith which did flourish was pilgrimage, even though the war presented obstacles to the organisation and completion of pilgrimage on a local, national, and international

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Chandler, 'Catholicism and Protestantism in the Second World War in Europe', in *The Cambridge History of Christianity: World Christianities, c. 1914–c.2000*, ed. by Hugh MacLeod (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 263.

level. The problems pilgrims encountered were either deliberate, as in the Nazi-occupied areas of Europe subjected to the prohibition of pilgrimage and other religious practices; practical, where shrines fell into militarised or protected zones, and so could not be reached; or a by-product of wartime conditions, which saw trains diverted for military use, petrol rationed, and the time and freedom to travel seriously curtailed.

Faith and the practice of religion in Europe during the Second World War has received significant, though patchy, scholarly engagement in recent years.<sup>2</sup> Studies on religiosity during and immediately after the war (Catholic and non-Catholic) debate the extent to which religious practices changed in wartime, and the impact war had on devotion and behaviour. There is, unsurprisingly, little consensus, the war marking alternatively the beginning of a decline in religiosity of all kinds, or the inspiration for a revival of faith.<sup>3</sup> Even then, very little is written about wartime pilgrimage, or the impact of war itself on pilgrims and pilgrimage in Europe even in studies of Catholicism in wartime, while a frustratingly high number of works on pilgrimage or Catholic devotion in the twentieth century simply gloss over the years 1939–45.<sup>4</sup>

Discussion of wartime pilgrimage is thus limited to a few key examples. Thomas Brodie briefly examined pilgrimage in his study of wartime German Catholicism, demonstrating how the Nazi regime tried to restrict pilgrimage.<sup>5</sup> Clair Willis analysed the role of pilgrimage in Ireland, noting its role in Irish neutrality and

<sup>2</sup> Jan Bank, with Lieve Gevers, *Churches and Religion in the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016); Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World War* (London: Routledge, 2005); Stephen Parker, *Faith on the Home Front: Aspects of Church Life and Popular Religion in Birmingham, 1939–1945* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005); Alan Robinson, *Chaplains at War: the Role of Clergymen During World War II* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2012); Michael Snape, *God and Uncle Sam: Religion in American's Armed Forces in World War II* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2015); Jonathan Huener, *The Polish Catholic Church Under German Occupation: the Reichsgau Wartheland, 1939–1945* (Bloomington; Indiana University Press, 2021); Alan Wilkinson, *Dissent of Conform? War, Peace and the English Churches 1900–1945* (London: SCM Press, 1986); W.D. Halls, *Politics, Society and Christianity in Vichy France* (Oxford: Berg, 1995). For discussions of non-Christian religions: Marko Attila Hoare, *The Bosnian Muslims in the Second World War: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Jeff Eden, *God Save the USSR: Soviet Pilgrims and the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021); David Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany's War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 178–216.

<sup>3</sup> John Wolfe, *God and Greater Britain: Religious and National Life in Britain and Ireland, 1843–1945* (London: Routledge, 1994), 251; Parker; Clive D. Field, 'Britain on its knees: prayer and the public since the Second World War', *Social Compass* 64 (2017), 92–112; Claudia Baldoli, 'Religion and Bombing in Italy, 1940–1945', in *Bombing, States and People in Western Europe 1940–1945*, ed. by Claudia Baldoli, Andrew Knapp and Richard Overy (London: Continuum, 2011), 136–53; Clive D. Field, 'Puzzled People Revisited: Religious Believing and Belonging in Wartime Britain, 1939–1945', *Twentieth Century British History* 19 (2008), 446–79; Clive D. Field, *Periodizing Secularization: Religious Allegiance and Attendance in Britain, 1880–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Duquesne, *Les Catholiques Français Sous L'Occupation* (Paris: Grasset, 1966; repr. 1994); Mary Lee Nolan and Sidney Nolan, *Christian Pilgrimage in Modern Western Europe* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989); Renée Bédarida, *Les Catholiques dans la Guerre, 1939–1945: entre Vichy et la Résistance* (Paris: Hachette littératures, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Brodie, *German Catholicism at War, 1939–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 115, 144–5, 149–52, 234–5.

opposition to the English.<sup>6</sup> France is better served: Phillippe Wilmouth has studied the role of pilgrimage in uniting the Moselle; Serge Laury explored the continued devotion to the Virgin in the Pas-de-Calais during the war; while the pilgrimage of Our Lady of Boulogne has received treatment in a number of articles.<sup>7</sup> More recently, greater consideration has been given to faith, the sacred, and the miraculous in the Second World War but most works take the approach of Bill Halls, who noted that there was a rise in ‘processions, pilgrimages and prayers’ after war began, or Bank and Gevers, who commented that ‘one unexpected phenomenon was the revival of pilgrimages’ in France to Lourdes and La Salette, but say little more.<sup>8</sup>

This article goes beyond the blanket observation that pilgrimage increased during the war, to ask why people went on pilgrimage, how pilgrims themselves changed, and how pilgrimage was adapted and altered to accommodate the challenges of wartime conditions. There is considerable evidence that pilgrimage flourished in response to the pressures of war, and the needs of Catholics for community, prayer, and guidance. Evidence of the performance and role of pilgrimage, and differences between the way it was conducted and perceived across wartime Europe, shows the impact of conflict on pilgrimage itself, and on perceptions of the uses of pilgrimage by organisers, participants, and spectators.

The primary reason to promote and participate in wartime pilgrimages in Europe was arguably to pray for peace and an end to war. These aims were hard to quibble with, and fitted with the papal stance of neutrality whereby the papacy did not preference one state over another.<sup>9</sup> European Catholics were already planning or undertaking peace pilgrimages on the eve of war, hoping to prevent conflict, as well as in its early months though some, such as the September pilgrimages to Walsingham in England and Lourdes in France, were cancelled due to the outbreak of hostilities.<sup>10</sup> In Italy, a pilgrimage of ‘prayer for peace’ which included Loreto and Assisi, was still being promoted three days before Italy formally entered the war.<sup>11</sup> Pilgrims to the Calvary of the Rosary (Angoulême) sang ‘Save, save France, do not abandon her’ to the Virgin, while those to Our Lady of Pontmain

<sup>6</sup> Clair Willis, *That Neutral Island: a Cultural History of Ireland During the Second World War* (London: Faber, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Phillippe Wilmouth, ‘Le diocèse de Metz écartelé 1939–1945: un évêque, son clergé et le peuple catholique’, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Université de Lorraine, (2014), 387–89; Serge Laury, ‘La Culte Marial dans le Pas-de-Calais (1938–1948)’, *Revue d’histoire de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale et des conflits contemporains*, 128 (1982), 23–47; Louis Pérouas, ‘Le Grand Retour de Notre-Dame de Boulogne à travers la France (1943–1948): Essai de reconstitution’, *Annales de Bretagne et des pays de l’Ouest*, (1983), 171–83. See also Dominique Avon, ‘Le pèlerinage du Puy, 12–15 Août 1942’, *Revue d’histoire de l’Église de France* 211 (1997), 395–434.

<sup>8</sup> W.D. Halls, ‘Catholicism under Vichy: A Study in Diversity and Ambiguity’, in *Vichy France and the Resistance: Culture and Ideology*, ed. by Roderick Kedward and Roger Austin (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 133; Bank, with Gevers, 149, 170, 245, 308, 312. See also *Le Miracle de Guerre dans la Chrétienté Occidentale: IVe – XXe siècle* ed. Philippe Martin and Phillippe Desmette (Paris: Hemisphere, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> Chandler, 267.

<sup>10</sup> *Catholic News Service*, 4 September 1939, 37; *Le Lorrain*, 15 July 1939, 3.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Italian Catholics do penance for peace’, *Catholic Standard*, 7 June 1940, 1.

(Mayenne) appealed to her because she was known as the ‘Madonna of France in Peril’.<sup>12</sup> In 1942, the three-day National French Pilgrimage devoted one day each of prayer to the war dead, to prisoners of war in Germany, and to France.<sup>13</sup> Pilgrimages for the safety of individual countries also occurred in unoccupied countries: a pilgrimage to St Davids in Wales intended to ‘commit the Welsh nation in these anxious days to God symbolically by consecrating a Red Dragon flag in the sanctuary’ of Saint David, their patron saint.<sup>14</sup> A group of unidentified British pilgrims joined those from Spain at Santiago de Compostela in 1941 ‘to pray for Spain and for World Peace’.<sup>15</sup>

In Europe’s neutral countries, Catholics gave thanks for escaping conflict, and to maintain peace within their borders: both Irish and Swiss Peace Pilgrimages encompassed calls for protection of their own countries.<sup>16</sup> A few days after war broke out, the bishop of Luxembourg urged his countrymen, then still in a neutral country, to visit their famous shrines in the hope of maintaining peace, suggesting one site near the French border and another near the German.<sup>17</sup> In Ireland, wartime pilgrimages prayed for peace using ‘the spiritual power of Ireland’ to secure ‘peace for the world’.<sup>18</sup> In 1940, the Mass of the Peace Pilgrimage was broadcast so that ‘all Ireland partially assisted’ in the success of the venture.<sup>19</sup> Major pilgrimages to Knock and Croagh Patrick were organised, and claims made that ‘Ireland [was] waging war against war’ through faith alone.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the Swiss National Pilgrimage prayed for peace,<sup>21</sup> and in August 1941 the country’s bishops vowed to go on pilgrimage to the tomb of the Blessed Nikolaus (who became the patron saint of Switzerland after the war), if Switzerland not only escaped the war, but was able to ‘maintain its political and religious freedom’.<sup>22</sup> In a letter of 1943 to the Swiss, Pope Pius XII praised them as ‘the most exemplary of neutrals’, and urged them to go on pilgrimage to Our Lady at Einsiedeln ‘for a merciful ending of the war and a peace in which all participants may find wholehearted agreement’.<sup>23</sup>

Nowhere was pilgrimage more prominently about securing peace than at Fátima in neutral Portugal, where the first Grand Pilgrimage of Portugal appealed for peace in early November 1939.<sup>24</sup> Fátima had become a pilgrimage site after a series of Marian apparitions appeared to three peasant children, Lucia de Santos and her cousins, in 1917.<sup>25</sup> During the early years of the Second World War, devotion to Our Lady of

<sup>12</sup> ‘Grandoise pèlerinage à Angoulême’, *La Croix*, 11 May 1940, 4; ‘La Premier Pèlerinage de Guerre’, *La Croix*, 30 March 1940, 2.

<sup>13</sup> ‘A National Pilgrimage’, *Tablet*, 25 July 1942, 43.

<sup>14</sup> ‘How modern pilgrims went to St Davids’, *Western Mail*, 1 May 1940, 6.

<sup>15</sup> *English Catholic Newsletter*, 84 (1941), 210.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Pilgrimage by day’, *Catholic Herald*, 14 March 1941, 1.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Unarmed Country in Wartime’, *Catholic Herald*, 8 September 1939, 7.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Pilgrimages Renewed’, *Catholic Herald*, 10 May 1940, 5.

<sup>19</sup> ‘Irish Newsletter’, *Catholic Herald*, 30 August 1940, 5.

<sup>20</sup> *Catholic News Service*, 16 September 1940, 27.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Switzerland’, *Tablet*, 15 June 1940, 590.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Switzerland’, *Tablet*, 24 August 1940, 150. Quote from ‘Switzerland’, *Tablet*, 23 August 1941, 104.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Catholic Youth Movements: A Letter from Pope Pius XII’, *Tablet*, 4 December 1943, 271.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Portugal Pilgrimage for Peace’, *Catholic News Service*, 13 November 1939, 6; *Catholic News Service*, 18 December 1939, 10.

<sup>25</sup> William Thomas Walsh, *Our Lady of Fatima* (London: Doubleday, 1990).

Fátima was associated with opposition to communism, but soon developed to focus on the present war and the protection of soldiers. This change was prompted by Lucia's further revelations of the Three Secrets of Fátima, new information on what Our Lady had revealed that made her message central to the Second World War.<sup>26</sup> Veneration of Our Lady of Fátima extended to England, Portugal's oldest ally. In May 1943, the *Catholic Herald* reporter F.A. Fulford reminded his readers that:

the people of London have been spared the heavy blitzes of 1940 and 1941. The blitzes, as a point of fact, ended at the time when a Portuguese official of the BBC in London appealed to the mothers of Portugal to pray to Our Lady of Fatima for the mothers of England.

There were subsequently rumours that the mothers of Britain would repay their aid with a post-war pilgrimage to Fátima.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to pilgrimages for peace or protection, pilgrimages of thanks for survival were also common. In many cases, families and loved ones of servicemen and women conducted pilgrimage on their behalf, praying for their safe return home. Such pilgrimages tend not to be well recorded though some, such as the pilgrimage of Walter Schmid and his mother to pray for his father's safety, are documented,<sup>28</sup> as is the pilgrimage of French mothers who went to Notre-Dame-de-Puy in 1942, following the precedent of Isabelle Romée, mother of St. Joan of Arc who went on pilgrimage when England invaded France during the Hundred Years War (1337–1453).<sup>29</sup> Pilgrimages to appeal to local protectors like Ste Geneviève, Patroness of Paris, reflected local concerns about the war,<sup>30</sup> while those to the shrines of St Leonard, patron saint of prisoners, or to Notre Dame de Limon near Lyon, liberator of captives, encompassed attempts to help those in wartime camps through prayer.<sup>31</sup> Some pilgrimage sites were pro-active in advertising their role in praying for combatants. The religious authorities at the shrine of Our Lady of Pontmain, established in honour of a Marian vision that occurred in 1871 during the Franco-Prussian War on the same evening as the Prussians halted their advance into Brittany, appealed for prayers on behalf of mobilised husbands, sons, brothers, fathers, and fiancés, to be put at the base of the Virgin's statue during pilgrimage prayers.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>26</sup> S.L. Zimdras-Swartz, 'Fatima and the Politics of Devotion', in *Marian Devotions, Political Mobilization & Nationalism in Europe and America*, ed. by Roberto Di Stefano and Francisco Javier Ramón Solans (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2016), 179–90.

<sup>27</sup> 'Cessation of Big Blitzes Coincides with Prayers of Portuguese Mothers to Shrine', *Catholic Herald*, 7 May 1943, 1.

<sup>28</sup> Chris Maunder, 'Mapping the Presence of Mary: Germany's Modern Apparition Shrines', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 28 (2013), 81–2.

<sup>29</sup> 'La Premier Pèlerinage de Guerre', *La Croix*, 30 March 1940, 2; Robert L. Fastiggi and Michael O'Neill, *Virgin, Mother, Queen: Encountering Mary in Time and Tradition* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Press, 2019), 102; 'Pèlerinage des Mères Françaises à N.-D. du Puy', *La Croix*, 2 October 1940, 1.

<sup>30</sup> Vesna Drapac, 'Religion in a dechristianised world: French Catholic responses to war and conflict', *Journal of European Studies*, 26 (1996), 405.

<sup>31</sup> 'Pèlerinage à St Léonard Libérateur des Prisonniers', *La Croix*, 8 November 1940, 2; 'Nouvelles Religieuses', *La Croix*, 10 August 1940, 2.

<sup>32</sup> Cheryl A. Porte, *Pontmain, Prophecy and Protest: A Cultural-Historical Study of a Nineteenth Century Apparition* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2004).

Many servicemen vowed to undertake a pilgrimage if they survived the war. At Walsingham, promises came by post and were put under the statue of the Virgin, to be reclaimed when the pilgrimages were completed after the war.<sup>33</sup> Other pilgrimages were conducted in thanks for avoiding occupation, or for liberation, like that to the Black Virgin of Myans by devout Savoyards spared occupation in October 1940.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, in Paris, a large pilgrimage to Sacré Coeur was held in November 1944 in thanks for liberation from the German forces, and another the following month to Lourdes, described on Toulouse radio as a ‘real liberation pilgrimage’.<sup>35</sup> The pattern was repeated across Europe as more areas were liberated, and in the hopes that other places would soon follow: in Holland, Catholics in liberated zones travelled to s’Hertogenbosch (North Brabant) to pray for the Western Netherlanders still under Nazi control.<sup>36</sup>

It is no coincidence that the vast majority of these wartime pilgrimages were to Marian shrines, as she ‘served as the symbol of a Catholic alternative to a world of violence and mass destruction’<sup>37</sup> and was a symbol of hope and peace. Unsurprisingly, some members of the Catholic press associated final victory in war to the devotions of pilgrims to, and the assistance of, the Virgin. Both the fact that May – the month of Germany’s surrender in 1945 – was the Virgin’s month, and the very week of peace coincided with the sixth anniversary of the first peace pilgrimage to Walsingham, was enough to convince one commentator for the *Catholic Herald* that this was the case.<sup>38</sup>

Pilgrimages of peace and thanks, seemingly straightforward in their aims and intentions, were in fact intertwined with the politics of the countries in which they took place. In Vichy France, where the Catholic Church supported the regime in its desire to restore traditional Catholic values as an antidote to the anticlericalism of the Republic, Cardinal Gerlier, archbishop of Lyon saw the recent defeat of the French as an opportunity for ‘spiritual renewal’, as it gave the country time to pause and pray.<sup>39</sup> Gerlier, leader of the Church in Unoccupied France, reminded pilgrims to Fourvière (Lyon) in 1943 that war was a visitation on man for sin.<sup>40</sup> This message could be used to bolster the aims of Vichy’s leader, Maréchal Pétain, who promoted a doctrine of ‘*travail, famille, patrie*’ and the values of traditional, right-leaning Catholicism. Additionally, though specific interest in Marian pilgrimages reflected wider trends in Europe, in France it was particularly associated with the

<sup>33</sup> ‘Soldiers promise Walsingham pilgrimage, if spared’, *Catholic Herald*, 10 April 1941, 7.

<sup>34</sup> ‘Notre-Dame de Myans’, *La Croix*, 24 August 1940, 2; *Catholic News Service*, 14 October 1940, 44; Davide Rodogno, *Fascism’s European Empire: Italian Occupation During the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 89–92.

<sup>35</sup> ‘Ex-prisoners of Nazis in Paris officiate at thanksgiving pilgrimage’, *Catholic News Service*, 13 November 1944, 6; ‘Liberation Pilgrimage held at Lourdes Shrine’, *St Louis Register*, 15 December 1944, 4.

<sup>36</sup> ‘Liberated Hollanders pray for suffering countrymen’, *Catholic News Service*, 30 April 1945, 40.

<sup>37</sup> Martin Conway, *Catholic Politics in Europe, 1918–1945* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2008), 66.

<sup>38</sup> ‘In a few words’, *Catholic Herald*, 18 May 1945, 4.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Christofferson, with Michael S. Christofferson, *France During World War II: from Defeat to Liberation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 2.

<sup>40</sup> ‘Cardinal Gerlier: Abandonment of Religion blamed for world evils’, *St Louis Register*, 12 February 1943, 4.



Vichy regime and ideology, and the centrality of the mother *in the home* promoted by Pétain. In May 1941, Pétain turned *Fête des Mères* (Mother's Day) into a major holiday, and the cult of the Virgin was strongly associated with celebratory plays and Catholic services.<sup>41</sup> Unsurprisingly, Marian pilgrimages were the ones most closely reported in the French press.<sup>42</sup> By contrast in Britain there was fear that Catholics might be seen as a potential 'Fifth Column'; as a result, overt acts of faith could attract criticism and pilgrimages were not as widely reported.<sup>43</sup> Irish peace pilgrimages were also tinged with political concerns that were not reported in the Catholic press, but clearly noted by others who took part. Elizabeth Bowen, a novelist reporting on Ireland to the Dominions Office, complained she found a certain 'smugness' in the Irish attitude to their own role in the spiritual salvation of Europe, and heard it widely said that the bombing in England was a punishment 'for her materialism', themes central to the preaching at the Peace Pilgrimage at Knock in July 1940.<sup>44</sup> The pilgrims' destination was significant in this context, as during the course of the war Our Lady of Knock was declared 'Queen of Ireland, Queen of Peace' a sign, Edith Turner suggested, 'that Irishmen would not fight Britain's war'.<sup>45</sup> At another peace pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick in July 1942 two sermons were given, one in English and one in Irish; though no record of their contents survives, it is possible that they reflected these very different attitudes to peace, war, and the English.<sup>46</sup>

The potential politicisation of pilgrimage led to its suppression in some parts of Europe. In Germany, where the Nazi regime opposed religious institutions, and especially Catholic ones, pilgrimage was obstructed and the religious persecuted,<sup>47</sup> and it was banned in both Slovenia and Czechoslovakia following their occupation.<sup>48</sup> The pretext for doing so appears to have been the sermon given by Monsignor Stasek at the last pilgrimage to St Lawrence near Domažlice, close to the German border, after which the Czech bishops were instructed to order their priests to stop referring to 'topical questions'.<sup>49</sup> When pilgrimage resumed, Catholic priests used the opportunity to pray to Czech saints at pilgrimage sites to protect their people.<sup>50</sup> Similar restrictions were rolled out in occupied Poland. It

<sup>41</sup> Christofferson, 45.

<sup>42</sup> Drapac, 'Religion', 406.

<sup>43</sup> Keith Robbins, *England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales: The Christian Church, 1900–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 287; Wilkinson, 255.

<sup>44</sup> Elizabeth Bowen to the Dominion Office, 1943, quoted in Willis, 359–60; Sylvia Townsend Warner, *T.H. White: A Biography* (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), 171.

<sup>45</sup> Edith Turner, 'Legitimization or suppression? The effect of Mary's appearance at Knock, Ireland', in *Moved by Mary: the Power of Pilgrimage in the Modern World*, ed. by Anna-Karina Hermkens, Willy Jansen and Catrien Notermans (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 207.

<sup>46</sup> 'Croagh Patrick Pilgrimage', *Irish independent*, 25 July 1942, 3.

<sup>47</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2002), 331–7.

<sup>48</sup> 'Czecho-Slovakia: Catholics in Difficulties', *Tablet*, 30 September 1939, 406; Brodie, *German Catholicism*, 145; 'Slovenia: the Persecution of Catholics', *Catholic Bulletin of Foreign News*, 6 September 1941, 1.

<sup>49</sup> 'Czecho-Slovakia: Persecution of Catholicism', *Catholic Bulletin of Foreign News*, 10 May 1941, 1.

<sup>50</sup> 'La situation de l'Église catholique en Bohême et Moravie', *La Croix*, 12 May 1940, 4.

was noted that religious practices remained free but that there was ‘meticulous surveillance lest pilgrimages should take on the appearance of patriotic demonstrations or sermons become patriotic panegyrics.’<sup>51</sup> This was part of a wider suppression of Catholicism as the occupying forces first advanced into Poland, Catholic property being seized and converted for military use, finances appropriated, churchmen placed under arrest, and all manner of Catholic associations, education, and iconography suppressed.<sup>52</sup> Similar control of public religion occurred in Belgium, where permission was required from the military authorities for processions, as a result of which they often moved inside churches where they ‘acquired the character of demonstrations’.<sup>53</sup> Some of the opposition was, however, pragmatic rather than ideological. When the Gestapo ordered the Prefect of Metz and Landrâte of Moselle to prohibit processions and pilgrimages in May 1943, the rationale was that it prevented the Mosellans from working for the war effort.<sup>54</sup>

On 26 July 1942, 5000 young French pilgrims to Vue near Nantes wore the ‘Gaullist’ insignia of red, white, and blue, and the Cross of Lorraine. This was reported by the *Feldkommandantur* who interpreted the ‘pilgrimage’ as an act of political protest.<sup>55</sup> That the Nazi regime were worried about the potential for political pilgrimage had already been seen in their cautious agreement that processions could only take place if they were ‘purely religious’.<sup>56</sup> In Unoccupied France, there were such pilgrimages, but they were not about resistance to the Nazis. That of 10,000 French Catholic Rover Scouts to Notre-Dame de Puy in August 1942 carried a central message of peace and unity, though it also emphasised the suggestion that the French should unite under Catholicism and the Vichy regime.<sup>57</sup> The idea that this pilgrimage was manipulated by the regime to legitimate its rule may well be true of its leaders and supporters, not least because a message from Pétain was played to the pilgrims after high mass, but there is no evidence that it reflected the motives of individual pilgrims.<sup>58</sup> Pétain’s message praised their devotion as being one of the ‘swords’ of France, the other being patriotic faith, and described the pilgrimage as a ‘symbol of union’ of the two.<sup>59</sup> Certainly both the Catholic hierarchy and the Vichy regime sought to return France to the traditional, right-wing vision of society, where faith and the family unit dominated.<sup>60</sup> The largest act of symbolic

<sup>51</sup> ‘The Plight of Polish Catholicism’, *Tablet*, 16 December 1939, 691.

<sup>52</sup> *The persecution of the Catholic church in German-occupied Poland: reports presented by H.E. Cardinal Hlond, primate of Poland, to Pope Pius XII, Vatican broadcasts and other reliable evidence, preface by Cardinal Hinsley* (London: Burns Oates, 1941). First report, 6 January 1940, 3–11. See also Huener.

<sup>53</sup> Bank, with Gevers, 308.

<sup>54</sup> Wilmouth, 283.

<sup>55</sup> Robert Gildea, *Marianne in Chains; in Search of the German Occupation of France, 1940–1945* (London, MacMillan, 2011), 190.

<sup>56</sup> Chandler, 273.

<sup>57</sup> Dominique Avon, ‘Le pèlerinage du Puy 12–15 Août 1942’, *Revue d’histoire de L’Église de France*, 83 (1997), 395–434. See also Vincent Vailli, ‘Le pèlerinage du Puy-en-Velay du 15 Août 1942: Apogée de la Revolution Nationale?’, in *De Vichy au Mont-Mouchet: L’Auvergne en Guerre 1939–1945*, André Gueslin ed. (Clermont-Ferrand: Institut d’études du massif Central, 1991), 65–74.

<sup>58</sup> Drapac, ‘Religion’, 401–02. See also Bédarida, 96–8.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Les Pèlerins de l’Espérance’, *Journal des Débats Politiques et Littéraires*, 17 August 1942, 1.

<sup>60</sup> Christofferson, 36, 97.

resistance in Europe was arguably the Return of Our Lady of Boulogne, which was supposed to mark the spiritual salvation of France, and thereafter peace in Europe.<sup>61</sup> A processional pilgrimage of the statue of the Virgin was carried through France in the spring and summer of 1943 to Lourdes, then on an ‘improvised’ tour of France, known as the Le Grand Retour. Soon after, copies of the statue also began to tour France. Some of these statues travelled with no difficulty, but the one in northern France was repeatedly delayed by the Allied invasion of Normandy.<sup>62</sup> French parishioners came in their droves to see these statues to pray for peace or, in the case of one child, to leave a note before the statue asking, ‘Holy Virgin, give me back my daddy’.<sup>63</sup>

Though pilgrimage could be politicised by organisers and participants, the Catholic hierarchy was more concerned with maintaining religious traditions and religious cohesion than it was in using activities of the faithful to pass political comment.<sup>64</sup> Pilgrimage had an important role to play in maintaining community links during wartime, whether these were the common bonds of the wider Catholic society, or those of a particular geographically defined region. Continuing established pilgrimage traditions was an important way of supporting Catholics by creating a sense of cohesion as those communities came under pressure, and provided spiritual succour to those who were dealing with the strains of living in wartime. Unity was also a consideration for those who felt their faith was hit particularly hard; for some there was a sense that Catholic places of worship were receiving the ‘lion’s share of destruction’.<sup>65</sup> Concerns over Catholic identity and solidarity extended to participants in the forces, where the provision of spiritual support by Catholic chaplains was not considered enough by one worried British Catholic. He wrote to the editor of the *Catholic Herald* suggesting all Catholic servicemen should wear a badge of the Five Wounds of Christ in the same way that the Catholic rebels of 1536 had against their own ‘English Hitler’. He hoped that it would unite, but also inspire, non-Catholics to take an interest in the faith and thus stop the ‘leakage’ from which it suffered.<sup>66</sup> Similarly Dr O’Reilly, preaching at the Catholic Young Men’s Society pilgrimage to Harvington Hall in England, cautioned that as Catholic men, they had to ‘unite and keep united’ in the face of danger and threats to that unity.<sup>67</sup> Pilgrimage and prayer also linked Catholics on the front with those at home, as those fighting knew they were being prayed for by co-religionists across Europe.<sup>68</sup>

Pilgrimage fostered community identity that was hard for displaced and evacuated Catholics to maintain. When German Catholics were evacuated eastwards to

<sup>61</sup> Gildea, 180–2. The core motives behind the organisation of, and participation in, these processions have been reinterpreted by Pérouas, 171–83.

<sup>62</sup> Pérouas, 177.

<sup>63</sup> Pérouas, 180.

<sup>64</sup> Chandler, 264.

<sup>65</sup> Walsingham Anglican Archives: *Our Lady’s Mirror*, Summer 1940: <<https://www.waaolm.org.uk/olm1940-3.htm>> [accessed 21 March 2021].

<sup>66</sup> ‘Letters to the Editor’, *Catholic Herald*, 8 December 1939, 2.

<sup>67</sup> ‘Pilgrimage to Harvington’, *Evesham Standard & West Midland Observer*, 31 August 1940, 5.

<sup>68</sup> Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, 52.

a predominantly Protestant area, they felt ‘a profound sense of loss’; even when German evacuees went to Catholic areas, practices were sufficiently different from their own that they became disconnected from their faith.<sup>69</sup> The recognition that ‘refugees ... need spiritual consolation as well as material assistance’ underpinned the large refugee pilgrimages to Lourdes, where a special mission was set up to support them.<sup>70</sup> Ten thousand refugees from Lorraine participated in pilgrimage to Lourdes in August 1941 ‘as an act of faith and a token of confidence’.<sup>71</sup> The Lorrainers’ pilgrimage was led by their own bishop, Joseph Jean Heintz (1886–1953), himself exiled from his see of Metz in August 1940 by the German advance, and came from the parts of unoccupied France where they had ‘as far as possible, reconstituted their parishes’, keeping alive all the traditions of Lorraine.<sup>72</sup> Pilgrimage for groups of refugees like these succeeded in keeping dispersed communities together as they united in pilgrimages organised and defined by their geographical origins and identity. The same was also true of evacuated communities, though exercising their religious practices was not always possible, such as when Catholic children were evacuated to the households of non-Catholics who did not support their faith, and were even sometimes actively hostile towards it.<sup>73</sup>

In some parts of Europe, there was concern to maintain annual pilgrimage traditions because such repetition reinforced bonds, and socialised the next generation into this element of faith. Without these pilgrimages, many of the social and community aspects of these cyclical activities were lost, and connections with co-religionists vanished. When the Whitsun pilgrimage to Monte Vergine was stopped in 1944, the devotees of the cult considered it ‘dangerous to cancel an institution of this magnitude and spiritual value’ just because of the war.<sup>74</sup> This was not the case everywhere. Laury noted that in the Pas-de-Calais, hostilities did not interrupt ‘traditional pilgrimages’, and that the ‘permanence’ of Marian devotion was a feature of the war years.<sup>75</sup> In England, however, matters were different. The head of the Guild of Our Lady of Ransom, John Filmer, lamented how he ‘missed very much the annual reunion of many regular fellow pilgrims’ because he would not be able to see his friends as he did each year.<sup>76</sup> In England, the maintenance of these traditions was arguably more significant because of the fact that the majority of the population were Protestant, and the establishment and then continuity of these new

<sup>69</sup> Thomas Brodie, ‘The German Catholic Diaspora in the Second World War’, *German History*, 33.1 (2015), 80–4.

<sup>70</sup> ‘45,000 Refugees in Lourdes’, *Catholic Herald*, 1 November 1940, 1.

<sup>71</sup> ‘Pilgrimage in made by 10,000 Lorraine Exiles’, *St Louis Register*, 22 August 1941, 7. For another pilgrimage of evacuees, see *Le Lorrain*, 9 May 1940, 2.

<sup>72</sup> ‘15,000 Lorraine Exiles Pay Visit to Lourdes’, *Catholic News Service*, 15 September 1941, 30; Paul Christophe, 1939–1940: *Les Catholiques devant la Guerre* (Paris: Les Éditions ouvrières, 1989), 132, 179; ‘News, Notes and Texts’, *Tablet*, 30 August 1941, 120; ‘10,000 Ousted Lorrainers Make Lourdes Pilgrimage’, *New York Times*, 12 August 1941, 3.

<sup>73</sup> Carlton Jackson, *Who Will Take Our Children?: The British Evacuation Programme of World War II* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, 2008), 33, 50–3, 82–3.

<sup>74</sup> Norman Lewis, *Naples ’44: An Intelligence Officer in the Italian Labyrinth* (London: Eland, 2005), 1 May.

<sup>75</sup> Laury, ‘La Culte Marial dans le Pas-de-Calais’, 25–6.

<sup>76</sup> ‘England at Easter’, *Catholic Herald*, 29 March 1940, 8.

traditions of pilgrimage were important in uniting England's Catholic community in a common act. A regular discussion in the Catholic press about the need to maintain traditions emphasised the fact that many pilgrimages had taken part uninterrupted for several decades, and hoped for war to end so that they could continue.<sup>77</sup> The York pilgrimage was a particular concern for the pilgrims of the Guild of Ransom, founders of this pilgrimage in 1892, who were warned of a 'sad piece of news' that the jubilee pilgrimage of 1942 might not go ahead.<sup>78</sup> In the end, though there was no formal pilgrimage, the head of the Guild decided to undertake the pilgrimage on his own as a symbolic gesture. He encountered a priest and two married couples who had had the same idea, telling him that they 'knew the pilgrimage was off, but they had been to the pilgrimage regularly for many years and were determined not to miss paying their usual devotions'.<sup>79</sup>

Some pilgrimages to nationally important shrines were critical in reminding people of their own national identity, and so were resorted to as a sign of continuity and adherence to a pre-war past, often as resistance to Nazi occupation. In Poland, only pilgrimage to the Black Madonna in Częstochowa, known as the Queen of Poland since 1656, was permitted by the occupying force; this at least allowed those under occupation to act 'as one nation' in the face of territorial division.<sup>80</sup> The Black Madonna had been credited with the defence of Warsaw against the Russians in the 1920 Miracle on the Vistula, and with the defence of Jasna Góra monastery during the Second World War.<sup>81</sup> Pilgrimage provided a similar focus of national faith in Czechoslovakia following occupation. In July 1941 Fr Spacek, chaplain of the Polish forces in England who fought alongside the RAF, recalled how:

After the German occupation, thousands of people started making pilgrimages. But now these pilgrimages became to some extent symbolical; to visit these country churches was a question of national sentiment, and there was no priest who did not give a message of strongest encouragement to the people around him. I can still see before me the pilgrimage of St Vavrinecek [or Lawrence, in Prague], when one of the best known deans of Prague addressed thousands of people ... There is no village or hamlet where the Church is not the centre and refuge of patriotism. And because of this, there are no prisons or concentration camps where Catholic priests are not held in captivity.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>77</sup> '49<sup>th</sup> Annual Pilgrimage to York', *Catholic Herald*, 23 May 1941, 7; 'Notes for Ransomers', *Catholic Herald*, 13 June 1941, 3.

<sup>78</sup> 'Notes for Ransomers', *Catholic Herald*, 15 May 1942, 5; Kathryn Hurlock, 'The Guild of Our Lady of Ransom and Pilgrimage in England and Wales, c. 1890–1914', *British Catholic History*, 35.3 (2021), 9.

<sup>79</sup> 'Notes for Ransomers', *Catholic Herald*, 5 June 1942, 5.

<sup>80</sup> Bank, with Gevers, 149; Józef Gula, 'Catholic Poles in the USSR during the Second World War', *Religion, State and Society*, 22 (1994), 11; 'Litany of Our Lady – Nazi Text for Poland', *Southern Cross*, 21 May 1943, 1.

<sup>81</sup> Anna Niedźwiedz, *The Image and the Figure: our Lady of Częstochowa in Polish Culture and Popular Religion* (Krakow: Jagellonian University Press, 2010), 112–19.

<sup>82</sup> 'Faith lives on in Catholic Czechoslovakia', *Catholic Herald*, 4 July 1941, 5.

In Norway, by contrast, veneration of and pilgrimage to the shrine of St Olav, the country's patron saint, was used both as a way to resist the Nazis, *and* by Norwegian Nazis who wanted to employ him 'as a prop in an ethnocentric and nationalist narrative' which idealised the Norse past.<sup>83</sup>

The movement of large numbers of Catholic refugees around Europe, and their participation in pilgrimage in their new locales, introduced people to different pilgrimage sites, or indeed to the act of pilgrimage itself, while other locations were introduced to new groups of pilgrims. Such was the case with the Breton sailors and fisherman who took refuge in Cornwall. They attended the Cornish-Breton festival of September 1942, which included a pilgrimage to St Michael's Mount.<sup>84</sup>

The extent to which these new connections endured varied, however. In Britain, John Wolffe concluded that, though there were increases in religious activity in warfare, in the long-term this had little impact on religiosity and church going, though his conclusions remain the subject of debate.<sup>85</sup> Yet in some parts of Europe, Catholic soldiers and evacuees stayed where they were, and introduced pilgrimage traditions to areas where they had been absent before the war. The 150,000 Polish servicemen and dependents who had settled in Britain by 1949, the vast majority of whom were Catholic, planned pilgrimages to British sites that they were unlikely to have visited before the war: the *Akcja Katolicka* (Catholic Action) established in Scotland transported the traditions of pre-war Poland to Scottish communities, organising events for the Catholic community that included pilgrimage, actively working to prevent religious indifference. Thomas Kernberg argued that the annual Polish pilgrimage to Carfin Grotto in Scotland, a major event in the Polish Catholic calendar, linked them to the Virgin as the Patroness of Poland.<sup>86</sup>

Catholic priests serving in the various forces included pilgrimage organisation in their remit, together with religious services, the distribution of religious literature, and attendance at religious retreats or 'Refresher Courses' in Christianity as a way to 'provide useful religious activities for the troops'.<sup>87</sup> Permission to embark on pilgrimages formed part of the wider efforts of various countries to maintain morale among their forces as religion was recognised as a 'cohesive force for raising wartime morale'.<sup>88</sup> As a result, servicemen and servicewomen regularly replaced the missing civilian pilgrims. Hundreds of American Catholics went on pilgrimage to the Shrine of the Miraculous Medal in Paris under the direction of the European Theatre Chaplains' Office.<sup>89</sup> In the summer of 1942, Polish officers took part in

<sup>83</sup> Marion Grau, *Pilgrimage, Landscape, and Identity: Reconstructing Sacred Geographies in Norway* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 153.

<sup>84</sup> 'Cornish-Breton Festival', *Catholic Herald*, 11 September 1942, 5.

<sup>85</sup> Wolffe, 251; Parker; Field, 'Britain on its knees', 92–112. A similar correlation between bombing and religiosity was seen in Italy: Baldoli, 143.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas Kernberg, 'The Polish Community in Scotland', Unpublished PhD Thesis (University of Glasgow, 1990), 275; Sheila Patterson, 'The Polish Community in Britain', *The Polish Review*, (1961), 73.

<sup>87</sup> Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, 230.

<sup>88</sup> Field, 'Puzzled People Revisited', 447; Field, *Periodizing Secularization*, 215.

<sup>89</sup> 'WACS and Soldiers make pilgrimage to shrine of miraculous Medal', *Catholic News Service*, 9 April 1945, 22.

the pilgrimages at St Winefride's Well, north Wales, carrying the statue and forming a choir,<sup>90</sup> while 'a noble contingent of Catholic W.A.A.F.s' (the Women's Auxiliary Air Force) boosted the pilgrims at Prinknash Abbey in England.<sup>91</sup>

Though war disrupted the religious activities of many Catholics, being stationed in Europe also gave servicemen and women opportunities for pilgrimages they otherwise might not have had. American airmen and ground crew were so keen to go to Walsingham that they had 'forgone their sleep'<sup>92</sup> despite being on duty the night and day before, just so they did not miss out. A month after the liberation of Rome, 'the greatest British pilgrimage that has ever paid homage' came to the city. An excited correspondent for *The Tablet* claimed that the pope had been giving these British pilgrims audiences 'on a scale unprecedented in history, including the pre-Reformation age'.<sup>93</sup> This was not a formally organised pilgrimage, but 'men in khaki drill' and women in service uniform taking advantage of their proximity to the city.

Significant movements of people around Europe thus changed who went on pilgrimage, and where, but so too did the conditions of pilgrimage. The demographic of Catholic pilgrims across Europe shifted, in neutral and in combatant countries, as war service and difficulties of travel prohibited some from taking part. War service saw many of service age unable to join their usual pilgrimages, and so in their place there was an increase in the number of younger pilgrims. The pilgrimage of 1940 in honour of Saint John Vianney to the basilica in Ars (Auvergne), included so many young pilgrims that it was dubbed 'the pilgrimage of the next generation'.<sup>94</sup> The pervasiveness of walking or cycling also meant a rise in younger pilgrims, like those to Béhaud (Loire) in September 1942 who walked 'impressive distances'.<sup>95</sup> The reliance on walking or cycling also meant those who found independent travel difficult, or indeed impossible, stopped taking part. Writing about the Lourdes pilgrimage in the summer of 1941, one correspondent for *The Tablet* reported that the shrine's Medical Bureau had been closed, and that the limited number of pilgrims who did make it to the site 'seldom included the sick', no doubt because the added difficulties of travel in wartime, and the lack of people to accompany them, made the pilgrimage impossible for many of Lourdes' traditional pilgrims.<sup>96</sup> After the war in Europe ended, it took some time before transport provision returned to normal. Monsignor Choquet of Tarbes and Lourdes warned potential pilgrims to Lourdes in July 1945 that the twenty-five trains normally used to accommodate their annual pilgrimages were still unavailable.<sup>97</sup> In some cases pre-wartime options were permanently lost: the S.S. *Athenia*, known as 'The

<sup>90</sup> 'Honouring St Winefride at Holywell', *Catholic Herald*, 3 July 1942, 5.

<sup>91</sup> 'Prinknash Pilgrimage: WAAFs at ceremony site', *Catholic Herald*, 29 May 1942, 5.

<sup>92</sup> 'Doughboys pilgrimage to Walsingham Shrine', *Market Harborough Advertiser and Midland Mail*, 14 July 1944, 12.

<sup>93</sup> 'News, Notes and Texts', *Tablet*, 22 July 1944, 43.

<sup>94</sup> 'Au sanctuaire d'Ars, les 4 et 5 Août, des milliers de fidèles ont prié pour la France', *La Croix*, 11 August 1940, 2.

<sup>95</sup> Gildea, 190.

<sup>96</sup> 'News, Notes and Texts', *Tablet*, 30 August 1941, 120.

<sup>97</sup> 'Lourdes Pilgrimage', *Manchester Guardian*, 19 July 1945, 5.



Lourdes Ship' for her role in taking Scottish pilgrims in the 1930s, was torpedoed by the Germans on 3 September 1939, the first British ship to be sunk by them in the war.<sup>98</sup> Problems of wartime transport did not necessarily hinder sick pilgrims in Italy, however. At the basilica of Mary Help of Christians in bomb-damaged Turin, over one thousand sick pilgrims, many on stretchers, attended the annual pilgrimage of the sick in 1941, and the bishop of Alba led a special pilgrimage of the sick by train from Turin to Loreto in July 1943.<sup>99</sup>

Access to sites was a problem for pilgrims throughout the Second World War. Several shrines were wholly inaccessible due to war damage, or their location in militarised zones. Bomb damage to dozens of churches in Italy stopped pilgrimages, such as to the church of San Lorenzo in Rome; S. Niccoló, home of the shrine of St Nicholas of Myra;<sup>100</sup> and Santa Maria del Monte (Cesena).<sup>101</sup> More famously, the church of the Benedictine monastery of Monte Cassino, a major pilgrimage centre for nine centuries, was destroyed by the Allies when the Germans, using it as a defensive position, refused to leave.<sup>102</sup> In other places, access was discouraged or prohibited. The German occupiers who settled the district around the Black Madonna's shrine in Częstochowa obscured its religious identity, renaming the road approaching the shrine 'Adolf Hitler Allee' to give the area a more Germanic feel.<sup>103</sup> At Walsingham in England, the two rival shrines, one Anglo-Catholic, the other Catholic, found themselves on opposite sides of the militarised line even though they lay only a mile apart, a fact which influenced their fortunes during the war years. Though the Catholic shrine was accessible, lack of access to the nearby village caused problems for pilgrims.<sup>104</sup> Nazi advances across Belgium and into northern France also limited safe access to some of the most important pilgrimage sites, and prompted some Catholics to take matters into their own hands so that their holiest relics were safe. In Bruges, the Procession of the Holy Blood was cancelled, and the relic hidden by religious authorities for its own safety, just as it had been during the First World War.<sup>105</sup> The Nazi regime in general, opposed to the hierarchy and reach of the Catholic Church, tried to limit or even ban pilgrimages, citing 'wartime necessity' and the unsupportable pressure put on German trains by

<sup>98</sup> 'S.S. Athenia Well Known to Scottish Catholics', *Catholic Herald*, 8 September 1939, 7.

<sup>99</sup> 'Un commovente episodio al pellegrinaggio dei mali', *La Stampa*, 9 June 1941, 2; 'Gli ammalati Pellegrini toriensi', *La Stampa*, 10 July 1943, 2.

<sup>100</sup> Owen Chadwick, *Britain and the Vatican During the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 242; 'War Damaged to the Churches of Southern Italy', *Tablet*, 19 February 1944, 89.

<sup>101</sup> Baldoli, 144.

<sup>102</sup> Peter Caddick-Adams, *Monte Cassino: Ten Armies in Hell* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>103</sup> 'Adolf Hitler Replaces Częstochowa's Madonna', *Catholic Bulletin of Foreign News*, 26 December 1942, 4.

<sup>104</sup> Walsingham Anglican Archives: *Our Lady's Mirror*, Summer 1942, <<https://www.waaolm.org.uk/olm1942-2.htm>> [accessed 31 March 2021]; *Our Lady's Mirror*, Summer, 1944 <<https://www.waaolm.org.uk/olm1944-2.htm>> [accessed 31 March 2021]; 'Walsingham in Poverty: Celebrating Our Lady's Birthday', *Catholic Herald*, 30 August 1940, 8; 'Lovers of Walsingham: An Idea', *Catholic Herald*, 15 August 1941, 7.

<sup>105</sup> 'Belgium: Procession of the Holy Blood Cancelled', *Catholic Bulletin of Foreign News*, 10 May 1941, 1.



the sheer numbers of pilgrims using them.<sup>106</sup> Even if pilgrims had the ability to travel, and access to their preferred destinations was possible, there were often issues with accommodation and general hospitality. In the first month of the war, reports from Lourdes told of hotel closures because they were requisitioned.<sup>107</sup> At Walsingham, the cycling student-pilgrims of St Edmund's Seminary slept in huts in the grounds of the Slipper Chapel, access to the village, and thus accommodation, across the militarised line being prohibited.<sup>108</sup> Pilgrims who could travel, and found lodging, were faced with problems with provisioning because of food rationing and, in Ireland at least, a lack of soap.<sup>109</sup> When Italy entered the war in 1940, the British envoy Sir D'Arcy Osborne, then living on Italian soil in Rome, was removed to the pilgrim hostel attached to the Convent of Santa Marta, next to St Peter's. For the duration of the war, it was used to serve both the needs of the envoy and various ambassadors, as well as refugees.<sup>110</sup>

These difficulties meant alternatives were developed for pilgrims, either to more accessible pilgrimage sites, to temporary ones, or through other devotional activities, much in the same way that secular holidays and other leisure activities had to be adapted due to wartime restrictions.<sup>111</sup> When conflict threatened the image of the Madonna del Divino Amore in Castel di Leva, Rome, in January 1944, the pope had it moved to a church in the centre of the city where it attracted so many pilgrims praying for the city's safety, that it had to be moved a second time to the larger church of St Ignazio to accommodate the numbers.<sup>112</sup> The inability to visit Lourdes clearly weighed on many, as alternatives were soon developed: holy water from the site was sent for, and a Lourdes Day Rally was held in Scotland. For those who could not reach Norfolk, shrines to Our Lady of Walsingham were visited elsewhere in England.<sup>113</sup> In Ireland, the women who usually raised funds to take invalids to Lourdes instead encouraged pilgrimages to Knock; in France, the same diversion of funds was suggested for Lourdes pilgrims who were instead asked to spend what that journey would have cost on works in their own parishes.<sup>114</sup> When pilgrimages could take place to Lourdes, such as when 1200 Children of Mary went in December 1941, simultaneous pilgrimages were held by members of the sodality to local Marian shrines across France.<sup>115</sup> In France, where veneration of St Thérèse of Lisieux peaked before the outbreak of war when it was believed that she had averted conflict through the 1938 Munich Agreement, pilgrims unable to visit her shrine in occupied Normandy instead went as 'virtual pilgrims' to their local

<sup>106</sup>Brodie, *German Catholicism*, 144–5.

<sup>107</sup>'Lourdes: Usually Thronged, Deserted Village as War Halts Pilgrimage', *Catholic News Feeds*, 25 September 1939, 5; 'Belgian Pilgrimage to Lourdes', *Catholic News Feeds*, 6 May 1940, 8.

<sup>108</sup>'Ware Seminarists', *Catholic Herald*, 31 July 1942, 5.

<sup>109</sup>'St Patrick's Purgatory', *Catholic Standard*, 28 May 1943, 6.

<sup>110</sup>Chadwick, 121.

<sup>111</sup>Robert MacKay, *Half the Battle: Civilian Morale in Britain During the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 117.

<sup>112</sup>Baldoli, 145.

<sup>113</sup>'Five Thousand at Edinburgh R.C. Rally', *Midlothian Advertiser*, 4 April 1942, 3.

<sup>114</sup>'Mgr Brunhes bénit les chantiers de l'église Ste-Bernadette à Montpellier', *La Croix*, 26 April 1940, 5.

<sup>115</sup>'Good News From Lourdes', *Catholic Standard*, 12 December 1941, 17.

churches, and honoured her there.<sup>116</sup> Other pilgrimages went ahead to their usual destinations, but were modified in order to take account of the problems caused by war, processions cut short or diverted to follow alternative routes, candles not lit, and large outdoor gatherings reduced in size.

Despite these negative impacts on conducting pilgrimage, as a whole it is true that the number of pilgrimages across Europe increased, though the individual pilgrimages were themselves likely to be smaller. For many pilgrims this was because pilgrimage provided religious support which was needed more than ever in wartime, either to seek assistance for themselves or for loved ones, or to pray for peace for all. In some countries it also formed part of a wider shift towards looking to the Church for help: in Italy, for example, where the state was ill-prepared for entry into the war, Catholic priests stepped in to visit and bless those being bombed, and their encouragement of faith 'came to be perceived, albeit unconsciously, as an important part of Italy's civil defences'.<sup>117</sup> Indeed in some parts of Italy, specific pilgrimages were used for defence such as the repeated pilgrimages to Taranto cathedral in the spring of 1942, which the local bishop claimed protected the city, and those to the shrine of Padre Pio in Apulia where there was also a significant increase in the number of letters sent asking for help during the war years.<sup>118</sup>

The stresses of war not only appear to have stimulated a rise in devotional activities, of which pilgrimage was just one, but they also potentially created new religious sites which could become the focus of pilgrimages. The recognition of devotion to Our Lady of Banneux (Liège, Belgium) by the local bishop saw a rise in pilgrimage traffic after 1942.<sup>119</sup> In July 1944, Bergamo in Italy drew throngs of pilgrims after a young girl claimed she saw a vision of the Virgin.<sup>120</sup> Marian visions also continued to occur at Heede in Lower Saxony from 1937–1940.<sup>121</sup> This was mirrored by decline in other places. Though major national pilgrimages took place to sites like Lourdes or Croagh Patrick, other sites saw a sharp reduction in their pilgrim numbers, and the subsequent loss of income that went with it. The problems faced by wartime pilgrims undoubtedly made pilgrimage impossible for some, but for others the mobility of wartime service opened opportunities to access new sites, sometimes with their own communities in exile, while Catholics elsewhere modified pilgrimage experiences to account for wartime shortages or prohibitions. A positive spin could even be put on the difficulties of pilgrimage at the time, such as when pilgrims were praised in *La Croix* as they were acting in a 'spirit of penance' by enduring the comparative hardship of wartime pilgrimage.<sup>122</sup> One

<sup>116</sup>Vesna Drapac, 'Catholic Attitudes to Peace and War at the Time of the Munich Agreement', *French History and Civilization*, 6 (2015), 259; Vesna Drapac, 'The Devotion of French Prisoners of War and Requisitioned Workers to Thérèse of Lisieux: Transcending the "Diocese Behind Barbed Wire"', *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 7 (2014), 283–96.

<sup>117</sup>Baldoli, 137.

<sup>118</sup>Baldoli, 145–6.

<sup>119</sup>Bank with Gevers, 407.

<sup>120</sup>'News, Notes and Texts', *Tablet*, 29 July 1944, 56.

<sup>121</sup>Maunder, 83, 86; Maria Anna Zumholz, *Volksfrömmigkeit und Katholisches Milieu: Marienscheinungen in Heede, 1937–1940* (Cloppenberg: Verlag und Druckerei Runge, 2004).

<sup>122</sup>'En Savoie, 20,000 Pèlerins', *La Croix*, 13 September 1940, 2.

reporter even claimed that war had the ‘happy consequence of giving the pilgrimages their true appearance’.<sup>123</sup>

It is clear that pilgrimage, in common with many religious activities, had to be adapted in the face of war, but that it was still an important and regular part of Catholic devotion. Quite how that manifested itself across Europe varied due to clear factors like the status of a country as neutral or combatant, or the fact that some places were occupied while others were not. It also reflected the respective piety and politics of the places involved. In England, where Catholicism was very much a minority religion, engagement with pilgrimage had to be careful not to clash with the Catholic Church’s desire to demonstrate the loyalty and patriotism of Catholics to the state and its aims. In Italy, by contrast, the support provided by the Church replaced the weak state, and pilgrimages were actively encouraged as a way of defending places from enemy bombardment. In the immediate aftermath of the war, pilgrimages of thanks, penance, and peace took place across Europe, demonstrating the way in which they were a key expression of Catholic piety and of coping with the effects of war, whether in militant or neutral countries: a large scale cross-carrying pilgrimage to the medieval abbey of Vézelay in France in the summer of 1946, for example, was promoted as a ‘crusade’ for peace, with the emphasis on bringing countries together in prayer and penance.<sup>124</sup> The changes engendered by the war — the alternatives developed in the face of destruction or problems of access and travel — were largely temporary as religious sites across Europe were rebuilt, and pilgrimage organisers were keen to re-establish the practice of large-scale pilgrimages to sites like Lourdes and Walsingham such as had been seen before the outbreak of war across Europe.

## Notes on contributor

Dr Kathryn Hurlock is an historian of pilgrimage. She leads The Returning Soldier project at Manchester Metropolitan University which explores the experiences of veterans from the ancient to modern eras. She is currently working on the histories of veteran pilgrimage in Europe.

## ORCID

Kathryn Hurlock  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7331-4903>

Correspondence to: Kathryn Hurlock. Email [K.Hurlock@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:K.Hurlock@mmu.ac.uk),

<sup>123</sup>‘Manifestations mariales au diocese de Puy’, *La Croix*, 19 September 1940, 2.

<sup>124</sup>*Pilgrim Cross: an illustrated account of the Pilgrim Cross: Vézelay Peace Pilgrimage, 1946* (Oxford: Blackfriars Publications, 1946).