

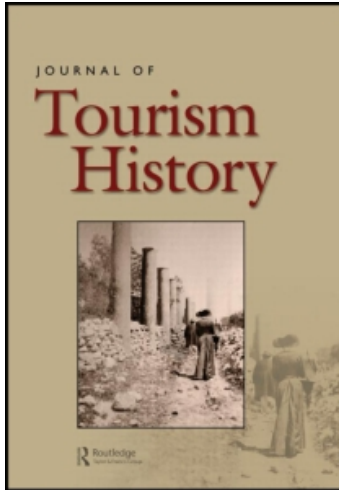
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### Pilgrimage in the jet age: the development of the American evangelical Holy Land travel industry, 1948-1978

Hillary Kaell <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> History of American Civilization, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA

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## **Pilgrimage in the jet age: the development of the American evangelical Holy Land travel industry, 1948–1978**

Hillary Kaell\*

*History of American Civilization, Harvard University, 569 Mather Mail Center,  
Cambridge, MA 02138, USA*

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The period from 1948 to 1978 was the key transitional moment that brought modern, mass tourism to the Holy Land. It also saw the rise of American tourism as the primary market segment in the area. Yet the period remains woefully understudied, lost amidst ample scholarly work about Holy Land travel in earlier and later periods. This article examines the development of the American evangelical Holy Land travel industry in this period. It argues that scholars should conceive of the middle-class Christian leisure industry in ways that correspond to how historian Lisa McGirr has described the rise of evangelical politics in the same period: a series of overlapping grassroots networks. Two major points about these networks are highlighted. First, Catholic companies, which have remained obscured in tourism history literature, actually provided the first models in this homegrown industry. Second, fledgling evangelical companies positioned themselves as insiders in faith communities by adapting models from the Christians they served, such as the pastor–lay relationship and the trend toward non-denominationalism in the 1970s.

**Keywords:** advertising; community; industry; pilgrimage; religion

I came along in the middle of an incredible transition . . . When I started, we were filling out steam ship tickets by hand and now it's all e-tickets and everyone is traveling. (Peter Miele, Personal Interview, September 19, 2008)

When Peter Miele reflects upon his career at his father Henry's travel business in Los Angeles, what he remembers is, most of all, a radical transition. Since the 1950s, when Miele first joined his father's firm, mass air travel and computerization have significantly altered how Americans go abroad. Although this was true generally, Miele is in fact referring to a very particular branch of the American tour industry: Christian pilgrimage. When his father began selling package pilgrimages to the Holy Land in the 1930s, only a handful of Americans Christians had the time or money to embark on such a voyage. Today, approximately 150,000 Americans who identify as religious pilgrims travel there each year (Department of Statistics, 2008, pp. 22–23).

The 'Holy Land' encompasses major sites in the modern states of Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian territories that are linked with New and Old Testament passages,

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\*Email: [hillarykaell@gmail.com](mailto:hillarykaell@gmail.com)

particularly where Jesus lived and died.<sup>1</sup> This article examines evangelicals, who today make up the majority of American Christian pilgrims.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, it seeks to illuminate how the American industry that now provides Holy Land trips to evangelicals grew domestically between 1948 and 1978. This period has yet to be studied in any depth by scholars of American Holy Land tourism. Although, as Peter Miele indicates, the rise of package pilgrimages paralleled trends in the wider tour industry, it followed its own trajectory as well.

A number of literary scholars and historians have examined American Holy Land travel in the nineteenth century, when major figures like Mark Twain and Herman Melville made the trip. These studies generally end around 1917 with the British Mandate in Palestine (Greenberg, 1994; Obenzinger, 1999; Vogel, 1993; Yothers, 2007). Anthropologists, sociologists, and scholars of tourism have also produced a wealth of studies on current evangelical travel to Israel, probing the religious and political aspects of Christians' relationships to the sites and to the Israeli guides (Belhassen & Santos, 2006; Feldman, 2007; Fleischer, 2000). There is also significant scholarly interest in current Christian Zionism, the strongly pro-Israel political wing of conservative Protestantism in the USA (Ariel, 2002; Spector, 2009; Weber, 2004). Studies of American travel to the Holy Land, whether historical or contemporary, focus almost exclusively on Protestants; those few that feature a chapter about Catholics do not tend to integrate it into the wider study (Greenberg, 1994; Klatzker, 1987; Merkley, 2001).

This article seeks to do three things. First, it looks to integrate American Catholics into the history of Protestant travel by showing how Catholic pilgrimage companies were pioneers in the early 1930s and, in the 1960s, provided models for the growth of the (now larger) Protestant pilgrimage industry. Second and more fundamentally, this article focuses on the largely ignored 1948–1978 period, when mass tourism began in the Holy Land. This period begins with the 1948 establishment of the state of Israel and division of Jerusalem. The period ends in 1978, which marked the beginning of a new relationship between the Israeli Government and modern Christian Zionists. That year the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs published a study, *American Fundamentalism and Israel*, which awakened many government officials to the political and economic potential of this alliance. Also in 1978, the newly elected Israeli Prime Minister, Menachem Begin, first invited Jerry Falwell, the influential 'Moral Majority' leader, to tour the country. Scholars most often cite the Begin–Falwell relationship as the crucial lynchpin in forging a Jewish-Christian Zionist accord (e.g. Lieven, 2004, pp. 173–189; McAlister 2001, pp. 193–194).

As has already been intimated, this article focuses on the supply side – how the pilgrimage industry was constructed and promoted – rather than on the pilgrims themselves. Historians and ethnographers of American religion produce few studies of industry or supply side economics (tourism or otherwise), having been almost exclusively interested in how religious people consume products and ideas. In his 1997 essay, 'The Illusion of Shifting Demand,' sociologist Roger Finke speaks to this group of scholars when he argues that religious innovation and growth is often caused by supply side industries, not just consumer demand (Finke in Tweed, 1997, p. 108). This article builds on Finke's thesis and applies it to the case of evangelical tourism. By looking at the supply side, it moves beyond the facile assumption that evangelical Holy Land pilgrimage began only when Christian Zionist demand

skyrocketed in the early 1980s. Rather, the foundation was laid and the industry was already entrenched all over the USA.

This article seeks to make one additional and related point. The most salient feature of the mid-twentieth century evangelical pilgrimage industry was that, although major tour companies like Thomas Cook played a role, it was primarily a network of small, local actors. This corresponds to how historian Lisa McGirr has described the rise of evangelical politics in the same period (McGirr, 2001). If scholars have begun to think of conservative religious politics in the 1960s as a series of overlapping local networks, they must do the same for an equally important facet of religious life evolving in the same period – the development of the leisure industry.

Like evangelical politics, which seemed to burst fully formed into the American public sphere in the late-1970s, so did the evangelical leisure industry shock many (non-evangelical) observers (McGirr, 2001, p. 5). Scholars have begun to examine the growth of certain aspects of this industry, particularly televangelism and Christian rock, but much of it remains unstudied, including the growth of middle-class Christian resorts, travel and summer camps after the World War II (Hendershot, 2004). This article shows how the growth of mass pilgrimage was tied to developments in the wider tourism industry but, because of its reliance on small, local actors, also adopted patterns in the religious communities that it served. This allowed pilgrimage producers to position themselves as ‘insiders’ in faith communities, thus assuring potential clients that they would be able to provide a transformative religious experience in the Holy Land.<sup>3</sup>

This article provides a mostly chronological history of the development of the American pilgrimage industry. The first sections examine the growth of the domestic industry in the USA. The last section turns to the ‘Israeli period’ after 1967. During the first 20 years covered in this article (1948–1967), most major Holy Land sites were under Jordanian control. Jordan did seek to capitalize on the tourist market – publishing tour books for the USA, for example – but it never engaged a fully successful marketing strategy at home or abroad (Jordan Tourist Department, 1958, 1962; Katz, 2003, p. 182).<sup>4</sup> The Israeli Government, on the other hand, ran a sophisticated campaign to attract American Christian pilgrims even before 1967. There has been substantial scholarly work about Israel’s tourism policies, particularly its political Zionist message (Bowman in Harrison, 1992; Cohen-Hattab, 2004; Stein, 2008). Because this article focuses on the development of the USA pilgrimage industry, its description of Israeli policy focuses on its affect in the American market.

### **The wealthy abroad: Holy Land travel during the British Mandate**

American travel to the Holy Land began in the 1820s, but the first organized group tours date to the ‘Gilded Age’ following the Civil War (Obenzinger, 1999, p. 45). Thomas Cook conducted his first package tour of the Holy Land in 1869 and, although the trip participants were mainly English, one American, a Mr. Martin, joined this first tour (Brendan, 1991, p. 129). From this point on, the number of Americans on group tours increased rapidly. In 1874 they comprised 25% of Cook’s Holy Land trade (Klatzker, 1987, pp. 51, 54). Cook’s travelers were mainly Protestant but the first American Catholic groups began in this period as well. In 1889, the

Franciscan Commissariat organized the first American Catholic group tour (Pfeiffer, 1890, pp. 3–7). The number of Holy Land travelers generally in this period (and until the World War II) should not be overestimated, however. This was not the age of ‘mass’ travel the way one might think today; travelers were an elite group of those who could afford to travel.

Current scholarship offers a rich portrait of this period in Holy Land travel but it begins to falter in the British Mandate period, from 1917 to 1948. Although none of these scholars addresses the tour industry specifically, the implication is that there were few travelers who considered themselves ‘pilgrims’ (Greenberg, 1994; Vogel, 1993, pp. 4–5). This is not the case. American Protestant travel continued unabated and new infrastructure greeted pilgrims: the American Colony opened a hotel in the early 1920s and the American-financed YMCA, which offered accommodations, opened in 1924. By 1934, American Express had offices in Cairo and Jerusalem that took care of travel arrangements for independent groups (I. Galtman, American Express Company Archivist, Personal Interview, October 1, 2008).

More important, the seeds were being sown for a very different type of tourism. This was a crucial period for the development of the first small, independent tour companies. In Palestine, the first Arab-owned tour companies began operations in the 1930s, relying on knowledge gleaned from a generation working as guides and hired hands for European tour companies. The first one, called Oweida Brothers, opened in Jerusalem in 1931. The family business began as a carriage supplier in the 1860s, providing transportation from Jaffa to Jerusalem for companies like Thomas Cook (H. Abu Dayyeh, Personal Interview, May 29, 2009).

In the USA, small Catholic companies, relying on connections in immigrant communities and personal links with priests, began to offer tours in the 1920s. Likely the first company of this type to offer a group pilgrimage to the Holy Land was Beccari Catholic Tours, Inc. F.M. Beccari, an Italian immigrant who had been naturalized in 1905, founded the company in New York after the World War I. He specialized in trips to Rome, likely drawing on previous connections in his place of birth, and, by 1927, also offered a pilgrimage to the Holy Land (‘Chicago Aldermen tour through Europe,’ 1922; US Department of Labor and Immigration Service, 1920). In the same period, in 1923, Thomas A. Broderick, a 25-year old native New Yorker, landed a job doing promotions for Franco-Belgique tours. Broderick was Irish Catholic and active in the Knights of Columbus so his interest was piqued when Pope Pius XI declared a Holy year in 1925. He paired his new tour expertise with his Knights connections to pull together 55 people, mainly Irish Catholic, for a pilgrimage to Rome. He continued organizing Catholic lay tours privately until 1936 when he co-founded Transmarine Tours (P. Broderick Callan, Personal Correspondence, October 2, 2008; Broderick, 1972; Martin, 1967).

Companies like Beccari’s and Broderick’s organized small parish trips, but also operated as the middlemen for larger organizations with which they often had ethnic ties, like the Archdiocese of New York (Broderick) or the Franciscan Commissariat (Beccari). These trips remained limited to the wealthy or upper-middle class. For example, the 1927 Commissariat trip, organized by Beccari, was a three-month affair, with options for ‘add-ons’ of personal interest, like a trip to Lourdes or Ireland (Franciscan Commissariat of the Holy Land, 1927, p. 13). Not only did travelers miss three months of work, but the trip cost US\$1385 per person. In context, the average

yearly salary at the time was US\$2010 (1926 American Income Almost 90 Billions, Breaks Records, 1927).

No major evangelical travel companies emerged during this period, likely in part because the evangelical movement was focused on institution-building at home and in traditional fields, like missions (Carpenter, 1980, pp. 62–75). Historian Joel A. Carpenter describes the growing home leisure industry in this period by and for conservative Christians. This included summer vacation sites, camps, and conferences but little travel abroad (Carpenter in Eskridge & Noll, 2000, pp. 266–267). The main exception was the Holy Land trips linked to one of the most established evangelical institutions at the time, Wheaton College. Joseph P. Free, a biblical archeologist at the college, organized independent Christian groups in the late-1930s – shortly before all Holy Land travel came to an abrupt halt because of the World War II and the 1948 Israeli war.

### **Developing local networks: the Holy Land tour industry after the war**

In 1949, American companies that survived the dry period, like Henry Miele in Los Angeles and Thomas Broderick in New York, resurfaced with a spate of new tours. Advertisements played on Americans' interest in European travel. Now that the war was over and the US dollar strong, trips to the continent were possible, for tourists and for pilgrims. Catholic companies benefited from increased wealth and security in Catholic communities, including newly suburban parishes (P. Broderick Callan, Personal Correspondence, September 30, 2008). Some conservative Christians, particularly Baptists, were also intrepid travelers. As early as 1955, the conservative Christian magazine *Moody Monthly* declared that 50,000 American Christians had gone to the Holy Land that year, a boom attributable in part to the London meeting of the World Baptist Alliance, which was followed by a group tour to the Holy Land (US Tourists Invading Holy Land, 1955). Although the magazine's figures are a likely an exaggeration, it demonstrates conservative Christians' awareness of the postwar travel trend.

Since its development in the 1930s, the American Holy Land tour market has had one defining characteristic: it is an intricate network of thousands of small family run or clergy-run businesses that are geographically diffuse. This structure was solidly in place in the mid-1950s as new companies began to mushroom across the USA. These small companies acted as the sluice gates, attracting groups of pilgrims and then collaborating with tour wholesalers that organized buses, hotels and access to shrines through companies based in the Holy Land. Although there were key nodes where multiple small companies operated (New York mainly, but also Chicago and Los Angeles), overall the industry was scattered in small towns throughout the USA from Milan (Pennsylvania) to Buena Park (California). Interested travelers scanned pages filled with small, black-and-white travel advertisements in local or national papers: 'See the Holy Land in 1955 – 6 weeks tour. Also, "Christmas in Bethlehem Tour." Bible Land Tours. Write to Box 3-M, Wilmore, Kentucky' (See the Holy Land, 1955).

Likely people working in the secular holiday-travel and pilgrimage industries had some knowledge of each other particularly because, since the 1930s, both were members of the same professional associations like the American Society of Travel Agents. There was also overlap with the domestic evangelical leisure industry that

had developed in the 1930s as a series of summer retreats and resorts. For example, Winona Lake, a vacation camp in Indiana, was an early pioneer in large Holy Land group tours. In 1959, they organized the first of many ‘Prophetic Pilgrimages’ to the Holy Land. ‘As the name prophetic pilgrimage implies,’ explained the organizers, ‘this will be much more than just a sightseeing tour.’ Bible experts, visits to holy sites and evangelization opportunities awaited those who paid US\$1495 for the five-week tour (Bible Lands Prophetic Pilgrimage, 1959).

The clients who chose a Christian pilgrimage varied greatly in terms of their goals for the trip, although, based on the analyses of extant trip lists, approximately 70% were female and over age of 55. Although this is out of the ordinary for American travelers, it reflects the church pew demographic. There has been an ongoing scholarly discussion about what constitutes a ‘tourist’ and a ‘pilgrim’ (e.g. Fleischer, 2000: 311–314; Olsen & Timothy, 2006, pp. 6–8; Smith, 1992, pp. 1–17). This article does not engage this debate; suffice it to say that for most clients who choose a Christian company’s pilgrimage there are expectations of spiritual transformation or, at the very least, a shared experience with fellow believers.

Often, tour companies appealed to consumers by describing their founder’s religious commitment and his realization – akin to discerning a vocation – that tours fulfill a spiritual need. This served two related purposes: first, it assured potential pilgrims that their religious aspirations were incorporated into the commercial model and, second, it recreated a leader–tourist relationship that mirrored the familiar pastor–lay relationship. Pilgrims, most of whom were female, were already used to trusting (mainly male) religious leaders to guide them through the temptations of this world and prepare them for the next. Evangelical tour companies recreated this scenario by focusing their companies on single, charismatic leaders called ‘Pied Pipers’ in the industry. Large ministries, like the Billy Graham Evangelical Association (BGEA), relied on the appeal of a famous preacher. More often, however, a single individual – a layman or a small-church pastor – personally guided multiple tours, becoming known and trusted in this capacity. For example, Bob Terrell from Asheville, North Carolina, led 28 tours in 35 years. After his first trip in 1962, he was so impressed by his own spiritual awakening that he began to organize yearly trips, becoming a local celebrity in his own right (B. Terrell, Personal Interview, January 28, 2009).

### **The jet age and the mass market**

‘The year 1960,’ Israeli Ministry of Tourism proudly stated, ‘ushered in the jet age’ (Government Tourist Corporation [GTC], 1961, p. 13). It is undeniable that, in 1960, major changes were afoot. In the American tour industry, however, that year is best thought of as the beginning of a five-year transition to the ‘jet age.’ A survey of the *New York Times* travel section shows that by 1966 advertisements for ship travel to the Holy Land were almost entirely replaced by those for air travel. This shift changed the overseas travel industry enormously, primarily because it lowered costs. This occurred in part because airplane seats cost less than ship passage and in part because, once the travel time was shortened from days to hours, pilgrimages were trimmed from about three weeks to two. This trend continues; today, to keep costs low, American pilgrimage companies routinely run eight-day tours. In 1965, Americans made an average salary of US\$7262 per year and an all-inclusive pilgrimage cost approximately US\$800. Thus the cost of a pilgrimage was about 11% of a yearly salary in 1965,

whereas it represented 30% in 1955 and 69% in 1925 (Meras, 1967; Rice, 1950; US Bureau of the Census [USBC], 1955, p. 299, 1965, p. 340).

Less expensive tours opened the way for pilgrims who differed in class and geography from those who predominated earlier. In 1963, the Catholic magazine, *America*, announced, 'The grand tour is no longer for the affluent: the culture-gluttons (often relatively poor) have now won the day. Everyone goes abroad.' (Tourists, 1963). Indeed, a 1961 report sponsored by the Jordanian Government concluded that American travelers to the holy sites were no longer primarily from the affluent Northeast: 24.8% were from the Midwest and 24.4% from the west. The majority lived in small towns. About 65% were Protestant and 32% were Catholic, roughly equivalent to their percentages in the overall USA population (Jordanian report in Schmidt, 1961; W. Snyder, Personal Interview, January 28, 2009).

In the early 1960s, top airlines like Trans World Air (TWA) and British Overseas Air Corporation (BOAC) offered their own tours, including Holy Land trips. This created a new line of professionals; trip organizers hired by airlines to market and create specialized pilgrimages. A number of these airline agents took their contacts and tour savvy and opened their own travel companies that specialized in Christian travel. Perhaps the most important of these early entrepreneurs in the evangelical market was Pano Anastasato. He cast a long shadow; during the 1960s and 1970s he trained and recruited men who, today, run some of the foremost evangelical tour companies.

A Greek immigrant, Anastasato worked in sales at Swissair and Alitalia, where he observed the American Catholic pilgrimage industry. He also organized tours for the nationally renowned Oklahoma evangelist, Billy James Hargis. Although they broke ties early on after a disagreement, Hargis provided the inspiration for Anastasato's company, which used techniques from Catholics but appealed to Hargis' 'Bible belt' constituency. In 1962, he struck out on his own, borrowing money from his father to start Wholesale Tours International (WTI). Anastasato was not evangelical – in fact, he saw faith as a sign of weakness – but he had noticed, while working with Hargis, that evangelical groups, which were mainly comprised of older people with little travel experience, were uncomplaining and did not expect high-end hotels and facilities. They were content to walk where Jesus walked and, for Anastasato, it seemed like the perfect business opportunity. (A. Anastasato, Personal Correspondence, March 27, 2009; P. Anastasato Jr., Personal Interview, February 2, 2009; Personal Correspondence, February 6, 2009).

Anastasato introduced a number of mass marketing techniques on a scale that had not been used in the pilgrimage industry before. He used his contacts at the airlines to bargain for blocks of seats in the winter off-season and then offered enough yearly tours that he could offset the higher-priced summer seats, ensuring that his year-round prices remained lower than the competition. He flooded Christian newspapers with advertisements and created gifts and flight bags for his pilgrims emblazoned with the company acronym. Most important, Anastasato pioneered the 'pyramid' sales system on a mass scale, which remains the system that most pilgrimage companies use today. The idea was that the tour company courted pastors – called tour leaders – by offering them a free trip if they brought a certain number of (paying) lay people. Anastasato's wife recalls that his (cynical) theory was that 'Anybody that can sell you God can sell you anything.'



Anastasato's pitch to pastors was two-fold, personal and then professional. His son recalls: 'First his question to them was why wait for retirement to walk where Jesus walks? You can go now for free if you take your congregation. And then he'd tell them that doing this will reinvigorate your ministry.' (P. Anastasato Jr., Personal Correspondence, 6 February 2009). Anastasato also understood instinctually that this Pied Piper system appealed to lay people since they want to be led by someone they trust and a religious leader can better guarantee that the trip will produce the desired transformative effect.

The Pied Piper system had another important effect as well. Companies that sold to evangelicals faced a unique challenge; unlike Catholic tour providers, they had to appeal to a market that was denominationally diverse. Cliff Gotaas Tours, a Chicago-based company that entered the market in 1964, bridged the gap by promoting Pied Pipers who could appeal across a wide spectrum: prophecy preachers like Vance Havner, Christian novelists like Harriet Louise H. Patterson, or well known thinkers like Harold Ockenga. This allowed Gotaas to compete with his largest local competition in the 1960s, Wheaton Travel, which had an exclusive contract with one of the biggest Pied Pipers out there, Billy Graham. Both Anastasato and Gotaas also published newsletters, called the *Pilgrims Pilot* and *TravelNews*, respectively. By the mid-1970s, these newsletters each had a circulation of thousands of former pilgrims. They acted to cement a constituency that was otherwise diverse. Christians from different denominations heard about each other, about projects in the Holy Land and, of course, about upcoming trips.

### **The evangelical market after 1965: Christian and pan-denominational**

Catholic companies always kept the tour market 'in the family'; Catholic companies dealt with Catholic clients. In the decade after 1965, the evangelical market began to adopt this pattern as well. Many of the new companies that developed were different than Anastasato's; increasingly Christians ran their own businesses and framed it as a ministry or religious calling. Many of the leaders had been on trips and now wanted to replicate that experience for others. Dehoney Travel provides an example of a pattern typical of the time. Wayne Dehoney, a Southern Baptist pastor from Tennessee, first went to the Holy Land in 1955 with a group of his colleagues after the Baptist World Alliance meeting in London, England. For the next decade he used his travel journals and slides for Sunday school lessons and sermons. Anastasato was aware of this interest and, when Dehoney was serving as President of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1966, approached him to promote a tour for Baptists. Dehoney accepted and, following the success of this first tour, decided to organize trips as part of his pastoral ministry, eventually taking between 1200 and 1600 people to Israel a year. (K. Dehoney Evitts, Personal Interview, September 21, 2008).

Dehoney Travel, like many early Protestant companies, relied on a specific denominational base, such as Southern Baptists, where Dehoney was well connected. By the mid-1970s, however, a shift occurred. A number of companies began to advertise to 'Christians' generally, taking advantage of the growth of non-denominational evangelical culture. Two of the most successful companies to ride this trend were Cliff Gotaas Travel and the BGEA. Both were based in Chicago and began running trips in 1965. The BGEA, emblematic of neo-evangelical organizations in this period, united a

growing broad-base Christian movement outside of a specific denomination. Holy Land trips were considered an extension of the BGEA's ministry, under a full-time tour pastor, Roy Gustafson.

Gotaas, on the other hand, was a businessman who had worked at TWA for 20 years and had seen the success of Catholic tours to the Holy Land. He was also an evangelical with roots in the Chicago Christian community, where his brother served as pastor at the non-denominational Winetka Bible Church. Gotaas, perhaps inspired by what he saw at Winetka, was careful not to ground his company in a particular denomination. Dick Damisch, who ran Gotaas' advertising in the 1960s and 1970s, recalls, 'We had ads in *Christian Life*, *Christianity Today*, *Covenant Companion*. We covered the field . . . Any Christian could go with us. When he hit the high point (c.1975), he was sending 10,000 people a year.' (Richard Damisch, Personal Interview, November 7, 2008; David Gotaas, Personal Interview, September 17, 2008).

The trends in evangelical tourism parallel broader movements in American Christian industry. During three decades after the World War II, there was tremendous growth and diversification of evangelical ministries and businesses. Barry Gardner argues that one reason for this was that, as conservative Christians were forced out of denominations by their liberal co-religionists, they began to rely less on the denominations as a mediating institution and went directly to para-church and pan-denominational organizations to satisfy spiritual needs (Gardner, 2000, pp. 300–307). Christian tour companies provided one such outlet. Increasingly, companies like Gotaas' also relied on trusted pan-denominational celebrities like televangelists or Christian paperback writers, who were part of the broad evangelical subculture. In this way, evangelical companies benefited from the marketing and technological innovations of the time without sacrificing the important community networks that make pilgrims trust tour providers.

### **The six-day war and beyond: the Israeli modernization of pilgrimage**

'If it had been a week-long war we wouldn't be here any more!' joked Pano Anastasato about the 1967 war between Israel and its Arab neighbors. It was the first major disturbance in a decade and it proved too much for many small pilgrimage companies. Those that survived learned a lesson that has been repeated over and over since then: the Holy Land is a gamble. Particularly after 1967, companies developed strategies to weather periods when violence in Israel makes headlines and Americans cancel trips. 'In this industry,' explains 40-year tour veteran Kathy Dehoney-Evitts, 'you get used to suffering from every little hump and bump. When Israel's out of the news I can make a good living. When it's on TV every night – you wonder how you're going to eat.' (K. Dehoney-Evitts, Personal Interview, August 3, 2009). Catholic companies cope by offering pilgrimages to places like Mexico and Europe. Evangelical companies have sometimes branched out to include Catholic tours or diversified by offering short-term mission trips and 'Christian' vacations to holiday destinations like Hawaii.

The 1967 war had another important effect on Holy Land travel. For the first time, all the key Christian sites were under one government. Tourism was Jordan's major foreign currency earner before 1967 and since the early 1960s the government had required tour companies to apply for licenses and worked to suppress street

peddling at holy sites (H. Abu Dayyeh, Personal Interview, May 29, 2009). However, during the Jordanian period, Holy Land pilgrims remained primarily poorer and included many Arabs who stayed with relatives and/or spent much less money than Western tourists in Israel. For example, in 1966 Jordan had nearly twice the number of tourists as Israel (616,000: 320,000), but made about half the income (US\$33.6 million: US\$64 million) (Feron, 1967). When Israel gained control of places like East Jerusalem and Bethlehem in 1967, then, it brought modern, mass tourism to the Holy Land on an unprecedented scale.

Within a few years of its establishment, the state of Israel had organized a Ministry of Tourism that began buying buses, and training and licensing guides. By 1960, Israel had also opened eight international tourism offices, three of which were in the USA, and began its policy of inviting foreign journalists and travel agents for complimentary group tours (Government Tourist Corporation [GTC], 1956, p. 23, 1961, pp. 4, 16). The campaign to attract American Christians dated back to the early 1960s, before Israel had many Christian sites of interest. The Ministry's 1963 *Annual Report* gives an account of its numerous activities in the USA in that year, many of which were aimed at Christians (or general audiences rather than Jewish ones): 37 public lectures, 14 radio and TV appearances, 24 tourist evenings, 25 study seminars for travel agents, 6719 press releases, 3118 publicity items, 343 window displays for travel agencies, 34 TV films, and 2227 film screenings. The Ministry of Tourism invited 137 Christian pilgrimage organizers for free tours and published half a million books about the Holy Land (Israel Ministry of Tourism [IMT], 1964, pp. 16, 30, 33). As well, the Israelis extended the Terra Sancta awards program, originally developed to honor 'righteous gentiles' who saved Jewish lives during the Holocaust, to include Catholic tour leaders, like Loyola University professor Father Francis Filas (News from Israel, 1963).

When Israel gained control of the Christian Holy Land sites in 1967, Americans and Europeans remained their target market and it created Department for Encouragement of Pilgrimage (DEP) aimed specifically at Christians. This strategy was likely guided by economics (Westerners brought in more money), history (the Israeli tourism industry was already focused on the West), politics (Israel saw tourism as a way to gain allies), and pragmatics (Arabs boycotted the sites) (Feron 1967). When Israel targeted 'Christians' before 1967, however, this often meant Catholics, who were traditionally associated with pilgrimage and had a presence in the Holy Land in the form of the Franciscan 'Custos' (custodians) of many sites. Yet DEP polls in the months after 1967 showed a surprising change; despite the encouragement of the Vatican, American Catholic travel slowed. It is unclear why this was the case. The DEP blamed it on fear of violence, but it is also possible that pilgrimage generally was down because of the turmoil caused by the Second Vatican Council and *Humanae Vitae* (1968) (Israel Ministry of Tourism [IMT], 1967, pp. 24, 29). Whatever the case, for the Israeli Ministry of Tourism, Catholic pilgrims began to seem a dull prospect in the five or so years after 1967, particularly in comparison with a new market segment, USA evangelicals.

The DEP adjusted its American marketing strategy to focus on conservative Christians. The Ministry of Tourism ran an advertisement in the first issue of *Christianity Today* in 1956, but had then largely ignored the evangelical market (Israel: Land of the Bible, 1956). By the mid-1970s, however, advertisements began to appear regularly in evangelical newspapers and the awards program was extended

to include evangelical tour leaders and supporters. Terra Sanctas were given to Anastasato (c.1972) and Gustafson from the BGEA tours (1970). This activity on the part of the DEP is noteworthy because it prefigures Likud Prime Minister Menachem Begin's 1978 overtures to pastor/tour leader/politician Jerry Falwell, which is generally identified as the beginning of the Israel–evangelical alliance (an exception is Spector, 2009, pp. 144–1447).

In the mid-1980s, anthropologist Glenn Bowman reports on the authority of a tour agent that the Ministry of Tourism had not adapted its tour guide training to accommodate Christian pilgrims; in the first years of the 1980s, Bowman writes, the guides themselves began to change their (often anti-Christian) rhetoric (Bowman in Harrison, 1992, p. 127). It is unlikely that this was the case. Within days of the 1967 war, the Ministry instituted a three-day crash course for guides – in English – about Christian sites and theology (Feron, 1967). By the late-1970s, the Ministry was producing advertising material for the American Christian market that showed that the Israelis had been paying careful attention to the theology of their new evangelical market.

The Ministry adopted the language that American evangelical tour companies had been using since the 1960s, as is evident in a 1980 Ministry-produced booklet, *Let the Bible be Your Guide*: 'With Bible in hand one can see the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy, and can sense God's promise for the future – the shafts of hope that portend a brighter future tomorrow for the world.' (Israel Government Tourist Administration in North America, 1980, p. 2). Whereas earlier Israeli-produced advertisements referred to a more traditionally 'Catholic' concept, namely walking where centuries of previous pilgrims have gone, by the 1980s, the Jewish writers of this pamphlet emphasize the evangelical idea that the Bible is the only necessary guidebook in Israel (Peregrinus, 1971). They also refer to specifically evangelical theological concepts about prophecy, which would have been foreign to a Catholic. The Jewish writers carefully navigate this theology by referring directly to the state of Israel as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy – which corresponds to many Zionists' beliefs – but then using euphemisms, such as 'shafts of hope,' to refer to End Times theology that poses problems for Jewish belief.<sup>5</sup>

This activity on the part of the Israeli Government meant a few things for American tour operators as they looked toward the 1980s. Most obviously, Israeli Ministry of Tourism and El Al Airlines pilgrimage adverts now bolstered their own in Christian magazines and on Christian television. This was a positive development for tour operators since the Ministry did not organize its own tours and thus was not a direct competitor. From a purely pragmatic standpoint American tour organizers were pleased with Israeli administration in the Holy Land: roads and airports were improved, more buses were on the road and it was much easier to cross between sites, particularly in Jerusalem. It is also crucial to underline that the significant impact of the 1967 war on Holy Land tourism was due to Israeli control but, just as important, it coincided with the development of modern mass tourism worldwide. Thus, in terms of tourism, two major upheavals rocked the Holy Land industry nearly simultaneously (H. Abu Dayyeh, Personal Interview, May 29, 2009).

Although American tour operators today do not recall a major disruption, some at least must have had to renegotiate contracts with new Holy Land companies after 1967. Specifically, many of the Arab companies that had provided Arab guides and hotels since the 1950s (or before) were replaced with Jewish Israelis. Although Israel

gave new licenses to longstanding Arab companies like Oweida Brothers and the holy sites continued under control of the Christian groups that had occupied them previously, many Arab tour operators and guides were denied new licenses or were made to wait indefinitely long periods of time (A. Farah, Personal Interview, May 24, 2009; For academic critiques of Israeli tour politics see: Bowman in Harrison, 1992; Cohen-Hattab, 2004; Katz in Cohen, 1985). As these scholars have pointed out, Israeli policies in the 1970s deeply (and adversely) affected Arab tour professionals. Now, when tour industry leader Hani Abu Dayyeh describes this change of hands, he argues that it disrupted the age-old pattern whereby Holy Land pilgrimage operated along confessional lines: Christian companies/guides took care of Christian pilgrims, Muslims took care of Muslims and Jews took care of Jews. Abu Dayyeh, whose family is Christian, voices a sentiment typical of Arab tour providers and guides who feel that their rightfully inherited market was usurped (H. Abu Dayyeh, Personal Interview, May 29, 2009).

The rapidly increasing Christian evangelical market in the 1970s did not, however, want Arab guides. Scholars have assumed that this was the case either because evangelical visitors felt negatively about Arabs – related to ‘Orientalism’ and/or stereotypes about violence – or because they felt particularly positively about Jews in light of theological trends. While these factors played a role, it is crucial to recognize that American Protestants saw Arab Christian guides very differently than Hani Abu Dayyeh. It had nothing to do with the fact that guides were Arab per se but rather that Arab Christians were Orthodox and sometimes Catholic, but never evangelical. Through to the late-1970s most conservative Protestants did not consider Catholic and Orthodox people Christian, whether they were Arab, American, or anything else. Indeed, advertisements in *Moody Monthly* encouraged Americans to support missions that save children from the evils of paganism, Mohammadianism, Communism, and Catholicism, all four of which were seen as equally damning (Reaching for their Souls, 1959).

American Catholic pilgrimage companies did want local Christian guides in the 1970s, but this generally meant European and American priests who were stationed in the Holy Land by the Vatican. In 1967, the Catholic Church negotiated a system with the Israelis that had been in use since Turkish times: the Jerusalem-based Custos of Franciscans could license priests as tour guides if they could demonstrate knowledge of the Bible and a sense of the Holy Land. (D. Watham, Franciscan Commissariat, Personal Interview, January 23, 2009). Today this system of licensing has produced bedfellows that would have seemed unlikely (in fact, completely unbelievable) in the 1970s: evangelical pastors have turned to the Catholic Church for licenses. The Moody Bible Institute, one of the US’ premier evangelical institutions and publisher of such blatantly anti-Catholic adverts and articles in the 1960s, now has its pastors licensed as guides by the Franciscans (W. McCord, Personal Interview, November 10, 2008).

## Conclusion

Over the last 40 years, the evangelical Holy Land tour industry has grown in ways that reflect patterns in the American Christian communities that it serves. This article argues that scholars must begin to think of the development of the middle class Christian leisure industry in ways that correspond to how historian Lisa McGirr

has described the rise of evangelical politics in the same period: a series of overlapping grassroots networks. By looking at one facet of this industry, scholars can see that evangelical popular culture did not suddenly emerge fully formed in the late-1970s when it became noticeable more widely in the public sphere. It had been developing slowly over three decades. In the case of evangelical pilgrimage, entrepreneurs in the 1960s relied on Catholic models and on new marketing techniques gleaned from airlines. At first, these companies often appealed to specific denominational bases but, by the early 1970s, many were on the forefront of promoting new ways of being 'non-denominationally' Christian. Holy Land tourism benefited from the rise of televangelism and mega-churches in the 1970s and, likely, it also created bonds across denominations that served to bolster the new trend.

The evangelical pilgrimage industry also adapted one of the primary relationships in church communities, namely the pastor–lay model, to create a high degree of trust between pilgrims and their leaders. The industry evolved around a system of 'pied pipers' who were pastors or known lay leaders. Many of these appealed to local constituents but larger ministries, such as the BGEA, used the trust that people had in a famous public preacher like Billy Graham to similar effect. Pilgrims needed to 'know' their leader before they went – both so that they felt safe so far from home and so that they trusted that the leader understood the particular spiritual importance of such a trip.

The period from 1948 to 1978 was the key transitional moment that brought modern, mass tourism to the Holy Land. It also saw the rise of American tourism to the Holy Land in particular; Americans, both Jewish and Christian, now make up by far the largest number of visitors each year. Yet it remains woefully understudied, lost amidst the ample scholarly work produced about American Holy Land travel in the nineteenth century, and in the late-twentieth and early twenty-first century. This article makes no pretence to completeness; rather, it seeks to open the field, providing a solid basis for further investigations of this hitherto neglected period in American Holy Land travel history.

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### **Notes on contributor**

Hillary Kaell is completing her doctorate in American Studies at Harvard University. She specializes in the history and practice of North American Christianity and has published articles about a Quebecois holy woman and evangelical 'biblezines' marketed to teenage girls. She has also published various encyclopedia articles and online pieces, including work for the Pluralism Project. Last year, she worked as a consultant for a TV program about American religious history and, currently, is developing another series about pilgrimage around the world.

### **Notes**

1. Jerusalem, Galilee, Nazareth, and Bethlehem have always been defined as the 'Holy Land.' More peripheral places are included based on politics. For American evangelicals, the Holy Land primarily means Israel, but can include places in Egypt (Sinai) and Jordan (Mount Nebo). Since 1948, this definition has depended on which areas are open to USA tourism

- and allow border crossings to/from Israel or major airports. For example, in the late-1960s American imagined the 'Holy Land' as including areas in Lebanon and Syria, which are now considered unsafe and have visa restrictions.
2. I use the term 'evangelical' loosely to mean proselytizing Christians who are generally socially and often politically 'conservative,' but do not disassociate themselves from mainstream society. Evangelicals consider the bible inerrant and central. For a more robust definition, see Martin E. Marty, ed. *Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (1993), intro; Mark Shibley, *Resurgent Evangelicalism in the United States* (1996) 1–6. The pilgrimage industry is defined here as companies engaged primarily (or entirely) in running Christian pilgrimages – group trips focused on 'walking where Jesus walked.'
  3. Given the localized and pan-denominational nature of the pilgrimage industry, there is little material in archives. This article is therefore based upon archival sources where possible and 60 narrative interviews. Subjects were chosen after a systematic review of denominational magazines and the *New York Times* in the 1940–1970s. I contacted as many of the companies and former trip organizers as I could find. Some interviewees, such as Hani Abu Dayyeh, were recommended to me by a number of sources as major figures in the industry. Sixty interviews were completed between 2007 and 2009.
  4. It is beyond the scope of this article to systematically evaluate the reasons that Jordan never successfully caught on as the 'Holy Land' in the USA imagination. There are likely a few factors: the significance of the Jews and the Jewish testament in Christian theology, the fact that Jordan's loss of the Holy Land sites coincided with the development of modern tourism, the persistent image amongst Americans that Holy Land Arabs lived in an apolitical, biblical pastoral (For example, see Madden, 1961).
  5. End Times theology in this incarnation is foreign to Jewish theology and, moreover, states that Jesus will return and Jews who do not convert to Christianity will perish with the anti-Christ. For more see Ariel, 2002; Weber, 2004.

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