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"Let's Go Cruising": Pilgrimage Cruises from Ireland to the Mediterranean in the 1930s

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Abstract:

This article explores the 1930s phenomenon of Irish pilgrimage cruises which visited a range of religious destinations, but most frequently travelled to Lourdes or Rome. Although these were unquestionably sincere religious undertakings, they were also structured to resemble and eventually intertwine with the commercial cruise industry. The 1930s was the decade when Mediterranean cruises first became a luxury holiday form, combining sea and sun with the distinctly modernist aesthetic of cruise-liners themselves. This article explores the development of pilgrimage cruises, maps their relationship to the commercial cruise industry of the 1930s, and argues that the phenomenon was a forerunner of the package holidays to southern Europe which would later become so popular with Irish tourists.

Keywords: 1930s, Cruise, Package Holiday, Pilgrimage, Tourism

1. Introduction

Travel as part of a pilgrimage – occasionally to Oberammergau or even the Holy Land, but most frequently to Rome and Lourdes – was by far the most likely form of travel to continental Europe for Irish people throughout much of the twentieth century, and it occurred on a notable scale. Groups were often of a few hundred people but sometimes several thousand, and Ben Keatinge has argued it is useful to remember "the important role which religious journeys – pilgrimages – played in the 1930s and beyond in opening up continental Europe for Irish people. Indeed, the two reasons an average Irish person might have had for travel in de Valera's Ireland would have been pilgrimage and emigration" (2017, 139). As this article will discuss, tracking the changing routes taken by Irish pilgrims over time also highlights the changing forms of transport used, as overland travel gave way to sea journeys and then (eventually) air travel. These shifting

modes of travel, as well as the experience they offered pilgrims, then point towards the intersection between pilgrimage and tourism. This article will therefore explore the surprisingly intertwined history of Irish pilgrimage to European religious sites, the development of those pilgrimages into commercial opportunities for Irish travel agencies, and the desirability (especially during the 1930s) of cruise holidays. By mapping out the ways in which large-scale pilgrimage trips from Ireland to continental European destinations developed over several decades, this article will argue that they constituted a form of proto-package holiday which was already well-established for Irish travellers before World War Two, long before the post-war era in which package holidays as they are usually defined became popular. Pilgrimages shared many key characteristics of those later package holidays – a group of people previously unconnected to each other who agreed to travel together to a common destination, all arranged by a professional travel agent in order to benefit from economies of scale in group bookings and therefore minimise their travel costs. As a secondary but not insignificant benefit, the group also shared the social aspects of travel – sharing train carriages, hotels or even entire cruise ships as part of the joint experience of the journey, and becoming a temporary but sometimes quite intensely-bonded social group for its duration.

This intertwining of pilgrimage with tourism was complex, as would have been the motivations and experiences of the travellers themselves. Scholars of both religion and leisure have long recognised and documented the connections between pilgrimage and tourism, and as Raphaël Ingelbien has argued, "mass pilgrimages not infrequently afforded occasions for pilgrims to indulge in more strictly touristic forms of leisure" (2016, 142). This is not to discount genuine religious commitment as a motivation for travel even if the traveller also hopes for more secular enjoyment during the journey. The motivations and experiences of Irish pilgrims to European religious sites discussed in this article would have been widely varied and remain largely unknowable either individually or collectively. Travellers would have included invalids for whom the travel was often a painful and difficult experience born of desperation, as well as those for whom it was a respectable (and even virtuous) way to enjoy a Mediterranean cruise, along with every possible variation and combination of both these motivations. If their motivations and responses are opaque to us, however, what can be traced are the changing routes and destinations of travel, the way those intersected with wholly secular tourism using similar routes and destinations, and the infrastructure which developed to facilitate both forms of Irish travel to continental Europe. It is considerably outside the scope of this article to examine the religious experiences of Irish pilgrims beyond the ways in which their activities intersected with leisure travel. However it is important to note that to focus on this intersection is not to dismiss the sincerity of the religious experiences which existed alongside the pleasures of secular travel.

The transport infrastructures, routes and destinations of international secular travel as it developed during the twentieth century also shaped and changed Irish pilgrimage travel. As train travel gave way to cruise ships and then eventually to air travel, this opened up new routes for pilgrims via different intermediate locations and even to newly-feasible destinations. As will be discussed below, for example, pilgrimages to "the Holy Land", while remaining the longest and most expensive of such trips from Ireland, became feasible by chartering commercial liners to sail directly to North Africa rather than travelling by land across Europe, and it was the commercial popularity of long-distance cruise holidays in the interwar years which made liners available for pilgrimage charter. Similarly, while the shrine at Fatima in Portugal received official Vatican approval for pilgrimages in 1930, the first organised Irish visit there did not occur until 1949, and, although that first journey was by a chartered ship to Lisbon, it was only when air travel became feasible as a form of commercial tourism to the Iberian Peninsula that Irish pilgrimages to Fatima became frequent (*Evening Herald*, 19 May 1949). The business models of the commercial

tourism industry affected pilgrimage travel from Ireland in other ways too. Even an organisation as large and international as the Catholic Church needed professional assistance in organising a pilgrimage across much of Europe for hundreds of people, and commercial travel agencies were often employed to arrange the logistics of travel. The popularity of such ventures even led the Irish Catholic Church to establish its own travel agency, but over time the popularity (and potential profitability) of pilgrimages also encouraged many commercial travel agencies to specialise in organising them. The geography of this form of Irish international travel moved across the sea and rail connections of Europe, with train routes to Lourdes from Dublin via London and Paris, and later sea routes via Bordeaux becoming well-established. Mediterranean Sea routes to Rome via Naples (with "side trips" to Florence or Venice) eventually led to more adventurous sailings to Alexandria via Madeira and Gibraltar as pilgrims made their way to Jerusalem. This expanded the geography of pilgrimage travel from southern France across the Mediterranean and into North Africa in parallel with the geography of luxury tourism, as the 1930s' fashion for cruise holidays was also focused on the Mediterranean, and ships carrying wealthy tourists followed the same routes to the same ports as those carrying Irish pilgrims.

2. National Pilgrimages to Lourdes

The shrine at Lourdes had been a place of unofficial pilgrimage since the Marian visions of Bernadette Soubirous in 1858, and then developed a more official status over the next few decades, aided by both Church approval and developing transport infrastructure. As Ruth Harris documents in her definitive history of Lourdes, "[c]onnected to the outside world by a railway line from 1866, the town grew closer to Bordeaux, and through Bordeaux it became closer to Paris", and Lourdes rapidly developed from an isolated rural town into "a town of hotels, restaurants and railway lines" in the coming years (1999, 175). The first "national pilgrimage" to Lourdes was a French undertaking, organised in 1873 as a direct response to the shattering experience of defeat in the Franco-Prussian War and intended to stir national pride via national pilgrimage (255-258). This established a connection between national identity and pilgrimage which would exert a powerful effect on other Catholic countries, including Ireland. While Irish pilgrims undoubtedly visited Lourdes during these earlier decades of the shrine's development as an important European pilgrimage site, it was not until 1913 that the first Irish National Pilgrimage to the town was organised. That it took more than 40 years after the first French venture of its kind is hardly surprising considering the distance, difficulties and costs of travel from Ireland to the south of France in the late-nineteenth century. Even in 1913, one of its key organisers – the Archbishop of Cashel, who would also become a central figure for other Irish pilgrimages in the coming years – frankly described the journey as "affording an opportunity to those of means and leisure, of testifying in a special manner, their love and veneration for the Mother of God" (*Derry People and Donegal News*, 8 February 1913). In order to make the pilgrimage national, it was organised by allocating ticket quotas throughout the diocesan and parish structures of the island of Ireland, and intending pilgrims were required to obtain a signed form from their diocese in order to be added to the list of travellers (*Kerry Evening Star*, 16 December 1912). The actual organisation of travel however required professional expertise, and it was at this point that the religious structures intersected with those of commercial tourism. The Church contracted Thomas Cook (who had had offices in Dublin from 1876) to arrange the train, boat and hotel accommodation, to book pilgrims' tickets and take their payments. The pilgrimage route was overland, sailing initially for Holyhead from Dublin, Rosslare and Belfast, taking the train to Folkestone via London, the ferry to Boulogne, and resuming the train journey

from there through Paris and on to Lourdes. Different groups broke the journey with overnight stays in different cities – some stayed in London for a night, some in Paris, depending on their original starting point, and the train, hotel and meal packages were available in first, second or third class. First-class train and hotel tickets from Dublin were £14 17s, second-class were £11 3s and third-class were £9 12s (*Kilkenny People*, 26 April 1913). Thomas Cook would also organise "side trips" to destinations along the route for pilgrims who wanted them – this concept of "side trips" to pilgrimages would go on to become crucial to the ways that they blurred the divide between religious and leisure travel, and it is therefore significant they were present from the very first large pilgrimage from Ireland. It is also notable that one of the accounts written by a pilgrim who took the route with an overnight stay in London made reference to using that time for "sightseeing" (*Western People*, 27 September 1913). The 1913 National Pilgrimage groups left Ireland on 8 September, which was a day earlier than originally intended because train travel through France had to be rescheduled to accommodate large scale French troop movements, an ominous indication of events to come (*Freeman's Journal*, 24 May 1913). The total group of 3700 pilgrims included a significant number of ordained churchmen and they were led by both the Archbishop of Cashel and Cardinal Logue, but it is nevertheless clear that the great majority were members of the laity who had "means and leisure". That such a large number were willing and able to undertake the expense and rather gruelling travel was an indication that there was considerable enthusiasm for both the spiritual and secular experiences involved.

The 1913 National Pilgrimage was considered a great success by all those involved, with many reports stressing both the powerful religious and patriotic emotions felt by the pilgrims upon arrival in Lourdes, and a more general enjoyment of the entire experience, including the camaraderie among those sharing the journey (*Western People*, 27 September 1913). Wider international and then national events intervened, and the journey could not be repeated during the years of World War One, the War of Independence or the Civil War. The enthusiasm for such enterprises clearly survived that lengthy hiatus however, as in spring 1924 the Second National Pilgrimage to Lourdes was announced in the press. It was in most respects a repeat of the first journey in 1913, being organised by a national committee with diocesan sub-committees which allocated places to parishioners from their ticket quotas. The actual travel arrangements were again managed by Thomas Cook, but there were some significant changes to the transport routes used, and these were notable for the ways that they highlighted the secular possibilities of the pilgrimage for many travellers. Where in 1913 the entire party had travelled by train via London and Paris, the announcement for the 1924 journey emphasised that this time invalids (always an important part of pilgrimages to shrines such as Lourdes) would travel by specially-chartered steamer directly from Dublin to Bordeaux before making the short overland journey to Lourdes itself. By contrast, regular pilgrims would once again take the overland route via London and Boulogne, with second class tickets offering all trains, hotels, meals and tips for £13 11s from Dublin and Belfast, although pilgrims could request an upgrade to first class for their travel in France for 30s each (*Connacht Tribune*, 19 April 1924). While mention was made of the benefits of this new arrangements for the invalids, in that the direct steamer meant they only had to endure one embarkation and disembarkation and would be spared the "coming and going" of other pilgrims, it was also baldly stated that the two routes were also "better for the pilgrims that their journey be not incommoded by the presence of the sick" (*Sligo Champion*, 24 May 1924) a statement which indicated an unembarrassed acknowledgement that non-invalid pilgrims were likely motivated by a range of different ambitions, including the very secular pleasures of international travel and sightseeing (*Sligo Champion*, 24 May 1924). Indeed, as will be outlined below, this change to the organisation of

the Second National Pilgrimage was the first of many indicators over the remaining inter-war years that the journey itself was clearly understood to be an opportunity for enjoyable leisure travel. The 1924 pilgrimage was even larger than its 1913 predecessor had been, with a total of 4000 pilgrims, of whom 800 were invalids and their medical attendants travelling on the direct steamer, the rest being regular pilgrims travelling by train (*Ulster Herald*, 12 July 1924). As in 1913, it is striking that so many pilgrims willing and able to pay more than £13 per person could be found, especially given that many of them probably travelled in couples or family groups. Clearly, they would still have been the persons of "means and leisure" the Archbishop of Cashel had previously described, and it is worth noting that so many of them existed in the earliest years of the Free State when the general economic circumstances in Ireland were poor.

The success of the second National Pilgrimage in 1924 was clearly one of the most significant factors behind the establishment of a professional travel agency by the Catholic Truth Society of Ireland (CTSI). The CTSI itself had been formed in 1899 and was primarily a publisher of pamphlets and cheap books (Godson 2014, 397-400). In 1928, their printing and bookselling firm was renamed and reorganised under the new name of the Veritas Company, which also established a travel agency of the same name as part of the business. They were to be specialist pilgrimage organisers, and operated their first pilgrimage in October that year when they oversaw 2000 pilgrims visiting Lourdes (*Irish Independent*, 9 October 1928). The smaller party of travellers and the abandonment of a direct chartered steamer for invalids by comparison to the 1924 National Pilgrimage points towards the inexperience of Veritas as travel agents, although it was still a significant undertaking and appears to have been a successful enterprise. The following year Veritas organised a pilgrimage to Rome, which left Ireland on 8 October and returned a fortnight later. This was also an overland journey, which meant that seven of the pilgrimage's fourteen days were spent travelling. Advertisements and announcements of the trip dwelt in some detail on the routes and stopping points between Dublin and Rome, which, given the distance involved, were numerous. They were also without exception popular and fashionable southern European tourism destinations, most of which had no religious significance at all. On their outward journey from Dublin, pilgrims would travel via London, Paris, Aix-les-Bains, and Rapallo over the course of more than four days. They then spent a week in Rome, time which "will be occupied with sight-seeing…and during the five days practically every place of historic interest in the Eternal City will be visited, including, of course, St Peter's, the Vatican Galleries and Library, Sistine Chapel, Raphael's Loggia, Vatican Gardens, Catacombs of S. Callistro, Basilica of St. Sebastiano, and the Arch of Constantine will be visited" (*Irish Independent*, 2 October 1929). Many of these Roman sites were of religious as well as tourist significance, and one day of the trip was "reserved for the audience with the Holy Father", no doubt the high point of the entire expedition for most pilgrims. After that, however, "the special party desiring to visit Venice will leave Rome on Sat., 19th Oct., and join the ordinary party at Milan on the following Tuesday. Lucerne will be reached the same evening at 6.46", after which the entire group retraced their steps home via Paris and London (*Irish Independent*, 2 Oct 1929).

If the Veritas Company's first pilgrimage to Lourdes in 1928 had been relatively simple and small-scale, then their visit to Rome the following year not only displayed a growing confidence as professional travel agents, but also began to develop the template for pilgrimage tours from Ireland over coming years and decades. With a religious shrine or site as the journey's formal destination, its status as a pilgrimage was beyond question – especially if, as was often the case, it was organised by Veritas or accompanied by senior members of the Church – no matter what proportion of the time away from Ireland was spent on travel or sightseeing activities at non-religious locations. This combination of tourist pleasure with religious activity, organised

within the structures and infrastructures of commercial travel but also cloaked by the respectability of Church approval and involvement, then became the pattern for the most common form of travel outside Ireland (excepting emigration) prior to the development of mass market sun holidays decades later. As mentioned above, neither these structures nor the secular pleasures of the journey necessarily undermined a sincere religious commitment or experience for the pilgrims. However, in a mid-twentieth-century Ireland in which displays of a specifically Catholic form of respectability were powerful indicators of middle-class status for individuals and families (a status with very material benefits within communities and professional life), it is likely that being able to experience those secular pleasures while also enjoying the status of a pilgrim would have been particularly appealing (Cronin 2010, 107-129; Delay 2019).

3. Mediterranean Pilgrimage Cruises

Cruise travel as an end and a pleasure in itself – rather than sea travel only as a means of transport to a particular destination – had been available for the very wealthy since before World War One, but on a relatively limited scale and often only for very long journeys such those to the Caribbean during the winter. In August 1928, for example, the Cunard line were advertising a 39-day cruise to the Caribbean in the coming winter (for 90 gns), and even a 6 month "round the world" cruise for £425, both departing from Southampton, as most commercial cruises sold to British or Irish customers would continue to do over the coming decade (*Belfast Newsletter*, 30 August 1928). Mediterranean cruises were already taking place even during the 1920s however, with the *Irish Independent* noting in September 1926 that the Governor-General Tim Healy and his wife, as part of a group which also included James McMahon, the last British Under-Secretary for Ireland prior to Independence, had just departed on a cruise which among other places would visit Lisbon, Algiers, Venice, Corfu and Tangiers (*Irish Independent*, 11 September 1926). These were clearly rarefied holidays for very wealthy travellers, but by the start of the 1930s cruises had become both more numerous and slightly cheaper, and the Mediterranean was becoming a particularly favoured cruise route.

The development of leisure cruising for the (prosperous if not wealthy) middle-classes occurred largely because of external pressures on the shipping industry. Changes to United States immigration rules during the 1920s led to a drastic decline in immigrants from Europe and therefore in the number of trans-Atlantic sailings needed to transport them (Cerchiello, Vera-Rebollo 2019, 155). The impact of the 1929 Stock Market Crash and the deepening economic depression it led to also decreased passenger and cargo traffic across the Atlantic and shipping companies found themselves with underused liners (*ibidem*). By the early 1930s many of these had been redirected to offering cruise holidays to British (and Irish) passengers. In May 1931, the American Express travel agency on Grafton Street in Dublin was advertising "The Modern Holiday – Go Cruising!", promising holidaymakers they could "combine rest and gaiety at moderate cost" (*Irish Independent*, 27 May 1931). And early in 1932, the *Meath Chronicle* firmly stated that "[c]ruising is no longer the prerogative of the rich and leisured classes", noting that in the coming year the White Star Line would be operating "tourist" cruises to Spain, Portugal and Morocco. The article explained that "these 'Tourist' cruises will last for twelve days and the fares are from £12 upwards, thus bringing cruises well within the range of the average person" (*Meath Chronicle*, 23 January 1932). That claim was a very elastic use of the term "average person", but nevertheless it was the case that the cost of cruise holidays had dropped significantly by the early 1930s, and this would have important implications for Irish pilgrimage tourism.

The expanding business of leisure cruises visibly began to intersect with Irish pilgrimages to continental European destinations during 1933 and 1934. This was a significant period for the Catholic Church, 1933-34 having been declared a Holy Year which involved many activities – including pilgrimages – centred on Rome (Bosworth 2010). This was reflected in the pilgrimages organised from Ireland, as their principal destination became Rome instead of Lourdes. The exception to this was the Veritas-organised pilgrimage to Lourdes which departed Dublin in September 1933, a third "national pilgrimage" intended to give thanks for the success of the Eucharistic Congress. That had been hosted in Dublin the previous year, at which more than a million people from Ireland and abroad had congregated in the Phoenix Park, and in a world-first and technological marvel the Pope had broadcast a live radio message from the Vatican (Boyd 2007, 322). In October 1933, however, the first of at least four large-scale Irish pilgrimages to Rome left Dublin to participate in the Holy Year. The shift of destination from Lourdes to Rome was also marked by a significant change in the travel arrangements, as pilgrimage travel and Mediterranean cruises began to overlap. The first "official Irish pilgrimage" from Dublin to Rome (which cost from £19) travelled overland via the usual train routes through London and Paris in its outward journey, but advertised that not only were "extension parties to Venice and Florence" available during the 16-day trip, but also that there would be a "Mediterranean Cruise from Naples (to London) on Way Home" (*Irish Press*, 5 August 1933). In the spring of 1934, this intersection between pilgrimages and cruises became fully-developed. The availability and affordability of cruise ships meant that two large-scale pilgrimages from Dublin chartered cruise ships in March of that year. The Catholic Boy Scouts of Ireland (CBSI) chartered the Lancastria (a ship often listed in commercial cruise advertisements during the 1930s) to take 1150 passengers to Rome, and departed from Dublin on 7 March. Although organised by the CBSI, the pilgrimage was also advertised to the general public and among its passengers were Fine Gael leader W.T. Cosgrave, along with his wife and two sons (*Evening Echo*, 24 March 1934). Advertising and reports on this pilgrimage explained that the Lancastria would berth at Civitavecchia (the nearest commercial port to Rome) and there serve as accommodation for the pilgrims during their time in Italy, with trains conveying them in and out of Rome each day. The Lancastria was fitted to offer only first-class accommodation, and the pilgrimage cost between 19-25 gns (*Irish Press*, 15 July 1933).

The Lancastria was gone for 18 days, and returned to Dublin on 24 March 1934. The very next day the Laurentic departed for Rome carrying 700 new pilgrims. This pilgrimage was organised by Hewett's Travel Agency and where the CBSI journey had been timed so that the pilgrims were able to spend St. Patrick's Day in Rome, this second group were there for ceremonies to mark the "Closing of the Holy Door" (part of the Holy Year celebrations) as well as the canonisation of St. John Bosco (*Cork Examiner*, 24 March 1934). As was to be expected, a great many senior churchmen were onboard, including the Archbishop of Tuam. Most pilgrims were lay-people however, and among their number was Nessa Lyne, a journalist who wrote an account of the pilgrimage for the *Irish Press*. She did not name specific passengers, but did note that "unexpected as well as expected friends are aboard. Fellow-students of many years ago, university professors of one's twenties, well-known personalities, clergy-men, journalists, artists, doctors, lawyers, school-mistresses, civil servants, children, mothers, bankers, manufacturers, businessmen and women, officials intermingle" (*Irish Press*, 14 April 1934). This extensive list of middle-class occupations is useful confirmation of what the market was for journeys costing at least £20 per person and lasting up to three weeks. Lyne's account of the journey itself mentions the cold seas of the initial days finally giving way to "Gibraltar and sun, and mule caravans and Spanish folk and British military, and also the friendly hospitality of Irish convents". It was also at Gibraltar that the Laurentic party encountered their secular

Mediterranean cruise equivalents, as the Homeric (a ship from the White Star Line) also docked there and it "unloads more sophisticated passengers, lipstick and all! They are returning home, but not from a pilgrimage. Are they as lighthearted as we […] the peace of God maketh the heart glad" (*ibidem*). This response from Lyne captures both the similarities and differences between pilgrimage cruises and their commercial tourist equivalents. The religious sites and ceremonies experienced by pilgrims were undoubtedly different from those of commercial cruises, yet both were sailing the Mediterranean and enjoying the sunshine and mule trains of Gibraltar. Pilgrimage travel from Ireland continued its adoption of commercial tourism routes and models during the autumn of 1934. Following the Hewett Travel Agency's organisation of a sailing to Rome in March, other commercial agencies had begun to advertise pilgrimage cruises. Universal Travel Bureau in Killarney and Riordan's Travel Agency in Limerick advertised a "pilgrimage by liner" travelling from Dublin to Le Verdon (near Bordeaux) leaving pilgrims only a short train journey to Lourdes. The SS Orduna, run by the Pacific Steam Navigation Company, undertook this pilgrimage as a commercial operation – starting from Liverpool with 400 English pilgrims, sailing to Dublin to collect 410 more, and from there travelling directly to France. This was presented to potential travellers as an important improvement in pilgrimage travel, in contrast to the traditional overland route (*Cork Examiner*, 5 September 1934). It is striking that while in 1924 the second "national pilgrimage" to Lourdes had sent only its invalid pilgrims directly by steamer in order to prevent them "inconveniencing" other pilgrims on the overland route via London and Paris, ten years later it was the overland route itself which was presented as an inconvenience by comparison to the opportunity to travel by liner.

Pilgrimage cruises did not end after the Holy Year of 1934. Indeed, cruise travel to religious destinations (and via entirely secular tourist sites *en route*) for Irish pilgrims became ever more pronounced during the rest of the decade. In 1935 perhaps the most extravagant pilgrimage cruise of all travelled from Dublin to "the Holy Land". Organised by Veritas and departing on the Lancastria on 9 March, the party of just over 400 travellers sailed from Dublin to the Mediterranean, intending to visit seven ports in Greece, Egypt and Palestine. Advance publicity and advertising for the pilgrimage emphasised the avoidance of the "tedious" overland route with its "hawking of luggage", as well as claiming that chartering a cruise-liner would also be considerably cheaper – it was claimed that going overland would have cost almost £80 per person, whereas berths on the Lancastria were expected to cost between £40 and £65, depending on the class of ticket. Furthermore, the *Tipperary Star* commented, "there is no comparison from the health point of view, or for that matter from the point of view of social enjoyment, between travel overland… and travel on a luxury liner like the Lancastria, with no restriction on one's movements, no confinement, with outdoor games and sunshine – three months ahead of the opening of the summer season at home" (22 September 1934). Despite the emphasis upon the price being lower than it would have been overland, this was (inevitably considering the distance travelled) one of the most expensive Irish pilgrimages of the entire decade, so it is not surprising that, aside from senior clergymen, those listed as travelling were members of the professional middle-classes. They included the Secretary of the Catholic Truth Society, the nationalist MP for Fermanagh and Tyrone Cahir Healy, the chairman of the Institute of Civil Engineers (and his wife), the Assistant Harbourmaster of Dublin Port (and his wife), and the Chairman of the Licenced Vinters' Association (and his wife). The married couples travelling would have been paying at least £80 for their berths, and they were away for 25 days – this was therefore a pilgrimage which was demanding of both time and money (*Irish Independent,* 11 March 1935).

The recognition by commercial travel agencies that pilgrimage organisation could be a profitable activity was clearly evident by the middle of the 1930s. As described above, the very earliest

pilgrimages had (for want of many alternatives) been organised by Thomas Cook, and individual agents such as Albert Hewett had also been energetic pilgrimage organisers, but the Church's establishment of the Veritas Company in 1928 had to some extent made them fully Church-organised. The 1934 cruise to Lourdes on the SS Orduna was notable for apparently being an entirely commercially-arranged pilgrimage by a shipping company, and from the mid-1930s they were joined by commercial travel agents who also started to advertise pilgrimage tours. In 1935 for example, both Heffernan's Tourist Agency in Cork and Twohig Travel Agency in Dublin were advertising pilgrimage travel, not as part of large Church-initiated tours but as, in effect, package travel to the pilgrim's chosen destination for which the agency booked travel and accommodation for their party only (*Evening Echo*, 7 January 1935; *Irish Independent*, 16 March 1935). Over time this would become the default model for most pilgrimage travel from Ireland. Few if any large-scale Church-organised pilgrimages occurred after World War Two for example, even if some travel agency packages were able to advertise that their tours were "guided" by individual clergy. With each passing decade after wartime restrictions on travel to continental Europe were lifted, more and more travel agencies based all over Ireland advertised pilgrimage travel packages to a range of destinations. The 1930s saw what would evolve into this business model for commercial pilgrimage packages slowly emerge from the "national pilgrimages" organised by the Church itself, first via the Church's establishment of their own travel agency for such journeys, and then through the entry of wholly commercial travel businesses into arranging pilgrimage travel (*Air & Travel*, July 2020, 32-38).

One of the forms these overlapping business models took during this formative decade of Irish pilgrimage tourism was the curious example of the "all-Catholic cruise", of which there were two during the mid-1930s. The differences between these "all-Catholic cruises" and an actual pilgrimage might not have been entirely clear to many observers (and perhaps some passengers), although they were significant even if small. The most important difference was that unlike a pilgrimage which had a specific religious site as its destination, the all-Catholic cruises (like any other commercial cruise) was a circular voyage with stopping-off points but no specific destination. Where the pilgrimage cruises could present the voyage aboard ship as simply a form of transport to the religious site even when in reality the time spent cruising there and back may well have been a significant attraction to pilgrim tourists, the all-Catholic cruise could freely position the cruise ship experience itself and the glamour of the Mediterranean as its central attractions. The first "all-Catholic cruise" left Dublin on 17 August 1935 and returned after 21 days, during which time it visited Gibraltar, Barcelona, Rapallo, Naples, Rome, Lisbon, Malta, and Vigo (*The Liberator*, 3 November 1934). The cruise cost £24 and took place on the Tuscania, and may well have had a direct business connection to the commercially-organised sea pilgrimage to Lourdes on the same ship which had travelled in March of that year. Advertising for this cruise explained that it was to take place "under the leadership" of four Bishops each representing England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, and would have daily masses onboard and a private chapel, while other advance publicity claimed that passengers were promised an audience with the Pope while visiting Rome (*Cork Examiner*, 2 February 1935). In these respects, it did not differ from the arrangements for pilgrimage cruises, but the advertising also stressed that it would offer "all enjoyments of Cruising, Dances, Concerts, Deck Games and Sports, Competitions, Swimming Pool etc" (*The Liberator*, 3 November 1934). Reading between the lines of the pilgrimage cruises leaving Ireland in the mid-1930s – especially because they were often using the commercial cruise ships which were already serving the commercial Mediterranean cruise market – it is clear that many of these activities would also have been part of pilgrimage travel, and that this attraction was in fact something of an open secret for both pilgrims and pilgrimage organisers of the era. Nevertheless, pilgrimage organisers' references to the sociability

of onboard life were carefully subtle by comparison to the "all-Catholic cruise" references to swimming pools and dances. This journey was in its tone and objects little different from the commercial cruises advertised alongside them in Irish newspapers, emphasising Mediterranean sunshine and holiday enjoyment. The key difference was the exclusively Catholic identity of the passengers and the religious services made available to them on-board ship. No commentary on the reasons for such exclusivity appears to have been published, but the clear implication was that the frivolity of a cruise holiday was morally risky in the company of non-Catholics, but acceptable in a Catholic environment. The fact that such holidays were emerging – for those who could afford £24 and three weeks away from home – from the experience of pilgrimage tourism was the most likely reason for such concerns. Irish holidaymakers were becoming increasingly drawn to the specific qualities of a cruise, but were keen to retain a religious identity – and perhaps therefore their respectability – for the journey.

The 1935 "all-Catholic cruise" included 200 passengers from Ireland. Among them was Phyllis Ryan, the pioneering female chemist whose laboratory conducted much of the public analysis in Ireland. Ryan was met at Dublin port on her return from the cruise by Sean T. O'Kelly, then the Minister for Local Government and Public Health, and whom she would marry the following year (*Irish Press*, 6 September 1935). The cruise was clearly judged a commercial success, given that the following year the "second all-Catholic cruise" was advertised. Also sailing on the Tuscania, this group of holidaymakers left Dublin on 14 August 1936, carrying 900 passengers in total, of whom 220 were Irish. Originally planning to visit Spain, Portugal, Madeira, and the Canary Islands, the ship's final route was different, with a representative of the shipping company telling the *Irish Press* afterwards that "the Spanish ports were cut out of the itinerary owing to the troubles in Spain. They called at Lisbon, Madeira and Casablanca" (31 August 1936). The handful of passengers named in the paper upon the ship's return indicate a high proportion of married couples having taken the cruise, some accompanied by their children. Among these were CEO of the Vocational Education Committee who had travelled with his wife and daughter – his occupation underlining the extent to which this kind of holidaymaking was the preserve of the professional middle-classes. Despite this limitation, the evidence of the larger and better-publicised pilgrimages and Catholic cruises which left Ireland for Lourdes, Rome, North Africa, and the Mediterranean in general during the 1930s indicates that there was a sufficient market to support such travel. Those described by the Archbishop of Cashel as early as 1913 as people with "means and leisure" were a small proportion of Irish society but there were enough of them to form the basis of a nascent package travel industry in the decade before World War Two.

4. Mediterranean Leisure Cruises

It is worth noting that throughout this period of ever-increasing pilgrimage cruises from Ireland, the commercial cruise industry continued to grow as well, in many cases on the same ships and travelling almost the same routes as pilgrimage cruises. If the 1933-1934 Holy Year was a particularly busy one for pilgrimage travel, it was also the year in which Irish newspapers began publishing feature articles, travelogues, and fashion columns about cruise holidays, as well as carrying extensive paid advertising for commercial cruises. In 1933 the *Belfast Newsletter* published a hymn to cruises entitled "Ideal Holiday Cruising – Golden Sunshine and Life-Giving Breezes", which described cruise ships as "floating palaces" and included photographs of their on-deck swimming pools (25 January 1933). In April 1934, in advance of that year's summer tourist season, the *Irish Press* published a full-page article headed "Let's Go Cruising" illustrated with a drawing of a fashionable couple looking over the railings of the ship, and surrounded

by cruise advertisements from the White Star, Cunard, and Canadian Pacific shipping lines as well as many Irish travel agencies. The advertisements, which were illustrated with images of liners, palm trees and camels, listed sailings and prices for cruises to the Mediterranean, North Africa, the Balearic Isles, and even one to Soviet Russia to attend the Leningrad Music Festival (*Irish Press*, 14 April 1934). A similar article (still under the headline "Let's Go Cruising") appeared in the *Irish Press* exactly a year later in April 1935, again ringed with advertisements for cruises (*Irish Press* 9 April 1935). In 1933 both the *Sunday Independent* and the *Cork Examiner* published fashion advice for women planning a cruise, the *Examiner* offering the wise advice not to "buy a pair of jazz pyjamas just because your friend has some", while the *Independent* advised that "two or three" evening dresses would be useful if they were a design which would pack without crushing, and further suggested that although "there is a fancy dress ball at least once on every cruise" an impromptu costume rather than a pre-planned one would suffice (*Irish Examiner*, 21 July 1933; *Sunday Independent*, 4 June 1933).

References to evening dresses (let alone having two or three of them) belied the implication in some quarters that cruises were by then widely-affordable for Irish holidaymakers. Both travel articles and several paid advertisements during this period claimed that the less extravagant cruise holidays would cost passengers approximately £1 per day, and were often at pains to point out that this then included all accommodation, meals and onboard entertainments (*Belfast Newsletter*, 25 January 1933). This characterisation of cruises (like pilgrimages) was therefore a foreshadowing of the structures for "all-in" package holidays which would be developed during the 1950s. The *Meath Chronicle* went so far as to claim that the cost of a cruise compared favourably with the full cost of a seaside holiday (23 January 1932, 8). This would obviously have depended upon the seaside holiday in question – these took many forms, and the vast majority of Irish holidaymakers were not spending £1 per day per person. As an example of passengers who were taking cruises, in April 1933 the *Irish Press* briefly noted that Senator James Ryan and his wife Agnes (owners of the Monument Creameries chain of shops) had just departed for a fortnight's cruise during which they would visit Casablanca, Algiers and Barcelona (*Irish Press*, 8 April 1933). Successful business owners and others with similar incomes were the most likely customers for such holidays.

The flurry of articles and advertisements in Irish newspapers about cruises occurring at the exact moment at which so many pilgrimage cruises were also heading through the Mediterranean is notable, however. Praise for the experience of spending time onboard a luxury ship, the benefits of sea and sunshine, the opportunities to visit interesting destinations along the route, and even the advice on clothing to wear on the trip might all have applied to and been appreciated by passengers booking one of the many pilgrimage cruises leaving Ireland during the 1930s. This is not to discount the differences between the two kinds of cruise – the pilgrimage ships offered daily masses, and probably offered a more sober (in every sense) onboard atmosphere than the commercial cruises with their fancy dress, balls, and concerts. Nessa Lyne's article in the *Irish Press* recounting her experience on the pilgrimage to Rome had after all referred to passengers they met on Gibraltar from commercial cruises as being distinguished from pilgrims by their use of lipstick, which is also suggestive of more meaningful differences between the groups. She further recalled having encountered the pilgrimage being referred to by passengers on commercial sailings as a "sad cruise" (14 April 1934). Sentiments among pilgrimage passengers – especially perhaps invalids and their accompanying family – presumably varied considerably, but the mentions of "deck games" onboard ship and side trips to Venice, Turin or Florence depending upon the route belie claims of sadness for many if not all of the pilgrims.

5. Post-War Pilgrimages and Package Holidays

When it was explained of the 1936 "all-Catholic" cruise to the Mediterranean that "the Spanish ports were cut out of the itinerary owing to the troubles in Spain", this was an early indication of the geo-political events which would of course render all holiday travel in Europe impossible by the end of the decade. Both commercial cruises and pilgrimages across the continent continued remarkably close to the outbreak of World War Two, which is perhaps evidence of how unclear the magnitude of events in 1939 actually were for the general population. The Catholic Travel Association (a British organisation which had operated a travel agency in Dublin since 1934 and tended to organise cheaper overland pilgrimages) continued to advertise and operate its pilgrimages to Lourdes and Rome right through the summer of 1939 – at least ten parties travelled to Lourdes between June and August, for example (*Sunday Independent*, 11 June 1939). An overland itinerary to Rome which called at Naples, Florence, Venice and Milan was due to leave on 1 September 1939, and just a few days before that date it was announced that it would "leave according to plan", but that "if…a solution of the present international difficulty is not found until the end of the week, the next departure for Lourdes and Rome will be on September 9" (*Irish Independent*, 30 August 1939). However, perhaps not surprisingly, this was the last discussion of pilgrimages to continental Europe until after the end of the war. The cruise liners which had operated both commercial and pilgrimage cruises were in many instances requisitioned for military use and several were destroyed. As early as 4 September 1939, the Athenia (still in civilian operation and making a trans-Atlantic crossing) was torpedoed and sunk, an event reported in some Irish newspapers with the added detail that "three years ago the liner carried members of the Oblate Fathers' pilgrimage to Lourdes" (*Limerick Leader*, 4 September 1939). The Lancastria, which as a Cunard liner had carried the 1934 Catholic Boy Scouts' organised pilgrimage to Rome and the Veritas pilgrimage to the Holy Land, was sunk during the Dunkirk evacuation in 1940 with an estimated loss of up to 7000 lives.

The post-war tourism industry in Europe would come to be dominated by conventionally-defined "package tours" in search of sunshine and beaches. The transition from pilgrimage to beach holidays as the dominant Irish experience of European travel was slow however. As leisure travel from Ireland to the continent started to become feasible again after the end of the war, it was typically in the form of revived pilgrimage travel. The dominant pre-war destinations of Lourdes and Rome continued to be popular, and pilgrimages to these sites were very swift to adopt air travel – a small party from Ireland flew to Lourdes in September 1946, a date so soon after the end of the war that the town was dominated by recently liberated French prisoners of war visiting the shrine along their way home, to give thanks for their own and their country's survival (*Irish Press*, 24 September 1946). By 1954, as the former military airfield at Tarbes was being developed into a modern commercial airport to serve Lourdes, Aer Lingus was the only airline already running a scheduled service there, and by 1958 "[…] a specific building, the Lourdes terminal, was constructed to expedite passengers through Dublin airport" (Cronin 2011, 49). As well as developing new routes to Lourdes (and Rome) in the post-war era, Irish pilgrims also began to visit new destinations.

Fatima in Portugal had a similar history as a religious shrine to that of Lourdes in that it was associated with a Marian apparition in 1917. The town had been recognised by the Vatican as an official site of pilgrimage since 1930, but does not appear to have attracted organised Irish pilgrims before World War Two. This would change significantly in the post-war years, beginning in May 1949 when a pilgrimage cruise travelled from Dublin to Lisbon carrying 91 passengers. The pilgrims, who paid between £42 and £48 each, used the SS Alca as a floating hotel while in

Portugal, and travelled from it each day to visit the shrine at Fatima. The journey was organised by a commercial travel agency, MacGuill Travel Agency in Dundalk, but was also conducted under the aegis of the Archbishop of Armagh (*Irish Press*, 15 February 1949; *Evening Herald*, 19 May 1949). This first organised pilgrimage was soon superseded however, when in August of 1949 the first pilgrimage by air left Foynes Airport in Co. Limerick carrying 38 passengers to Lisbon, bound eventually for Fatima. The flying boat they travelled in took six hours to complete the journey, and the passengers included several members of the clergy and, among the lay pilgrims, the son of The O'Rahilly, who had died in the GPO during the 1916 Rising, and whose family owned Greenore Port in Co. Louth (*Irish Independent*, 12 August 1949). This journey, which was described as being seen off from Foynes by a large crowd, was a pioneering example of the kind of European travel – for both pilgrimages and secular holidays – which would become the norm over the next decade. The initial pilgrimage to Fatima by sea in May 1949 was in many ways the end of one era of travel, whereas the sea plane's voyage in August was the start of a new one. Sea journeys from Ireland to continental Europe did continue in the post-war years, but the age of cruise travel was rapidly being succeeded by the age of air travel.

The early adoption of air travel by Irish pilgrimage tourists to European destinations was a logical development based principally on the demands of geography – avoiding a long journey across large swathes of western Europe was the reason why Irish pilgrims before World War Two had often chosen to travel by sea and was now the reason why they began travelling by air. If the geography which drove both sea and air travel for Irish pilgrims was the same however, the experience of these two forms of travel was very different. The intertwining of pilgrimage and cruise tourism meant that much of the time away from Ireland was spent on the journey itself – and indeed that was clearly much of the attraction during an era when cruise holidays were very fashionable. If the time spent at Lourdes or Rome was for many a sincerely religious experience, the time spent on board the cruise ship (or at the wide range of secular destinations the ship also called at) was an opportunity to enjoy the pleasures of a secular cruise, and that time might well amount to at least half of the time away from home for many pilgrimages. By contrast, the advent of air travel to pilgrimage destinations dramatically shortened the amount of a pilgrimage spent actually travelling, even in those post-war years when air travel was significantly slower than it would become later on. This reduced travelling time in the post-war era ushered in a new structure of Irish pilgrimage travel, and one which also intertwined pilgrimage with newly developing modes of tourism, just as the cruise pilgrimage had done in the pre-war years. If less time was to be spent travelling, then pilgrims could combine their pilgrimage with another stop at a secular destination somewhere within viable reach of the shrine. One of the earliest manifestations of this new combination of travel plans was a journey by air from Dublin to Lourdes for a pilgrimage visit to the shrine, followed by a relatively short coach journey across the Spanish border to San Sebastian for a holiday. Perhaps surprisingly, Éamon de Valera was something of a pioneer for this form of holiday. In August 1953 it was announced that "Mr. de Valera will be absent on the Continent for the first fortnight in September. He proposes to go to Lourdes, San Sebastian, Lisbon and Fatima. He will be accompanied by Dr. and Mrs. Éamon de Valera and Rev.T.J. O'Doherty, Mrs. Éamon de Valera's brother" (*Irish Independent*, 13 August 1953). By the following year, commercial travel agencies in Ireland were advertising Lourdes and San Sebastian package holidays, such as the Irish and Continental Travel Agency's offer of "Lourdes and San Sebastian – Marian Year Pilgrimage combined with A Spanish Holiday" of 16 days in total for £58-5-8 (*Sunday Independent*, 1 August 1954). In 1958, which was the centenary year for Lourdes and therefore one with large numbers of Irish pilgrims travelling there, a package was advertised offering "Lourdes and Costa Brava by Air", which included one

week in Lourdes and then a second week at Palamós on the Costa Brava. The price was 49½ gns, which the advertisement described as "not a cheap holiday but exceptional value" (*Irish Independent*, 20 February 1958).

As these kind of package pilgrimages grew in number, they multiplied in format and stratified in price, so that well before the end of the 1950s, travellers could find air, sea or coach packages from Ireland to Lourdes, Fatima or Rome, each with different secular tourist destinations built in along the way or as a second destination, and at widely-differing costs. Coach travel – an often-overlooked form of travel which was crucial to the development of post-war package tourism – featured in those package tours which combined pilgrimages with holidays at the lower end of the market, as air travel was extremely expensive. The Catholic Holiday Guild, a British organisation established in 1940 as a Church-approved travel agency describing its mission as being "to promote Catholic friendship through holidays" and whose tours were more analogous to the "all-Catholic cruises" of the pre-war era than to formal pilgrimages, was in 1958 advertising in Irish newspapers their 12-day coach party journeys consisting of three nights in Lourdes, two nights in Paris and six nights in Fuenterrabía, "a typical Spanish seaside resort" for 38 gns, significantly cheaper than the nearly 50 gns for air travel to Lourdes and Costa Brava offered that same year (*Irish Independent*, 4 December 1957). Commenting on the Catholic Holiday Guild's packages that year, the Archbishop of Liverpool struck a slightly combative note when he wrote in the Guild's magazine that "Protestant visitors to Lourdes are sometimes 'mildly shocked' because the pilgrims seem to be all in a holiday mood", before going on to argue that "sadness and sanctity are thought to march together" only because of the Reformation (cited in *Irish Press*, 9 December 1958).

6. Conclusion

Leaving aside critiques of the Reformation, as secular package holidays started to become widespread for Irish tourists from the late 1950s onwards, pilgrimages combined with holidays remained a feature of the market. By 1967, an article in the *Cork Examiner* previewing the year's holiday options focused on the opportunities to combine pilgrimages with beach holidays in southern Europe and noted that "Ireland, in fact, is one of the few countries where this sort of combined trip is keenly sought by such a large proportion of local people". And far from feeling that such choices might undermine the spiritual experience of a pilgrimage, the article asserted that "The real point to the pilgrimage plus holiday trip is that so many people are prepared to give up part of a preciously-sought Continental fortnight to spend their time in devotions when lesser mortals would be seduced by sun and sands" (*Cork Examiner*, 3 April 1967). The market for Irish holidaymakers of "sun and sands" package holidays was still developing in the 1960s, but it is clear that many Irish travellers to continental Europe had long since experienced many of the characteristics of such tourism. Travelling in organised groups brought together under the auspices of commercial travel agencies, using transport and accommodation booked for the entire group in order to benefit from bulk-buying prices, and for a pre-paid "all in" cost per traveller, even the original Irish "national pilgrimage" to Lourdes in 1913 had shared all of these characteristics with the "sun holiday" packages of the 1960s and beyond. As Irish pilgrimages became more frequent and more varied in the decades which followed, their status as proto-package tourism became even clearer. The routes, modes of transport and secular stopping points or side-trips all followed the changing infrastructures and fashions of leisure tourism. This took many forms over time, but the development between the wars of pilgrimage cruises was one of the most explicit ways in which pilgrimages were combined with secular tourism of the period. In 1924, on the

second "national pilgrimage" to Lourdes, when only the invalids were sent directly by steamer from Dublin to Bordeaux, it was made explicitly clear that this was largely to avoid them being an "inconvenience" to other pilgrims on the overland route, and it was clearly that overland route via Paris which was expected to be the more enjoyable form of travel. By the 1930s however, overland travel to Lourdes or Rome was relegated to a rather arduous cost-saving approach, while most of the well-advertised and high-profile pilgrimages chartered cruise ships which not only promised sunshine and "deck games" on the journey but also stopped at such popular tourist destinations as Gibraltar and Malta. The fact that the ships were the very same cruise liners also being used for the very fashionable holiday cruises to the Mediterranean and North Africa which these pilgrimages so strongly resembled only underlined the ways in which they were mimicking the secular industry. After World War Two, when cruise holidays were largely superseded by air travel in European popular tourism, Irish pilgrimages adapted to this new tourism infrastructure as well, and also to the opportunities it offered to combine a pilgrimage destination with the increasingly popular Spanish and Portuguese beach holidays of the post-war decades.

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