



Roman Pilgrimage: The Station Churches

By George Weigel, Elizabeth Lev, Stephen Weigel

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The annual Lenten pilgrimage to dozens of Rome's most striking churches is a sacred tradition dating back almost two millennia, to the earliest days of Christianity. Along this historic spiritual pathway, today's pilgrims confront the mysteries of the Christian faith through a program of biblical and early Christian readings amplified by some of the greatest art and architecture of western civilization.

In *Roman Pilgrimage*, bestselling theologian and papal biographer George Weigel, art historian Elizabeth Lev, and photographer Stephen Weigel lead readers through this unique religious and aesthetic journey with magnificent photographs and revealing commentaries on the pilgrimage's liturgies, art, and architecture. Through reflections on each day's readings about faith and doubt, heroism and weakness, self-examination and conversion, sin and grace, Rome's familiar sites take on a new resonance. And along that same historical path, typically unexplored treasures—artifacts of ancient history and hidden artistic wonders—appear in their original luster, revealing new dimensions of one of the world's most intriguing and multi-layered cities.

A compelling guide to the Eternal City, the Lenten Season, and the itinerary of conversion that is Christian life throughout the year, *Roman Pilgrimage* reminds readers that the imitation of Christ through faith, hope, and love is the template of all true discipleship, as the exquisite beauty of the Roman station churches invites reflection on the deepest truths of Christianity.

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Editorial Review

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Rome's station churches date from the early Christian era, with architectural and traditional elaborations added to many in the Renaissance and major repairs made as recently as the past decade. Their visitation by believers during Lent follows a specific order, with aspects of the faith related to each edifice. Weigel, a Vatican analyst for NBC news, presents a readily accessible overview of how these "stational churches" correlate to and support Roman Catholic Lenten practice and affirmations while at the same time providing an attractive meditative tour for any visitor. Art historian Elizabeth Lev uses Weigel's color photos to discuss architectural details along with the buildings' history. This is a unique guide book, referencing not only theology but the history of Western art, modern and post modern literature, urban history, and church history. Valuable to believers, scholars, students, armchair travelers, and those planning pilgrimages following Phil Cousineau's guides. --Francisca Goldsmith

Review

Fr. Robert Barron, Rector-President, Mundelein Seminary

"An astonishingly good book. George Weigel's meditations on the liturgical texts of Lent and Easter are intellectually rich, spiritually alert, and rendered in beautifully crafted prose; Elizabeth Lev's examinations of the station churches themselves are always informative, insightful, and witty. Equally impressive are Stephen Weigel's artfully composed photographs. *Roman Pilgrimage* will delight your eye and feed your soul."

Timothy Cardinal Dolan, Archbishop of New York

"On cold, damp, late-winter early mornings, hundreds of priests, seminarians, sisters, and devoted lay people walk the Roman cobblestones to one of the Eternal City's forty most venerable sites, the station church of that Lenten day. It's a microcosm of the pilgrim Church and of life's journey, and Easter is never brighter than after faithfully completing this sixteen-century-old pilgrimage tradition."

Roger Kimball, Editor, *The New Criterion*

"*Roman Pilgrimage* is as beautiful as it is profound. Part travelogue, part meditation on Lent and Easter, part art-historical feast, this sumptuously produced book, full of striking photographs and theological wisdom, provides readers with a personal spiritual itinerary through the Eternal City during the holiest time of the year."

Boston Globe

"If you're not in Rome, the next best thing is reading Weigel and Lev's text and taking in Stephen Weigel's evocative photos. Anyone interested in Catholic spirituality and the significance of the Lenten season will find *Roman Pilgrimage* absorbing reading."

National Review

"George Weigel's new book *Roman Pilgrimage*, done in collaboration with Elizabeth Lev and his son Stephen, provides nourishment for both the inquirer and the believer, from a city whose bread and butter is Catholicism.... In a time that seems to have a tolerance only for nebulous spirituality and superficial religion, [*Roman Pilgrimage*] provides a way of proposal and rediscovery, where at every turn is a meeting with one — a saint, a martyr, the Savior — who walked this walk before and guides anyone willing through the next

step.”

Catholic World Report

“Enhanced by beautiful photographs from Stephen Weigel (George's son) and commentary from art historian, Elizabeth Lev, the book is part devotional, part history guide. And even though I have returned home from my own trip to Rome, thanks to this wonderful new work, this pilgrim's journey is really just now beginning.”

Publishers Weekly

“Gorgeous photographs by Stephen Weigel — of churches, basilicas, and cathedrals — accompany in-depth historical accounts and fascinating insights from Lev into the role these edifices play in the life of the larger Catholic Church. Each chapter begins with the day's Scripture readings and a brief exegesis, along with practical advice on living one's faith in a more authentic way. These reflections bring the traditional Lenten ascetic practices of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving into a contemporary context. [A] valuable companion for the Lenten journey.”

Booklist

“This is a unique guide book, referencing not only theology but the history of Western art, modern and post modern literature, urban history, and church history. Valuable to believers, scholars, students, armchair travelers, and those planning pilgrimages following Phil Cousineau's guides.”

Library Journal

“While no replacement for an actual pilgrimage, Weigel's reflections allow one to enter into the spirit of the Lenten experience of conversion.... Although heavily Catholic in tone, the book will appeal to any Christian seeking to experience somewhat the pilgrimage that many have followed to prepare themselves to celebrate Easter.”

First Things

“[*Roman Pilgrimage*] features biblical exposition, stunning photographs, and expert historical comment. But this publication is neither a mere guide for tourists nor a handbook for antiquarians. Rather it is a manual of Lenten faith: an invitation to the spiritual landscape of martyrdom, pilgrimage, prayer, and lectio divina.”

Catalyst

“Obviously, anyone traveling to Rome should not leave home without it.... But even for those not able to be physically in Rome, *Roman Pilgrimage: The Station Churches* is a kind of spiritual travelogue that will take the reader on an inspiring Lenten journey of faith and renewal.”

Kirkus

“[A] comprehensive, visually appealing work. Weigel's Lenten tour of Rome acts as part travelogue and part theological primer, and he introduces readers to some of Rome's most splendid and historically significant places of worship.... Weigel does an admirable job of weaving story and history into each chapter, introducing readers to characters long since forgotten to most. All the while, the author clearly describes the architectural importance of each site.... Engrossing, expansive pictorial study on a renewed Lenten discipline at the heart of Roman Catholicism.”

Hanna Suchocka, Polish Ambassador to the Holy See, 2001-2013

“*Roman Pilgrimage* evokes a tradition dating back to Pope St. Gregory the Great, but it also highlights, in a remarkable way, how relevant, contemporary, and even fashionable pilgrimage continues to be today. This beautiful book is an important gift to contemporary Christians, those looking for their roots and those

seeking new ways to deepen their faith. At the same time, it makes an important proposal to those who doubt and to those who got lost on the way. *Roman Pilgrimage* should be on the packing list of anyone who, setting off for the Eternal City, wants to return with something more than the usual tourist mementos.”

Msgr. James Checchio, Rector, Pontifical North American College

“*Roman Pilgrimage* is a special gift to those who cannot be in Rome for Lent, for it connects every reader spiritually to this ancient walk of faith. No one will come away from the station church pilgrimage—a unique opportunity to renew our friendship with the Lord—disappointed.”

Bruce Cole, Chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities, 2001-2009

“A splendid *vade mecum* to the annual Lenten pilgrimage in Rome. Visitors to the Eternal City, either in their armchairs or on foot, will learn much about the spiritual journey of Lent and Easter through Rome's station churches, many of them little-known artistic treasures.”

Noel Fahey, Irish ambassador to the Holy See, 2007-2011

“George Weigel's original, contemporary reflections on the station church liturgies of Lent and Easter are greatly enhanced by Elizabeth Lev's descriptions of the station churches and Stephen Weigel's evocative photographs. An indispensable guide.”

Edwin Cardinal O'Brien, Grand Master of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem

“The Lenten station church pilgrimage is increasingly popular in Rome, especially among English-speaking Catholics. Zealously promoted and led by the students of the Pontifical North American College, the daily Eucharistic celebrations at these earliest of the Eternal City's churches commemorate the martyrs of the first three centuries, whose witness is being emulated throughout the world today. Up to now, though, these sunrise pilgrimages have been known to few outside Rome. No more!”

About the Author

George Weigel is a Distinguished Senior Fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, where he holds the William E. Simon Chair in Catholic Studies. The author of numerous books on Catholicism and faith, Weigel lives with his wife in North Bethesda, Maryland.

Elizabeth Lev is an American-born art historian living in Rome. She teaches art history at Duquesne University's Italian campus and the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas. She is the author of *The Tigress of Forlì: Renaissance Italy's Most Courageous and Notorious Countess, Caterina Riario Sforza de' Medici*.

Stephen Weigel is a professional photographer and the principal of Stephen Weigel Photography.

Users Review

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