

The Persistence of the Sacred: German Catholic Pilgrimage, 1832–1937

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Skye Doney, the director of the George L. Mosse Program in History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, uncovers the Catholic world of pilgrimage in Aachen and Trier in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The core of his argument focuses on the question of accessing and regulating the sacred and, in turn, eternal salvation. Like recent studies by Monica Black (*A Demon Haunted Land* [2020]), Patrick Houlihan (*Catholicism and the Great War* [2015]), and Michael O’Sullivan (*Disruptive Power* [2018]), Doney’s work deemphasizes political history and focuses on the lived faith experiences of Catholics. He begins his study in the 1830s, a decade that he argues offered positive opportunities for Catholics, such as the ushering in of the *Zollverein*, easing trade and travel; the removal of select scientific works from the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, broadening intellectual horizons; and increased integration of Aachen and Trier into Prussia, infusing a greater sense of belonging for Catholics within predominantly Protestant Prussia. Doney concludes his study in 1937, when, he argues, sacramental practice and pilgrimage were at their peaks, and before postwar realities shifted Catholic emphasis away from pilgrimages.

Doney makes excellent use of sources, drawing from ecclesiastical, state, and regional archives. Likewise, he relies significantly on material culture from the period of study, including numerous images of these objects to help readers immerse themselves into the pilgrimage experience. The first three chapters delineate this experience and reveal how it changed over time. German Catholicism in the Rhineland was “heterogeneous, not monolithic” (9), Doney argues, as pilgrims made prayers and hymns into reflections of their encounters with the sacred. Despite attempts to neatly organize pilgrims and control their experiences, church authorities, including the clergy, were regularly met with resistance. Doney’s work portrays a world that is less uniform in religious practice and less clerically controlled, challenging the work of Wolfgang Schieder and Jonathan Sperber. Still, this did not mean that clergy and pilgrimage organizers did not attempt to regulate pilgrimage sites. For example, in the 1840s, staging areas at local parish churches were assigned for groups. Likewise, the ever-growing *Einzelpilger*, individuals who traveled alone or in tiny groups, created many challenges for organizers, especially when the pilgrims failed to follow established protocols.

Doney captures well the pilgrims’ feeling of urgency and their thirst to encounter the sacred in relics. As he explains, these were people who “believed that God could break into the world at will and manipulate nature” (59). The majority were women and children, though by the turn of the century the number of men participating and claiming to be healed increased. Those who were ill and seeking a cure were generally between thirty and fifty-five years old, with no economic group dominating among them except for the unemployed. Doney postulates that under National Socialism pilgrimage sites and relics also offered a counternarrative to the state’s portrayal of the sick “as useless eaters and an intolerable burden on society” (70) by emphasizing their worthiness and the possibility of miraculous healing. Pilgrims marked their journeys to pilgrimage sites with *Andenken* (remembrances) and *Abzeichen* (badges). More than just commemorative souvenirs, Doney explains that these items encapsulated the pilgrimage experience by serving as a “contact point between the sacred and the temporal” (110).

Doney posits that the individual who most challenged the Catholic Church's approach to pilgrimages in Germany was Johannes Ronge (1813–1887), a defrocked Catholic priest who likened himself to a second Luther. While possessing none of the skills or talents of Martin Luther, Ronge and other detractors did offer harsh critiques of the pilgrimage to the Holy Coat of Trier and the local ordinary, Bishop Wilhelm Arnoldi, in order to persuade the region's clergy to alter their approach toward relics and pilgrimages. A brutal pamphlet war ensued that one could liken to those of the Reformation era. Improvements in seminary training and theological education led to more critical approaches to the verification process of miraculous healing. Doney concludes that "Ink and paper took precedence over the blood of pilgrims and the clothes of the Holy Family" (147).

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, a professionalization of the evaluation of miracles occurred. The *Kulturkampf* also partially precipitated the necessity for reform. By 1891, Bishop Michael Felix Korum of Trier instituted formal investigative steps before a healing could be certified as miraculous. Through this process, Doney explains, a "masculinization of truth" (149) developed, by which male testimonies from relatives, doctors, or clerics superseded those made by women. The only exception was the testimony of Catholic nuns. While this transformation in validating miracles was underway, a parallel discussion took place that involved a scholarly effort to substantiate the genuineness of relics. Scholars debated the relics' authenticity and origins, utilizing a variety of approaches. Doney dedicates much space to the complexity of their arguments. Despite the efforts to substantiate the relics' authenticity, in 1925, Cardinal Karl Joseph Schulte, bishop of Cologne, stated that "Catholics should look to the thousand years of Germans venerating the Aachen relics and depend on the reliability of their German forefathers" (199). Thus, in the end, Schulte reduced the argument to faith, eyewitness evidence, and tradition, the foundation for much of popular Catholic belief.

Skye Doney has produced an important study that broadens our understanding of Catholic faith and practice in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It could be strengthened by contextualizing its themes, even briefly, within the history of relics and pilgrimages in the broader European Catholic tradition. While Doney does make passing reference to this subject, a larger discussion would assist more general readers. Likewise, Doney offers interesting snippets of the history of pilgrimages under National Socialism, especially how they juxtaposed Nazi ideology and claims to Catholic teaching and tradition. Perhaps he will more deeply explore such important insights in his future work.

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Ideale und Interessen. Die mitteleuropäische Wirtschaft im Amerikanischen Bürgerkrieg

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Most Americans think of the U.S. Civil War as the quintessential "American" war. That is the way K-12 students are taught about the bloodiest conflict in American history. College undergraduates are often reminded that this is "our" war; we cannot blame it on anyone