

# The return of the ‘Black Swan’? Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land and the Covid-19 pandemic

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*This article’s first goal is to propose an interpretation of a historical event of major economic, political, and religious significance with attributes resembling those of the current Covid-19 pandemic: the Roman Empire’s conversion to Christianity. The second goal is to explain and analyze the Christian pilgrimage market and to suggest that, due to its unique nature and attributes, this specific segment has the potential to serve as a preferred focus and an exit strategy from the Coronavirus crisis. The research offers a historical interpretation of Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land using the theory of the ‘Black Swan’, an economic term introduced by Professor Nassim Nicholas Taleb in 2007. Here we attempt to compare two Black Swans: one that occurred in the year AD 325 and the current Covid-19 pandemic. The economic Black Swan of 325 was the Roman Empire’s conversion to Christianity, a process that caused fatal damage to the myrrh and frankincense economy and completely changed the economy of the southern Land of Israel. In the case of the current crisis, this article suggests that the present conditions may transform the tourism industry in Israel. Based on an analysis of the unique attributes of the Christian pilgrimage sector, it also posits that this specific segment may provide a preferred focus and an exit strategy from the current Coronavirus crisis. The contribution of this article lies in its contemplation of a connection between current and past events, as well as in its consideration of specific market segments (pilgrimage) in the context of national and global exit strategies. The article’s broader goal is to gain a better understanding of the pandemic’s impact not only on the tourism industry as a whole but on its specific segments.*

**Keywords:** *pilgrimage, Black Swan, Covid-19, Holy Land, Christianity, Christian pilgrimage, exit strategies, pandemic events, qualitative case studies*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This research article offers a historical interpretation of Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land based on an attempted comparison of two suggested ‘Black Swans’: one that occurred in the summer of AD 325 – namely the first Christian Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, which took place in the city of Nicaea in Asia minor – and the current Covid-19 pandemic. The term ‘Black Swan’ was introduced by Professor

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Nassim Nicholas Taleb as an economic concept in his book *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, the first chapter of which appeared in the *New York Times* on 22 April 2007. The theory was subsequently built upon in the 2010 edition, in which Taleb thoroughly develops the significance of unanticipated large-scale economic crises. He explains the theory simply, as follows:

Before the discovery of Australia, people in the old world were convinced that *all* swans were white, an unassailable belief as it seemed completely confirmed by empirical evidence. The sighting of the first black swan might have been an interesting surprise for a few ornithologists (and others extremely concerned with the coloring of birds), but that is not where the significance of the story lies. It illustrates a severe limitation to our learning from observations or experience and the fragility of our knowledge. One single observation can invalidate a general statement derived from millennia of confirmatory sightings of millions of white swans. All you need is one single ... black bird. (Taleb 2010: xxi)

What we call here a Black Swan is:

an event with the following three attributes: **First**, it is an outlier, as it lies outside the realm of regular expectations, because nothing in the past can convincingly point to its possibility. **Second**, it carries an extreme impact. **Third**, in spite of its outlier status, human nature makes us concoct explanations for its occurrence after the fact, making it explainable and predictable ... I stop and summarize the triplet: rarity, extreme impact, and retrospective (though not prospective) predictability ... Therefore, a small number of Black Swans can explain much in our world, from the success of ideas and religions to the dynamics of historical and economical events. (Taleb 2007: 1)

This article's first goal is to propose an interpretation of a historical event of major economic, political, and religious significance with attributes resembling those of the current Covid-19 pandemic: the Roman Empire's conversion to Christianity. This process fatally damaged the Nabatean-led myrrh and frankincense economy along the ancient trade routes from southern Arabia to the port of Gaza. Just as the economic consequences of the Empire's conversion transformed the economy of the southern Land of Israel, this article considers the possibility that the current Coronavirus crisis may change the tourism industry in Israel as we know it.

The article's second goal is to explain and analyze the Christian pilgrimage market and to suggest that, due to its unique nature and attributes, this specific segment has the potential to serve as a preferred focus and an exit strategy from the Coronavirus crisis. Thus, the study seeks to examine the possible exit strategies based on the historical connections between religion and tourism. Previous research has identified different strategies for resuming tourism after the Covid-19 crisis (Gössling et al. 2021; Hall et al. 2020), with an emphasis on international tourism (Kim et al. 2021; Radic et al. 2021).

From the beginning of 2020 to the present (March 2022), the tourism industry has been facing an acute existential crisis that has almost completely halted tourism activity worldwide. A mysterious virus that first appeared in the city of Wuhan, China in late December 2019 spread across the globe, causing an almost complete closure of the global aviation industry within just a few months, and resulting in severe damage to the global tourism industry. Today, Covid-19 possibly constitutes one of the most severe crises to have ever hit the global tourism industry, and is arguably the worst loss suffered by the global economy in the last century (UNWTO 2021).

The contribution of this article lies in the fact that hardly any of the studies produced thus far have contemplated the connection between such current and past

events or considered specific market segments as possible elements of national and global exit strategies. The article's broader goal, therefore, is to better understand the pandemic's impact not only on the tourism industry as a whole but on its specific segments.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND BACKGROUND

### 2.1 A Black Swan and Covid-19

Studies relating to tourism have hardly ever used the Black Swan theory to analyze and explain current tourism-related events. This is probably due to several reasons. First, the Covid pandemic is still in progress at the time of writing, and it is not clear whether it should be regarded as a Black Swan or not. Second, researchers are still debating whether or not the pandemic could have been predicted. Third, researchers are debating whether tourism is diminishing or simply changing its interface as, for example, some have suggested that tourism is a complex system and that disruptive events are also complex and have tremendous impacts on several areas of society (Aldao et al. 2021; Postma/Yeoman 2021).

While researchers are still debating, the world tourism industry is currently facing a global event of massive historical scale befitting the economic theory of the Black Swan as explained above. Although over the past two decades some have sounded warnings regarding the possibility of a deadly virus that could erupt as a global 'pandemic', the Coronavirus that has been plaguing human society since January 2020 burst onto the global stage as an event for which no one was prepared. This lack of preparedness, on a global level, turned the epidemic into an extreme and extraordinary event that continues to transform formerly established and familiar economic rules of play, severely damaging a variety of industries around the world.

The Covid-19 crisis reshaped the demand for tourism as people experienced social, economic, health-related, and emotional stress (Dubey et al. 2020) as well as restrictions on travel. Nevertheless, the question of how tourist behavior has changed as a result of these circumstances remains open. It is now clear that many intervening variables must be taken into account in studying tourist behavior.

Zenker and Kock (2020), for example, predicted that the pandemic would leave a deep impression on how tourists think, feel, and behave, and they projected changes regarding domestic vs international travel patterns. McGinlay et al. (2020) reported more visits by locals to many European protected areas, and Kock et al. (2020) linked Covid-19 vulnerability to perceptions of and preferences for domestic holidays among US citizens (see also Kim et al. 2021). Kock et al. explained that Covid-19 concerns increased ethnocentrism as an expression of self-protection and survival needs.

Gössling et al. (2021) assumed that public opinion, as reflected in consumer sentiments, will change from pessimistic to unsure and then to optimistic, depending on how the disease spreads and what messages are transmitted by the media. As we can see, studies examining future travel intentions focused on how people plan to travel after restrictions are partially or entirely lifted (Bae/Chang 2021; Kim et al. 2021; 2022; Zhu/Deng 2020). Nevertheless, they did not compare these intentions to actual behaviors or discuss them in the context of different segments such as pilgrimage.

## 2.2 Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land

This study seeks to assess exit strategies in the realm of pilgrimage, as religion and tourism have always been inextricably linked. According to the UN World Tourism Organization, religion is among the most common motivations for travel, and religiously motivated travel, which is one of the world's oldest forms of mobility, is currently emerging as a major tourism segment (UNWTO 2018; Collins-Kreiner 2020). The links between religion and tourism are tremendously varied and have numerous implications for sites, visitors, and local populations (Butler/Suntikul 2018; Kim et al. 2020). The documented origins of pilgrimage reach back some 5000 years to the ancient Egyptian period (Rejman et al. 2016). Pilgrimage as a form of tourism has also been documented as occurring in biblical times, when Jewish pilgrims gathered at Jerusalem's First Temple to celebrate Jewish holidays (Shilo/Collins-Kreiner 2019).

According to the UNWTO, pilgrimage is one of the world's fastest growing types of tourism, with approximately 900 million visitors to major religious sites annually. Pilgrimage encompasses a range of activities, such as missionary travel and faith-based events and gatherings (Tomljenović/Dukić 2017). Concurrent with increased supply and demand, recent years have witnessed a marked rise in the importance of pilgrimage as an economic force and a social, political, and cultural phenomenon (Butler/Suntikul 2018; Collins-Kreiner 2020; Kim et al. 2020; Timothy/Olsen 2006).

Pilgrimage differs from other tourism segments in that it is meaningful travel motivated by religious sentiments and obligations that are stronger than any other motives we know and that do not exist in other segments (Di Giovine/Choe 2019). In some religions pilgrimage is a must, as in the case of the Islamic Hajj; in other religions – such as Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, to name a few – it is a custom, a common behavior, and an age-old tradition (Butler/Suntikul 2018; Timothy/Olsen 2006).

Pilgrimage has unique social characteristics as communities usually decide to make pilgrimages together, following their religious leaders (Collins-Kreiner 2018; Turner 1969; Turner/Turner 1978). For this reason its major attributes include:

- previous relationships and acquaintances among group members;
- a formal leadership figure (often a rabbi, priest, or other member of the clergy);
- a sense of trust among the participants; and
- 'communitas' – the sense of sharing and intimacy that develops among people who, together, experience liminality (the transitional period or phase of a rite of passage during which the participant lacks social status or rank, remains anonymous, demonstrates obedience and humility, and adheres to prescribed forms of conduct, dress, etc.) (Turner 1969; Turner/Turner 1978).

Pilgrimage is therefore characterized by a unique form of organization and travel, as it typically involves pre-organized groups that are part of a local community (Collins-Kreiner 2018). As a result, it is organized from the bottom up, sparked by the desire of members of the local community to visit a site of formative importance for their religion. Pilgrimage is often organized by local leaders whose groups are obviously comprised of pilgrims (Timothy/Olsen 2006), making them more disciplined than other tourists. Pilgrims focus on the aim of their travel, which may be to visit a holy site or figure, to take a vow, or to engage in some other religious act or duty. As a result, their itinerary is usually known ahead of time and strictly adhered to, with virtually no visits to non-religious sites during such trips (Collins-Kreiner 2018). In other words, pilgrims are less interested in tourist facilities and infrastructure, and more concerned with the religious aspects of a trip, meaning that they typically have lower demands

than other tourism segments. From a financial perspective, this also means that religious tours are usually less expensive than other forms of tourism (Collins-Kreiner et al. 2006; Timothy/Olsen 2006).

Israel contains many sites that are sacred to the three monotheistic religions. Religious travel to Israel today is performed by Christians, Jews, and Muslims, as well as Bahais, Druze, Mormons, and members of other religions. In 2019, Christian pilgrimage to Israel accounted for 20 percent of all incoming tourists, and 54 percent of all visiting tourists identified as Christian (Israel Ministry of Tourism 2019; 2020). Christians therefore constitute one of the major segments in the tourism industry, whereas Muslim travelers constitute only a small segment, primarily due to political issues, and Jewish tourism to the Holy Land is not only religious in nature. On this basis, the present article will focus on Christian travel to the Holy Land.

### 3 METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

To contend with the subject's complexity and to try to uncover and understand Covid-19's possible impact and influence on pilgrimage, we employed historical research methodology for the purpose of uncovering past events. Researchers use historical methodology that is often based on secondary sources in order to discover processes and better understand events that took place in the past as well as current events (Shilo/Collins-Kreiner 2019; Carr 1964).

Over the course of its existence as a field of study, and ever since the days of Herodotus, the Greek historian who recorded events in the fifth century BC, historical research has undergone numerous fluctuations and vicissitudes. For example, 100 years ago even historians of great stature believed that facts were objective pieces of information just waiting to be discovered and investigated. However more recent decades have witnessed the emergence of a critical approach that regards history as a subjective field of inquiry deeply influenced by the attributes of the researchers themselves.

Today it is widely accepted that facts do not reside in a 'temple of facts' – a 'Holy of Holies' of sorts – but rather are, themselves, part of a process of subjective narrative interpretation, which is an element of the historian's work (Carr 1964). History, then, can be considered a critical evaluation of the evidence available to the researcher and the historian's re-examination of the writer's accounts, reflections, and descriptions of the past. On this basis, philosopher Karl Popper's notion that 'there can be no history of "the past as it actually did happen"; there can only be historical interpretations, and none of them final' is currently the prevailing approach to the field of history (Popper in Carr 1964: 470).

Integrating historical methodology into our research has helped us discover processes and better understand the events that took place during the development of pilgrimage. The aim of this approach has been to better understand how current pilgrimage can serve as an exit strategy from Covid-19 for the tourism industry in the Holy Land.

### 4 THE FIRST BLACK SWAN: THE BIRTH OF PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLY LAND

A historical perspective may offer an interesting and relevant economic interpretation of the Coronavirus crisis. About 1700 years ago a 'Black Swan' landed in the Land of

Israel. This was a dramatic and influential event on a global scale that changed the face of the Roman-controlled ancient world. Ironically, it was this event that resulted in the Christian pilgrim tourism industry's entry into the Land of Israel, just as current events threaten to at least temporarily disable the tourism industry that began to develop at that time. Below we consider the relationship between these two economic events.

First, however, we offer a brief account of the earlier event itself. In AD 313 Emperor Constantine the Great issued a royal decree known as the Edict of Milan, which first permitted Christian worship throughout the Empire and required the Romans to demonstrate religious tolerance towards Christians (Limor 1997). Just over a decade later, in 325, during his reign over the entire Roman Empire, Constantine convened the First Conference of Nicaea, which became the founding conference of early state Christianity. In the process, he established Christianity as a well-recognized religion in the Roman Empire. In AD 380 the process was completed when Emperor Theodosius I issued the Edict of Thessalonica, confirming Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire. This political-religious decision had a huge impact on the ancient trade economy, with the magnitude of a Black Swan phenomenon, as it completely altered the face of the ancient Middle Eastern economy. At the time, trade in myrrh and frankincense was still at its peak (Rosenthal-Heginbottom 2003).

Myrrh and frankincense come from rare trees that grow only in Ethiopia and the southern Arabian Peninsula. These trees produce valuable resin, which was a popular and essential incense for worship and sacrificial needs in many temples throughout the ancient world. This rare and expensive incense was loaded onto camels and transported via trade convoys led by the ancient Nabateans along routes known as 'spice roads' (or 'incense routes'), which crossed the Negev from Petra to the port of Gaza (Amar 2004). For centuries, thousands of pagan temples in the ancient world regularly used immense quantities of myrrh and frankincense, which arrived each year in commercial convoys to eastern ports of the Mediterranean, from where they were transported throughout the Mediterranean region and Europe (Rosenthal-Heginbottom 2003).

The economy of the Nabatean incense trade became highly developed in the fourth century BC. Nabatean merchants became the primary carriers of frankincense and myrrh along the trade routes between Arabia and the Roman Empire (Amar 2021; Ben-David 2021). The Nabateans were one of many Arab tribes residing in the Arabian Peninsula during the Hellenistic period (the fourth through the first century BC). They played a key role in the economy of the incense routes, which flourished from the beginning of their independent kingdom in the second century BC to AD 106, when they were annexed to the Roman Empire under Emperor Trajan (Negev 1974).

During this period, frankincense and myrrh resin became a valuable and important element of daily worship in pagan temples, and large quantities were used on a regular basis (Amar 2021). As a result of this economic success, the Nabatean kingdom emerged as an important local power alongside the Roman Empire. Today, many historians link the Nabateans' success to the importance of frankincense and myrrh to the ceremonies and the ritual needs of the pagan temples (Ben-David 2021; Amar 2021).

In the Hellenistic and Roman periods, major religious sites served as some of the world's most important tourist destinations, known as the 'Seven Wonders of the World' (Jordan 2014). In the fourth century AD Christianity made a major contribution to the world of pilgrimage by introducing the Holy Land (the ancient Land of Israel) to its growing number of followers around the world. Many scholars believe that the early tradition of Christian pilgrimage to ancient Judea was encouraged by the Byzantine emperors beginning in the early days of the Empire (Limor/Stroumsa 2006), which

had a lot to do with the well-known tradition of the famous voyage to Judea of St. Helena Augusta, mother of Constantine the Great.

Although we have no reliable historical evidence of such a voyage, this tradition is widely accepted in the Christian world. It holds that during the second decade of the fourth century AD, St. Helena Augusta visited Judea in search of the geographical sites of the New Testament. This mythical journey plays a key role in the later world of Christian hagiography and pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

The earliest followers of Jesus were apocalyptic Jewish Christians. The inclusion of gentiles in the developing early Christian Church caused a schism between Judaism and Jewish Christianity during the first two centuries of the Christian Era (Flusser 1988). As mentioned earlier, in 313 Constantine I issued the Edict of Milan, legalizing Christian worship; and in 380, with the Edict of Thessalonica put forth under Theodosius I, the Roman Empire officially adopted Trinitarian Christianity as its state religion, and Christianity established itself as a predominantly Roman religion and the state church of the Roman Empire.

The Roman Empire's abrupt conversion to Christianity in 324–325 completely transformed the rules of the ancient economy. Within a short time it substantially reduced the demand for vast quantities of myrrh and frankincense as the Christian Church used only small amounts of these resins for the purpose of worship.<sup>1</sup> The result was the decimation and almost complete collapse of the extensive caravan economy that until then had generated huge sums for the Imperial Roman treasury. In this way, and similar to the recent developments in Israel's modern tourism industry, many people immediately lost their jobs and found it difficult to earn a living. The myrrh and frankincense market had provided them with new opportunities; and, based on the impressive archeological remains in the Negev, it can be deduced that traders made a good living in their profession, which was based on a centuries-old tradition.

The detrimental impact on the myrrh and frankincense market of the early Byzantine period proved catastrophic for the employment and income of the masses of ancient Eastern peoples as temple priests, guides, convoy haulers, food and merchandise providers, camel saddle artisans, owners of roadside hostels and inns, guards and security personnel, prostitutes, cooks, convoy crews, and various other service providers all lost their jobs at once. Needless to say, in the Roman world they were all left without any state financial support or welfare services, which were non-existent at the time.

During the following century the Roman economy underwent far-reaching changes. In the southern Land of Israel the Nabataean-Byzantine cities of the Negev were forced to relinquish their status, and the role they had played from time immemorial, and rebrand themselves. They of course were also forced to seek

1. Many scholars accept that early Roman Christianity adopted the use of myrrh and frankincense in places of worship from the pagan temples because of its importance to the public. People in the ancient Roman world associated the scent of myrrh and frankincense with worship of the gods as it was always present in all temples. As it was essential that the new religion maintain some established practices in order to draw new believers to Christianity, myrrh and frankincense became essential parts of every church gathering. Just before prayer began, the priest would burn some incense in the church's assembly hall in order to 'open the heart of the Lord' to the prayers of his followers. Despite this ancient link to the pre-Christian pagan world, the amount of incense now used in Christian churches is very small in comparison to the large amounts used in the ancient world.

out alternative sources of income to the convoys that ceased to pass through the region (Erickson-Gini/Israel 2013).

This was the basis of the agricultural development that began to spread through the northern Negev, which was its center in the Byzantine period. Tens of thousands of acres of olive groves and vines were planted in the Negev, whose residents produced considerable quantities of olive oil and wine that came to be in high demand by the thousands of Christian pilgrims who began to visit the Holy Land. In some of the Negev towns residents started to breed the noble Arabian horse, which over time would become a highly coveted and prestigious status symbol in the eyes of the nobility (Negev 1974).

The policy established by Emperor Constantine that led to the conversion of the pagan Roman Empire was to some extent a Black Swan that no one could have anticipated, similar to the current Coronavirus crisis. Indeed, we are now being forced to rethink tourism and consider alternative approaches to contending with the economic challenges, just as the ancient inhabitants of the Negev were forced to do some 1700 years ago.

## 5 THE SECOND BLACK SWAN? COVID-19 AND THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

The Covid-19 pandemic greatly impacted the tourism industry, ultimately causing it to shut down for months (Hall et al. 2020; Gössling et al. 2021; Lew et al. 2020). Although various efforts have been made since June 2020 to reopen the industry, most tourism sectors continue to struggle with recurring outbreaks of the virus (UNWTO 2021). The UNWTO (2020a) declared tourism to be among the hardest-hit sectors, with an emphasis on the high exposure of small and medium enterprises (Gössling et al. 2021; Lew et al. 2020; Ram et al. 2022).

Shocks occur regularly in the tourism sector (Collins-Kreiner/Ram 2021; Dolnicar/Zare 2020; Gössling et al. 2021). However, the shock stemming from the Covid-19 pandemic has been different in three critical ways. First, the economic shock and the consequent decline in travel have been global (UNWTO 2020b). Second, the ongoing crisis can trigger structural changes in many sectors of the industry (Dolnicar/Zare 2020). And, third, a return to normal routine is still nowhere in sight (Ram et al. 2022).

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a health and economic crisis with devastating effects on developing countries, especially those dependent on tourism. In an attempt to protect their populations, governments have implemented lockdowns, quarantines, and major restrictions on national and international mobility (Vanzetti/Peters 2021).

Tourism recovery and development policies will be highly instrumental in rebooting the industry following the pandemic and will include preventive measures, policy support, and departmental management (Bae/Chang 2021; Lew et al. 2020). For the moment, however, individual countries are implementing their own blend of tactical measures as part of their national tourism policies to contend with the crisis (Collins-Kreiner/Ram 2021; UNWTO 2021; World Bank 2021). The general tendency appears to be the implementation of short-term, local solutions as no country has the ability to make unilateral decisions regarding inbound or outbound tourism. Thus far, no single policy or strategy has been found to suit all countries, despite the recommendations of the UNWTO (2020a; 2020b; 2020c; 2021).

This situation has led countries to adopt differing dynamic plans (Collins-Kreiner/Ram 2021). This is understandable as each country has been impacted differently by the pandemic and has its own unique characteristics, as reflected in and shaped by

local politics, tourism networks and actors, and culture. On the other hand, without an international strategy this sector will be unable to become more resilient or better prepared for future crises (Hall et al. 2020).

In Israel the crisis began to be felt in March 2020, and from then to the time of writing most of the country's tourism industry has been dormant, with hardly any international pilgrims visiting the country (Israel Ministry of Tourism 2021).

## 6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This section will examine the advantages and disadvantages of current Christian pilgrimage as an exit strategy from the ongoing Coronavirus crisis. The historical event we described is comparable to the current pandemic in that both shocked and restructured the contemporary pilgrimage tourism industry – that of late antiquity and that of today.

The market segment of pilgrimage was analyzed according to its characteristics and the primary methods currently being employed to contend with Covid-19: social distancing, travel in unchanging small groups ('capsules/bubbles'), avoidance of large gatherings and mass tourism sites and facilities (such as restaurants), and wearing face masks. Of course, pilgrimage cannot avoid spreading the virus, but, in comparison to other economic sectors, it appears more capable of adapting to the requirements of the Covid regulations.

We claim that the first advantage of pilgrimage from this perspective is the powerful desire and motivation of participants to make a trip, which may even be mandatory in some religions (Butler/Suntikul 2018). As a result this segment is one of the first that can be expected to recommence activity, even before the conclusion of the pandemic. Indeed, faith-based tourism professionals state that the desire to engage in pilgrimage may even grow during the pandemic due to the tendency of pilgrims to take vows, make requests, and pray for health and other needs.

Second, we suggest, based on our analysis, that another advantage of pilgrimage could be its well-organized groups, which can travel to and from their country of origin as closed, unchanging capsules that were described in the literature (Turner 1969; Turner/Turner 1978). This advantage stems from the participants' above-mentioned unique local form of organization as this increases the discipline of such groups, which are usually accompanied by their religious or spiritual leader. As the members of such groups typically already know one another and are traveling with a formal leader who enjoys greater authority than a tour guide, it would be much easier and more feasible for them to adhere to Covid-19 restrictions than for other kinds of tourists.

Third, as pilgrims' trips have a single purpose, they also have a single, easy-to-manage itinerary and strict visiting hours. Specific times for general gatherings and prayers can be set up at the outset of a trip. As pilgrimage itineraries are more standardized than tourist ones, those involved are less likely to spread the virus.

Fourth, pilgrims are less interested in the touristic aspects of travel (Timothy/Olsen 2006) – meaning, for example, that dining is not an issue as they often eat while touring. In addition to the greater discipline of such groups, this is another factor that increases the ability of pilgrims to adhere to Covid-19 restrictions. Fifth, accordingly, religious tours are also cheaper than tours in many other segments (such as business tourism and leisure tourism), and are therefore also conducive to the unstable economic conditions currently being faced by many people around the world.

Another relevant aspect of this unique tourism segment is ‘*communitas*’ – which, in this case, can be defined as a group’s self-perception as part of a single egalitarian traveling community (or capsule) characterized by the same motives and desires and a sense of solidarity (Turner 1969; Turner/Turner 1978).

Finally, in addition to these advantages there may also be an opportunity for a new era of faith-based tourism. Due to changes in consumer behavior during the pandemic, we may witness a new developing trend of self-conducted pilgrimage tours, planned and initiated with the assistance of religious clergy but performed as private individuals. This type of consumer behavior may emerge as a new form of pilgrimage travel that uses new technologies, including specific, dedicated apps.

In the face of the pandemic, pilgrimage also has its disadvantages. One is the above-mentioned previously existing close relationships among members of religious tour groups. When this is the case, if one participant is infected the others most likely will be too. Another is the fact that pilgrimage usually involves mass gatherings, which are prohibited during the current period. A third is the fact that pilgrimage usually involves older tourists who are less likely to travel during the pandemic and must remain protected. As a result, the nature of pilgrimage will also need to change in order to ensure it is consistent with the current restrictions.

## 7 SUMMARY: CHRISTIAN PILGRIMAGE AS A TOURISM ECONOMY AND AN EXIT STRATEGY

This article began with a presentation of the emergence of Christian pilgrimage as a tourism economy. As we have seen, the Roman Empire’s conversion to Christianity resulted in the development of a new and successful tourism economy known as Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land, followed by other types of Christian pilgrimage to numerous sacred sites around the world.

It then maintained that although pilgrimage has a number of attributes that are known to be factors in the spread of illness, most of its characteristics can be utilized to facilitate tourism after such crisis. Pilgrims, who typically possess a powerful desire that supersedes all other factors, and the benefits of traveling as a community in a disciplined and organized group, could constitute a front line of travelers returning to normality once the current pandemic subsides.

Although one of the world’s oldest tourism segments, pilgrimage still accounts for a significant part of the market today. Focusing on this type of tourism could provide the industry with a viable exit strategy (one of a number of strategies). Doing so could also highlight the current need to explore the possibilities presented by other segments to develop effective exit strategies as the research thus far has focused on tourism in general.

The historical event’s main point of relevance to the current pandemic is that both appear to have restructured the economy. Although this article provides preliminary insights into possible exit strategies, the study remains limited in its breadth and scope. Furthermore, a comprehensive comparison between the two Black Swans remains impossible as we are still in the midst of the second crisis.

It is important to remember that this article is speculative in nature because it posits what might happen in the future due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Also, after trying to compare the two Black Swans, we are not convinced of the relevance of these two events to one another due to the large number of differences between them. It is also clear to us that two years after the pandemic’s initial outbreak is too early to

attempt to reflect on its impact, and especially to compare it to previous phenomena. However, we hope that doing so will enable us to make a modest contribution to the new era that began with the outbreak of Covid-19.

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