

# Homo Viator or Algorithmus Viator? A Thomistic Analysis of Pilgrimage in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

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**Abstract:** Debates on AI primarily focus on its moral implications and capacity to simulate religious experiences. However, an analysis of pilgrimage offers a unique perspective on broader transformations in religious practice, ranging from traditional spiritual journeys to modern, technology-assisted routes organized by travel agencies. Equipped with technological conveniences, emphasize efficiency and participant satisfaction, raising theological questions about the essence of pilgrimage itself. Used thomistic structure of argumentation (objections, counterarguments, and response) to examine three key issues: (1) whether AI can participate in a pilgrimage in a spiritual sense, (2) whether technological elimination of hardship diminishes the transformative potential of pilgrimage, and (3) whether cyberpilgrimage constitutes a legitimate alternative to physical pilgrimage.

Drawing on classical metaphysics and contemporary AI research, the study argues that AI, lacking a rational soul, free will, and an intrinsic orientation toward transcendence, cannot be considered homo viator. Furthermore, the removal of

physical hardship may undermine the ascetic and transformative dimensions of pilgrimage. The analysis of cyberpilgrimage suggests that, while psychologically engaging, virtual experiences do not replace the sacramental and embodied nature of spiritual journeys. This study contributes to the discourse on spirituality in the digital age, proposing a balanced approach that reconciles tradition with technological advancements while reaffirming the relevance of Thomistic anthropology in addressing contemporary challenges.

**Keywords:** cyberpilgrimage, artificial intelligence, thomism, neuroscience, suffering, spiritual purification.

**Contribution:** Introduced concept of *Algorithmus viator* to explore how AI reshapes pilgrimage, offering a Thomistic analysis of agency, suffering, and grace. It bridges pilgrimage studies and AI ethics, opening a new interdisciplinary field of inquiry.

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## 1. Background

Already in the first centuries, Christian faith found expression in pilgrimage, understood as both penance and spiritual purification—a remedy against sin and a path to moral and spiritual renewal. The Camino de Santiago (Way of Saint James) is an ancient pilgrimage route leading to the shrine of the apostle Saint James in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, renowned for its deep historical roots, religious significance, and enduring cultural impact across Europe. In the Middle Ages, Camino gained particular significance, attracting pilgrims from across Europe. This practice reflected not only the pursuit of the sacred but also the desire for communal experience and transformation (Komyathy 2022; Brumec 2021; Whalen 2019; Coleman et al. 2004). However, it is worth noting the limited sources available on the connections between Camino and AI.

Rooted in history, pilgrimage continues to evolve under the influence of social, theological, and technological transformations (Coleman et al. 2004; Kaelber 2006). The recent surge in popularity is evidenced by the

record-breaking 499,239 Compostelas issued in 2024 by the Oficina del Peregrino in Santiago de Compostela, which are certificates granted to pilgrims who have completed at least the last 100 km on foot or 200 km on horseback or by bicycle, in accordance with traditional pilgrimage requirements (Oficina del Peregrino, 2024). This suggests that the search for spiritual challenge and personal reflection remains strong (Collins-Kreiner, 2016). Why, in an age of luxury travel and advanced technology, do people choose a path marked by effort and sacrifice? This question invites deeper theological reflection on contemporary spirituality in diverse cultural contexts (Davies 2016; Reader et al. 2016).

Today, in an era of digitalization and AI, new tools assist pilgrims by facilitating route planning, progress tracking, and accommodation booking. This raises a fundamental question: does minimizing uncertainty and risk—once integral to pilgrimage—diminish its profound spiritual dimension? While modern conveniences enhance comfort and safety, do they not risk reducing pilgrimage to a touristic experience, stripped of its penitential and transformative essence? (Graves 2022; Oviedo 2022).

In Christian tradition, penance was individualized, tailored to the nature of the sin, serving as both contrition and spiritual therapy. As a form of penance, pilgrimage combined introspection with physical exertion, symbolizing the renewal of both body and soul. Over time, composite penalties (*compositio*) emerged, functioning as reparative measures in both ecclesiastical and secular contexts (Seryczyńska 2025). Secular authorities employed pilgrimage as a form of rehabilitation, separating offenders from their communities to undergo spiritual purification. This system was not only punitive but also pedagogical, reinforcing the necessity of atonement and conversion through conscious effort. The Reformation, with its emphasis on *sola gratia*—a theological principle affirming that salvation is granted solely by God’s grace, not by human merit or works—marked a radical shift: human effort was no longer deemed essential for salvation, profoundly altering perceptions of penance and its associated practices, including pilgrimage. This transformation offers a theological precedent for interpreting today’s technological shifts in pilgrimage practice. Just as the Reformation challenged the salvific value of embodied religious acts, replacing them

with interior faith, the technologization of pilgrimage raises questions about the necessity of physical and ascetic effort in spiritual journeys. AI-mediated tools that reduce uncertainty, optimize routes, or even simulate pilgrimage experiences may reflect a broader shift from bodily to cognitive or affective forms of religiosity. This parallel invites a deeper theological reflection on how digital mediation reconfigures long-standing tensions between grace and human effort in contemporary spiritual practice.

Currently, technological advancements aimed at reducing suffering and discomfort in pilgrimage are evident in the development of lightweight, ergonomic backpacks, footwear, mobile applications, and navigation systems. These innovations, which enhance comfort and safety, are particularly significant for the elderly, individuals with disabilities, and less experienced pilgrims. However, the minimisation of physical hardships raises critical questions about the role of spiritual effort and asceticism. Philosophers caution against a life devoid of authentic encounters with suffering, arguing that the avoidance of hardship may foster a superficial, consumerist existence in which spiritual transformation is rendered unattainable (Roszak et al. 2024; Bailey 2023). In the context of pilgrimage, the diminishing of physical challenges could deprive participants of the opportunity for profound personal growth (Egan 2010) and deepened spiritual experience (Lumbreras et al. 2024).

While debates on AI and religion have primarily centred on issues of morality (Graves 2022), its capacity to simulate religious experience (Geraci 2014), and its cognitive potential (Bostrom 2014), earlier anthropological accounts of pilgrimage—such as those by Morinis and Turner (1992)—predate the emergence of technological mediation as a subject of inquiry. However, more recent contributions (e.g., Campbell 2020) have begun to explore the interplay between digital technologies and religious practices, highlighting the need to revisit and expand existing frameworks in light of developments in AI and digital religiosity. Responding to this gap, the present article explores how artificial intelligence reshapes the practice and theological understanding of pilgrimage by addressing three interrelated questions: (1) Can AI be meaningfully integrated into the spiritual dimension of pilgrimage? (2) Does the elimination of physical

and existential hardship through technology diminish its transformative power? (3) Can cyber-pilgrimage serve as a valid substitute for traditional, embodied experience?

To examine these questions, the article adopts a Thomistic framework, drawing on the metaphysical categories of agency, suffering, and sacramentality. From this perspective, philosophy serves as a mediator in evaluating phenomena such as AI-guided or virtual pilgrimage, offering a more balanced and ontologically grounded understanding than that provided by functionalist or purely empirical accounts. In this context, the term *Algorithmus viator* (AV) is proposed as a conceptual extension of *Homo viator* (HV)—the classical figure of the human as a spiritual wayfarer—encapsulating a contemporary form of pilgrimage in which the journey is increasingly shaped, guided, or optimized by digital algorithms. AV reflects a transformation of the pilgrim’s experience under technological mediation, raising theological and philosophical questions about agency, suffering, and grace in an era of algorithmic facilitation. The phrase “AI-driven pilgrimage” refers to the progressive outsourcing of human effort—physical, cognitive, and spiritual—to AI-based tools such as intelligent navigation systems, automated decision-making, and immersive simulations. This technological shift raises fundamental theological and anthropological questions: can the essence of pilgrimage be redefined when human agency is mediated or even replaced by algorithmic systems? Could AI itself, in some sense, take on the role of the pilgrim? These possibilities will be critically examined in the following section, “Can AI be a pilgrim in a spiritual sense?”.

## 2. The Application of Classical Thomistic Argumentation in a New Context

The analysis of the impact of technology on pilgrimage gains particular significance when examined in light of the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas. In the following paragraphs, not only his theological insights but also the classical method of argumentation will be applied in an innovative way. This approach will follow the traditional structure of the

*Summa Theologica*, where theses are considered through objections, *pro* and *con* arguments, and a final response.

## 2.1. Can AI be a pilgrim in a spiritual sense?

Given the extensive debate surrounding Bruno Latour's *theory of agency* and his concept of *non-human agency* (Latour 2009) in the context of pilgrimage, particularly in relation to the experience and significance of rituals and the performance of religious roles by robots (Puzio 2023), it might seem that this question could be answered affirmatively. Scientific research in cognitive psychology and artificial intelligence increasingly suggests that certain cognitive processes—such as perception, memory, pattern recognition, and basic decision-making—once considered uniquely human, can be simulated by advanced AI models (e.g. Lake et al. 2017). Within the philosophy of mind, functionalism posits that mental states are defined not by their biological substrate but by their functional role within a system of inputs, outputs, and internal states (Putnam 1967; Fodor 1975). Applied to pilgrimage, this view would imply that if AI systems can mimic the informational and behavioral functions of a human pilgrim—planning routes, engaging in symbolic rituals, even responding to spiritual prompts—they may be seen as functionally participating in the pilgrimage process. However, this interpretation remains contested, particularly when considering the theological and metaphysical dimensions of pilgrimage that involve intention, grace, and transformation—qualities that, from a Thomistic perspective, exceed mere functional equivalence.

To underscore the interdisciplinary nature of the discussion, juxtaposed David Chalmers' (2006) philosophical framing of the 'hard problem' of consciousness with empirically driven models like Integrated Information Theory and predictive processing, which emerge from contemporary cognitive science. Proponents of emergentist theories, such as Chalmers, argue that advanced AI systems can develop self-adaptive capacities and exhibit emergent behaviours that could be interpreted as striving towards higher-order goals. Within this framework, one might argue that AI, by simulating cognitive and decision-making processes,

could in some way partake in the pursuit of *beatitudo*, the ultimate aim of pilgrimage understood as happiness through the *visio Dei*. However, this view remains contested. While Searle's *Chinese Room* argument (1982) compellingly illustrates the distinction between symbol manipulation and genuine understanding, more recent theories offer additional insights into the possibility of machine consciousness. Integrated Information Theory (Tononi et al. 2016) posits that consciousness arises from the degree of integrated information within a system, suggesting that complex AI architectures could, in principle, generate conscious states if they reach sufficient levels of informational integration. Similarly, predictive processing models (Sprekav et al. 2023; Friston 2019; Clark 2018) frame cognition as a continuous process of minimizing prediction error through active inference, potentially bridging the gap between simulation and subjective experience. Engaging these models allows for a more nuanced evaluation of whether AI could ever possess the internal structure necessary for the intentionality and spiritual orientation essential to pilgrimage (Bilagher 2022).

According to Aquinas (STh I-II, q. 3, a. 8), happiness is the proper good of a rational being, for only such a being—through intellect and will—can know and love God, who is the highest good and the ultimate end of human existence. AI, however, lacks a rational soul, free will, and the natural inclination towards God (*appetitus naturalis ad Deum*), and is therefore incapable of undertaking pilgrimage in its fullest sense. The human being, by nature, is HV, possessing an intellect capable of abstracting the essence of things and orienting itself towards the highest good (*intellectus agens*), while the will enables moral discernment and responsiveness to divine grace. AI, by contrast, functions solely through algorithms and pre-programmed structures, rendering it, at best, an AV—a technological entity that may facilitate aspects of pilgrimage but lacks the theological and anthropological characteristics essential to true pilgrimage.

Although AI can simulate cognition and decision-making, it lacks the capacity for abstraction combined with free will and, consequently, cannot be regarded as a moral agent. AI, as an AV, may assist in structuring the pilgrimage experience, yet it cannot partake in the transformative dimension of the journey, as it lacks free will and the capacity for moral

and spiritual struggle. The argument from functionalism must therefore be challenged, as reducing intelligence to mere information processing constitutes a category mistake. As philosophy of mind suggests, intentionality cannot be reduced to symbolic manipulation. *Chinese Room* experiment compellingly demonstrates that a system may generate correct responses without genuine understanding. Thus, even if AI were to produce statements about God, this would not imply an ability to know or strive towards Him.

While AI systems may exhibit complex behaviours, they remain bound by material conditions. Unlike humans, who possess an innate openness to the transcendent (*desiderium naturale videndi Deum*), AI is ultimately a sum of procedures and algorithms. Aquinas distinguishes sharply between the rational soul and computational abilities—the former alone enables knowledge of God, which AI, by its very nature, cannot attain. As such, AI cannot rightly be described as a pilgrim; though it may serve as an AV, facilitating aspects of the journey, it fundamentally lacks the defining attributes of HV: the capacity for conversion, acts of faith, and the reception of grace. Likewise the communal dimension of pilgrimage inherently relies on genuine interpersonal relationships, which AI, as a system of pre-programmed responses, cannot establish. Similarly, while AI can adapt its outputs based on data patterns, this form of optimisation does not constitute moral or spiritual development. It neither cultivates virtue nor exercises free will, but merely refines its functions within predetermined algorithmic parameters. Although AI may assist in the logistical aspects of pilgrimage, it cannot itself be considered a pilgrim.

## 2.2. Does the Elimination of Suffering Through Technology Diminish the Spiritual Dimension of Pilgrimage?

Considering Michel Foucault's reflections on embodiment and disciplinary practices—particularly his view that technologies of the self can serve as instruments of ethical formation (Foucault 1988)—it could be argued that technological tools, when used intentionally, may support rather than hinder spiritual transformation. As Popov (2024) notes, Foucault's

insights on how suffering and bodily discipline shape subjectivity remain relevant for evaluating contemporary practices such as pilgrimage. Augustine, in *The City of God* (X, 29), argued that “all knowledge directed towards the good participates in divine wisdom.” If technology aids the pilgrim by enhancing safety and facilitating a better understanding of the path, it appears not only to be unobtrusive to spiritual transformation but to actively support it by removing unnecessary hardships and allowing for greater focus on the ultimate goal of the pilgrimage.

In line with contemporary research on the impact of technology on religiosity, such as Heidi Campbell’s studies on the mediatization of religion (2020), one could argue that modern digital tools do not necessarily weaken spirituality but rather reshape it into new forms. For instance, recent ethnographic studies show that pilgrims use smartphone apps not only to navigate routes, but also to engage in communal prayer, access scriptural meditations, and document their spiritual growth (Lois-González et al. 2015; Tzanelli 2020). These tools often blend logistical support with affective and symbolic content, indicating that technology can become a space of spiritual engagement when intentionally embedded within a larger framework of devotion. Just as the printing press enabled widespread access to the Scriptures, and radio and television facilitated mass evangelisation, digital media may enrich the pilgrimage experience by offering resources for meditation, reflection, and community formation along the journey.

Aquinas challenges the notion that convenience and ease can substitute for genuine spiritual purification, asserting that “bodily punishment is necessary for satisfaction, so that man is punished in that wherein he took pleasure” (STh I–II, q. 87, a. 7). Since pilgrimage inherently involves hardship, uncertainty, and voluntary renunciation—elements that foster spiritual transformation—the technological minimisation of these challenges risks undermining its ascetic purpose. As Aquinas teaches, happiness is not solely a matter of intellectual enlightenment but also the proper ordering of emotions and desires through the moral virtues, particularly fortitude (*fortitudo*) and temperance (*temperantia*), which shape the will (cf. STh I–II, q. 3, a. 6; q. 59, a. 5). Pilgrimage, in its traditional form, provides occasions for exercising these virtues by

confronting difficulty and risk. However, the increasing reliance on technology, which optimises the journey and eliminates many of its hardships, risks reducing pilgrimage to a logistical exercise rather than a genuine purification of the soul.

While technological systems may influence the pilgrim's subjectivity and discipline the body, true spiritual transformation requires more than external structuring—it necessitates free will and the voluntary acceptance of suffering. If technology removes the challenges inherent in pilgrimage, it deprives the pilgrim of opportunities for merit and self-denial, essential aspects of the ascetic path. Augustine's account of knowledge directed towards the good suggests that spiritual growth is not achieved through convenience but through purification by struggle. A pilgrimage devoid of hardship risks becoming a curated experience rather than an existential journey. Neurobiological analysis indicates that physical discomfort and exertion activate brain regions—such as the anterior cingulate cortex and insula—associated with heightened interoception, attentional focus, and altered states of consciousness, which are frequently reported in accounts of spiritual or transcendent experience (Glicksohn et al. 2020). These findings suggest that bodily intensity may serve as a neurophysiological catalyst for deeper contemplative engagement. Complementary research in the psychology of religion shows that spiritual practices involving physical discipline—such as fasting, prolonged walking, or silence—are often linked to enhanced meditative depth, increased affective openness, and long-term meaning-making (Luhmann 2012; Beit-Hallahmi et al. 2014). The integration of these insights clarifies that while neuroscience and religious studies are distinct fields, they converge on the idea that embodiment plays a constitutive role in spiritual experience. If technology were to eliminate these bodily and existential elements entirely, the transformative dimension of pilgrimage could be not only weakened, but redefined along more consumerist or performative lines. This shift toward the consumerization of pilgrimage is particularly evident in virtual tours, app-based experiences, and livestreamed liturgies, as spiritual engagement becomes increasingly shaped by accessibility and design — a tendency reinforced by high-quality broadcasts from sites like Lourdes

or Santiago, which may lead some pilgrims to choose virtual presence over physical travel.

Recent fieldwork also indicates that pilgrims who engage in physically demanding routes report higher levels of perceived spiritual authenticity and post-journey reflection, compared to those who rely heavily on technological assistance or pre-packaged pilgrimage programs (Brumec 2021; Komyathy 2022). These findings support the view that embodied difficulty is not merely a physical burden, but a condition for moral and theological interiority. While technological advancements offer certain benefits, they should not replace the essential elements that define pilgrimage's spiritual and ascetic value. The AV may facilitate the journey, but it cannot undergo the interior transformation that defines HV—the one who walks not merely as a traveller, but as a seeker of the ultimate good.

### **2.3. Can a Cyber-Pilgrimage Serve as a Substitute for Traditional Pilgrimage?**

In light of the intellectual legacy of Jean Baudrillard's social theory, one may posit that such a substitution is indeed conceivable. According to Baudrillard, in the era of simulacra, representations may become more "real" than reality itself—producing what he terms hyperreality, wherein symbols and simulations no longer merely reflect the real but replace it (Baudrillard 1981/1994). Applied to the context of pilgrimage, this suggests that a virtual pilgrimage—despite lacking physical presence—may still be perceived by participants as authentic, emotionally and spiritually meaningful, even if ontologically detached from material embodiment. However, this raises a critical theological and phenomenological question: is such an experience spiritually authentic, or does it merely simulate authenticity within a hyperreal environment? Here, theological criteria such as sacramental grace, divine presence, or liturgical mediation may offer a framework for distinguishing genuine spiritual encounters from simulated affect. From a phenomenological standpoint, markers such as

inner transformation, intentional surrender, or sustained change in moral disposition might serve as indicators of spiritual authenticity beyond the sensory vividness of the virtual experience.

Contemporary research in immersive technologies and the psychology of religion increasingly demonstrates that virtual experiences are capable of eliciting profound emotional and spiritual responses, comparable to those engendered by physical events (Alkhoury 2024). Investigations into virtual reality (Tzanelli 2020) reveal that immersive digital environments can provoke neural reactions closely resembling those observed in real-world contexts, thereby suggesting that the spiritual impact of a virtual pilgrimage may be significant at both psychological and emotional levels (Dunn-Hensley 2020; Tran 2025; Hill-Smith 2011; MacWilliams 2002, 2013; O’Leary 2013; Fel et al. 2025). Digital tools also reconfigure the pilgrim’s perception of sacredness, ritual structure, and physical engagement. Sacred space, once defined by geography and the presence of relics or natural thresholds, becomes in virtual pilgrimage a constructed interface—its aura no longer mediated by environment but by design aesthetics and symbolic coding. Ritual actions, too, may be reduced to clickable sequences or gamified interactions, challenging traditional understandings of embodied repetition, intentional movement, and gesture as conduits of spiritual meaning. In such contexts, the sense of physical presence—walking, kneeling, touching, enduring—gives way to visual and auditory immersion, which may stimulate emotional depth but lack somatic resonance. The framing of digital pilgrimage often privileges immediacy, customization, and user control—values that may run counter to the spiritual logic of surrender, endurance, and being shaped by the journey rather than mastering it. This shift in structure risks producing not only a change in experience but a transformation of the meaning of pilgrimage itself: from a sacred ordeal into a consumable simulation of spiritual feeling.

As Augustine notes in *On the Trinity* (Book X, Chapter 10), God does not require physical movement, but rather the sincere intention of the heart. Thus, if a pilgrim engages in a virtual pilgrimage with genuine devotion and piety, it may be argued that such an experience holds spiritual value. Yet this value, while real, may be of a different order—symbolic and affective

rather than incarnational and sacramental. From a Thomistic perspective, true spiritual authenticity requires not only interior intention but also embodied participation in reality. As Aquinas teaches, “bodily exercise disposes man to spiritual good” (STh II–II, q. 186, a. 2). A virtual pilgrimage, though subjectively meaningful, remains a mediated simulation—it lacks the ontological grounding of physical hardship, community interaction, and spatial-temporal movement that define the traditional pilgrimage as an existential journey rather than a curated or programmed experience. Hence, digital pilgrimage may approximate certain aspects of devotion, but its capacity to effect genuine spiritual transformation remains limited by its disembodied and often self-directed nature.

Thus, while the concept of AV captures the shift toward technologically mediated spirituality, it also signals the risk of substituting authentic formation with experiential illusion. Whether such hyperreal experiences can be considered valid depends on one’s theological anthropology: for traditions that emphasize incarnation, suffering, and sacramentality, embodiment is not optional—it is essential.

### 3. Conclusions and Final Discussion

AI is increasingly applied in domains such as pastoral care, virtual chaplaincy, and religious dialogue (Garner 2021; Vallor 2015), where it simulates interpersonal presence and offers emotional or spiritual guidance. While such applications may support isolated or digitally connected pilgrims, they also risk reducing relational depth to algorithmic responsiveness. In the context of pilgrimage—where genuine human encounter, vulnerability, and community play a formative role—reliance on AI-mediated interaction raises theological and anthropological questions. Can algorithmic empathy truly substitute shared suffering and spiritual companionship? Acknowledging these developments invites a more comprehensive reflection on how AI reshapes not only the logistics, but also the communal and sacramental dimensions of the pilgrimage experience. The spiritual implications of virtual and AI-facilitated pilgrimage remain a critical area for theological scrutiny. Emerging studies in the psychology

of religion and affective computing suggest that emotionally responsive AI systems—especially when embedded in immersive environments—can influence a pilgrim’s emotional regulation, perceived sense of connection, and cognitive processing of spiritual content. While such experiences may produce states of affective resonance or symbolic significance, they may also short-circuit the deeper psychological and moral transformation traditionally cultivated through voluntary suffering, uncertainty, and interpersonal vulnerability. In this light, the figure of *AV* should not be understood merely as a technological proxy for *HV*, but rather as an anthropological construct that encapsulates a new spiritual condition: one in which the pilgrim’s journey is shaped by predictive systems, choice architecture, and data-driven personalization. Unlike *HV*, whose path is marked by open-endedness, grace, and inner struggle, *AV* navigates a curated landscape—safe, optimized, and emotionally modulated. This transformation invites a deeper theological inquiry: does the simulation of transcendence lead to spiritual reality, or merely to perhaps something like a technically induced feeling of the sacred?

Future research on the intersection of technology and spirituality could offer valuable insights into how digital tools shape the pilgrim’s experience, both individually and communally. One promising avenue is the study of *hybrid authenticity*, wherein traditional pilgrimage elements are integrated with modern technologies, resulting in an experience that, while distinct from classical models, retains essential spiritual values (Tran et al. 2024; Tzanelli 2020).

Another key area of exploration is whether technology, when applied judiciously—in accordance with the *Goldilocks Zone* principle, originally referring to the habitable region around a star where conditions are “just right” (neither too hot nor too cold) for liquid water to exist and life to be possible—can support rather than diminish the spiritual effort required of pilgrims. In this regard, Aquinas’s principle of prudence offers a useful framework, emphasising that technology should aid rather than replace authentic spiritual endeavour. Additionally, it is important to examine the evolving expectations of pilgrims and assess whether modern tools

might give rise to new forms of spirituality that harmonise tradition with contemporary innovation.

The analysis of the gradual transformation from traditional to technologically-supported pilgrimage reveals a dynamic continuum rather than a binary shift. Traditional pilgrimage has been historically characterised by physical hardship, embodied participation, geographical dislocation, and the cultivation of virtue through uncertainty and trust. In contrast, algorithmically-mediated pilgrimage introduces predictive planning, digital interactivity, and minimisation of discomfort—shaping the journey into a more efficient but potentially less ascetic experience. While hybrid models show that technology can complement rather than dominate the pilgrimage experience—for example, when pilgrims use navigation apps yet still endure physical fatigue and communal vulnerability—this shift also raises critical concerns. As Doburzyński (2021) notes, the move toward professionalisation and digital facilitation risks eroding the sacramental and transformative character of pilgrimage by eliminating traditional hardships and uncertainties. The concept of AV—the traveller guided by algorithmic systems—encapsulates this tension, as contemporary pilgrims increasingly rely on technological tools that structure their spiritual path. In contrast, HV represents the theological ideal of the human person as a wayfarer shaped by voluntary renunciation, moral struggle, and openness to divine transformation. The question, therefore, is not whether technology invalidates pilgrimage, but whether its integration supports spiritual discipline or replaces it with convenience. As Hoover and Stewart (2006) emphasize, technological mediation inevitably reshapes religious experience. Thus, both scholars and spiritual practitioners must discern how digital tools may serve contemplation, virtue, and sacramental depth—preserving pilgrimage as more than a curated journey, but as an existential act of devotion.

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