

## Group calls for the spiritual preservation of the Santiago pilgrimage trail



Seeing only its touristic and ecological value strips it of 'authentic meaning'

The spiritual meaning of the Way of St James pilgrimage must not be reduced to a mere touristic and ecological route, said a Spanish agency charged with promoting the Church's cultural heritage.

The ancient pilgrimage route was discussed during a recent meeting of the National Conference of Cultural Heritage of the Church, which is composed of bishops, Spanish national heritage officials and other advisors.

They recognized that the nearly 500-mile path to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Spain is popular as a touristic and ecological route because of the historical and artistic works and the beautiful scenery it contains.

However, viewing the pilgrimage route merely in these terms “would be to strip the pilgrimage of its main spiritual element: we would mutilate it and leave it without authentic meaning,” conference members cautioned.

The experience of the Way is a treasure of great value that includes the propagation and celebration of the faith, the exercise of charity, familiarity with the artistic styles of the history of the Church in Spain, appreciation of local customs and more, they said.

All of these aspects are “like signs that lead us towards a goal, the life of grace to which all men are called.”

The very concept of pilgrimage has a deep spiritual meaning that is reinforced through the sensory experience of the pilgrim, they added.

“Throughout the Way, art makes visible to us what we will one day see clearly at the end of our pilgrimage, reinforcing in us interiorly the faith of the pilgrim Church in the world.”

