CHAPTER 1

POSTSECULAR PILGRIMAGE: THE IDEA OF THE BOOK

A shrine turns into a pilgrimage site when its narratives or reported miracles, most successfully a combination of the two, appeal to a wider public. Pilgrims spread these news and narratives all over the pilgrim paths they use. They bring home devotional objects as souvenirs like shells from a beach holiday. Indeed, the pilgrimage to the tomb of St. James in Santiago de Compostela, a remote place in northwestern Spain near Finisterre, the end of Europe, spread the scallop—the “mussel of St. James” in many European languages—all over continental Europe. In October 1987, the Council of Europe declared the St. James pilgrimage route the first European Cultural Route because it links the formation of a modern European identity beyond nations to a medieval common European heritage. Most recently, the route experienced a huge revival. It now attracts all sorts of people interested in sportive or cultural hiking and various forms of self-experience. Further east, in a similarly remote place close to the French Pyrenees, Lourdes developed since the apparition of the Virgin Mary in the late nineteenth century a global attractiveness that spread the Lourdes Madonna, white with a blue girdle, all over the world. Lourdes grottos or at least symbols of this shrine are to be found in almost any Catholic community from New Orleans (USA) to Chennai (India), notwithstanding the large number of Catholics who think of it as kitsch. The Lourdes Madonna is an icon that brings Catholics from all over the world together, but you can also distinguish two different types of Catholics by asking if they like the spirituality associated with Lourdes or not. A global identity is never uncontested.

We will come back to both the shrines of Lourdes and St. James and their narratives to reflect on self, agency, and community in a global perspective. To start our examination of pilgrimage for international relations a new type of Catholic pilgrimage that turns...
the traditional structure upside down is illuminating: John Paul II invented in 1980s the World Youth Day. It is no coincidence that it was John Paul II who invented these gatherings. His life as a pilgrim pope initiated many events of mass gatherings. His journeys were a very genuine contribution of the papacy to an emerging public sphere. A religious community could experience itself globally by watching these visits and joining them if the papal plane came close enough to home. The global mourning of the death of John Paul II showed that the papal ambition of speaking not only to Catholics but to all people of good will was met. The World Youth Day is a spiritual gathering of Catholic youth and their friends. Every second year this gathering brings the pope and a huge crowd of young pilgrims from all over the world together in one city. In 2013, Rio de Janeiro will host the event. So far the World Youth Day took place in Santiago de Compostela (1989), in Paris, Denver, Toronto, Sidney, Buenos Aires, Madrid, Częstochowa, Cologne, and of course Rome. The event in Manila in 1995 is, with an estimated four to five millions participants, one of the biggest mass events in human history. All these places have their shrines that are sometimes integrated into the celebrations. The symbols of the World Youth Day are, however, always the same, a very simple wooden cross and an image of the Mother of God, which are carried to all these places. The pilgrims from abroad first spend a week in the guest country’s local parishes and dioceses before they gather in the city of the World Youth Day. The idea is to offer young Catholics an event in which they can experience themselves as part of a global community. Out of many nations the Catholic youth is brought together in unity. However, the local and national particularities are not excluded. Being guest in the various parishes, the pilgrims experience what it means to be a Catholic in France or in Latin America. It is a kind of Catholic cosmopolitanism that highlights the bright side of globalization.

The dark sides of humanity have their own pilgrimage sites. In 1994 the world and also the Catholic church failed to prevent the genocide in Rwanda. From a Catholic perspective it is disturbing that this genocide happened in one of Africa’s most Catholic countries. Catholics slaughtered and were slaughtered. Not surprisingly, the percentage of Catholics in Rwanda fell significantly. However, there is also a Catholic answer to this tragedy. It was offered already a decade before in Kibeho, Southern Rwanda, through an apparition of the Virgin Mary: reconciliation. After the genocide, in April 1995, the place became known for the Kibeho massacre. Kibeho was