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Seniors and Pilgrimages

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Introduction

The aim of this article is to call attention to the Catholic pilgrimages. On one hand will be discussed some meanings/proposes of the pilgrimages which will make the reader to think about his possible participation in a pilgrimage or in a religious tourism program, on the other the reader will be able to find suggestions to participate in pilgrimages without walking, meaning that in his own environment (without leaving his town) he is also able to participate in an evangelization process and/or in the success of pilgrimages.



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Seniors and Pilgrimages

I. CATHOLIC PILGRIMAGES



According to Roussel (1972), the desire to embark on a pilgrimage exceeds consciousness and is hence awoken by something that reaches beyond the rational and which might be faith, an attraction towards the marvellous or even simple superstition. In accordance with Malherbe (1992), for whoever seeks God, the idea of embarking off to wherever.

He manifested Himself proves natural and should be conceived of as some deep instinct driving the human being to seek out a distant place and that which cannot be found within any immediate vicinity. In reality, visiting a sanctuary does largely represent the externalisation of a need for protection against the hostilities of daily circulation and expressed through veneration whether in isolation or, as is increasingly the case, collectively (see picture 1).



Source: Picture 1 –May 13 in Fátima, Portugal



According to Ludwig Möld, author of the preface to *Cooperation between the Shrines of Europe* (n. d.), long before political or economic efforts to unite Europe, and also before the flows of mass tourism, large numbers of people were crossing borders on pilgrimage to the major sanctuaries.



Source: **Picture 2 – Santiago de Compostela, Spain**

Throughout centuries, such travels were embarked upon by the faithful and, as a result, generating in their wake not only the foundation of countless accommodation and support structures dotted along the routes chosen, the works of art created and installed at the places of worship but also the development of the areas surrounding the destinations with greatest demand (see picture 2).



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II. STRENGTHENING FAITH THROUGH TOURISM



While among academics, there is a pronounced propensity to classify religious tourism as a specific niche within the tourism market, members of the clergy have tended to approach it as a catalyst of human faith. Gendron (1972) defends that pastoral tourism takes on a privileged role at a place of pilgrimage. The sanctuary, a unique place of divine presence, exerts a particular attraction in the hearts of God's followers (the sinner, the sick, the sufferer), with the pastoral emphasis placed upon conversion. Even when whatever originally motivated the crowds to visit (such as, for example, the devotion to a particular saint), loses its strength, the site retains its revelatory power of the presence of the Lord and, while such continues to fascinate religious tourists, this also serves as a place of meeting where the Christian liturgy may be passed on in accordance with its universalist and Catholic principles.

Accordingly, Arrillaga (1989) sets out a list of the actions the Church should take into consideration within the framework of religious tourism in general and pilgrimages in particular:

- pay attention to the maintenance, security and custody of sanctuaries, places of worship, churches, etc., and placing worship in the charge of its clergy,
- deal with issues of common interest to sanctuaries, their problems and ensuring the means necessary to make these true centres of spirituality and, consequently, providing the desired results and promoting them as such among those responsible, associations, meetings, colloquia, seminars and congresses,
- encourage publications on sanctuaries (or groups of sanctuaries), ranging from modest pamphlets to periodicals and books whether descriptive, historical, artistic and religious,
- stimulating tourist/religious flows out of the values generated and the spiritual good that may be obtained by those participating in the spirit of faith and the behaviour appropriate to pilgrims.

In looking at the same ideas, Aucourt (1990 and 1993) highlights the efforts made to welcome and enhance the spiritual experience with the objective of putting into practice “enter as a visitor, leave as a pilgrim” and provides examples such as the Christian pensioners movement “Via Ascendente” that carries out campaigns designed to



keep churches open and welcoming¹, and “Ars et Fides”, an association mostly made up of students who commit themselves to undergo a year of preparation with the end purpose of discovering places of prayer not as some religious museums but rather as houses of God and centres of a living Christian community². In addition to these, there are groups of guides providing their services *pro bono* and other local initiatives taking on guided visits, cleaning, lighting, floral arrangements and musical performances.

According to Talec (1993), the Church’s pastoral work should focus its answers on theological reflection and study the vital questions posed by new ways of life as well as the changes in mentality caused and the behaviours resulting that pose challenges to the Christian faith and generate consequences in practice. In religious instruction, meeting points need to be set out within which experiences may be exchanged in accordance with the sectors of activity and promoting such actions with notices at the regional level and a magazine at the national level. Furthermore, cohesion between Christians engaged in recreational, tourism and leisure services should be concerned with the welcome provided at stations, airports, sites and tourism monuments, with church visits and events held at destinations, and ensuring the profile of commemorations and festivals and in conjunction with official entities.

¹ Whenever a coach of tourists stops in a village, they establish three points of reference: the bathrooms, cafe and the church even when the latter does not display any “notable” feature justifying a visit.

² Bauer (1993) makes a reference to the paper by Don Walter Pala (1992), in *Itinera* (Ravena), which explains how the objective of the Ars et Fides group is to aid the visitor’s discovery, across all its different facets, of the profound meaning to a religious building and not uniquely the historical and artistic dimensions but also the spiritual. Guides come from different countries and live in community throughout their mission (one or two months in summer). Their motivations are strong: the experience of community life in the company of young persons from different nations and backgrounds, interest in alternative holidays, deepening their knowledge and learnings, practicing foreign languages. It is always made clear that the community lives in accordance with the Christian vision of life but with a spirit open to dialogue as the teaching focuses upon overcoming prejudice and to be able to welcome the other in an ecumenical and non-apologetic spirit. These international communities of guides facilitate contact with foreign tourists as discovering a fellow national welcoming us into an unknown church and able to answer questions (from within a similar cultural code) thus fostering deep respect and great availability and openness to the encounter to come.



The Office des Nouvelles Internationales (1994) advised the Church to take into account the human reality of tourism and leisure, contextualising these factors in time, space, nature, the body, cultures and respond to them with original pastoral initiatives. Correspondingly, the role of the Study, Leisure and Tourism Exchange Services in France is highlighted with its publication of the magazine *Haltes* as well as organising annual national events and ensuring interconnection between the tourism authorities and the Church and also active in terms of theological reflection, instructing Christians involved in tourism and recreational activities. As regards the actions undertaken in churches, this magazine defends how they should obey a series of normally simple criteria that need to be codified, coordinated and implemented. Within the scope of this promotion falls: raising the awareness of local councils, drawing up an inventory of actors (priests, council officials, technical staff, volunteers) involved in operations, maintenance work and implementing a surveillance network. Another core requirement is managing and segmenting the supply, breaking down flows, in both time and space, bearing in mind the behaviours, different and/or contradictory expectations, such as silence, meditation, knowledge, learning and leisure. Finally, and in order to back up the proposals made, the magazine turns to François Zeller (then NADDP³ Vice President) to discuss the hypothesis that there might not only be an ignored pilgrim inside each tourist but also the inverse. Accepting this assumption, the ecclesiastical figure expresses his belief that tourism could bring about cultural learning, knowledge about the other, enable the individual to step beyond him/herself, strive for peace, with the image bound up with pilgrimage being of private devotion, focused inwards upon oneself with the individual consequently adapting to the prevailing times and thus transformed into religiously motivated tourism.

³ The National Association of Diocesan Directors of Pilgrimage (France) groups together the directors of all French pilgrimages, some international members and many of those responsible for sanctuaries with the objective of sustaining and fostering pilgrimages. Its congresses and its commissions tackle issues related to improving the spiritual, moral and technical conditions that are at the core of such practices. The NADDP head office is home to pastoral and tourism commissions centring their reflections on religious tourism and working with professionals from the sector in addition to commissions for relationships with the French railways company SNCF and hotels and sub-commissions on airlines and roads.



Concerning a Belgian initiative to promote faith through tourism, Hut (1997) refers to actions undertaken by the Religious Heritage Team (a group under the coordination of the Wallonie-Bruxelles Pastoral Tourism Office), which focuses upon the cultural and educational quality of heritage events. Following the organisation of two colloquia on “Receiving at Historical Religious Monuments” (1991) and “Museums with Religious Content” (1994), the group began publishing the quarterly periodical, *Patrel*, providing information on a network of around 300 representatives, volunteers and professionals, including a calendar and the programs of the different activities and events (exhibitions, colloquia, events) and a list of craftsmen and similar specialists in religious heritage whether Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist or Animist.

Within a similar action plan, but ranging across a far more universal scope, in his article, Batalla i Gardella (2003) transcribes one of most often quoted sentences proffered by Pope Paul VI who in 1975 stated: “the rupture between the evangelist and culture is undoubtedly the drama of our times as it was in previous eras”. According to his interpretation, this sentence sets out the objective of transforming, through the power of belief, the criteria of judgement, the determinant values, the points of interest, the thinking, the sources of inspiration and the models for human life. Accordingly, the Church (a specialist in Humanism) should deploy cultural goods for their promotion according to the model of Christ, a new man who revealed man to man himself. For the same reason, and in accordance with Pope John Paul II, the Church continually adds to its heritage so as to respond to the demands of each era out of a simultaneous concern to hand down to future generations what can be achieved in the present so that they may also be able to draw on the great fountain of “*traditio Ecclesiae*”. In summary, culture and tourism, culture and human mobility, culture and times of leisure are challenges that society and the Church should strive to ensure are placed at the service of society so that mankind may discover within individual dignity, a sensitivity to beauty and the enjoyment of art. In the implementation of such objectives, this ecclesiastical figure defends the creation of means to render volunteering more effective, taking into consideration:

- clear and precise timetables set down in writing and publicised through the media,



- pamphlets, triptychs, publications on the site being visited and audiovisuals able to accompany individuals and groups on visits or with a guide providing added value,
- lighting, cleaning and other infrastructures that contribute towards a pleasant visit,
- visual information on the objects and buildings being visited, with posters, captions and historical and artistic data,
- peak visitor flows, on occasion of important celebrations such as Holy Week and patron saint days and relating these to the place of visit (places of worship, statues, etcetera),
- a directory of cultural and religious volunteering, including the objectives, means, obligations and rights necessary for constructive and effective working practices.

Capitán (2003) meanwhile centres concerns on the dislocation of the faithful and considering that as the Church is the birthplace of pilgrimages, then it should guarantee their authenticity and attributing the local church a decisive and irreplaceable role in promoting pastoral work. According to the Bishop's guide, in the norms and regulations overseeing organised tours, pilgrimages are to be technically organised by travel agencies recognised by the ecclesiastical authorities, with the priority attributed to the spiritual field with the Church correspondingly responsible for demanding technical and professional competences from travel agents and especially coherent ethical behaviour in full respect for the purpose of these travels. Furthermore, the training of both the guides and party leaders and the religious clergy is important. Hence, from the design and departure of the pilgrim and during the travelling, the pilgrim is to experience the human warmth of community and experience the sensation of being an accepted and active member of a new community (occasional) that is on the move, with the latter to be imbued with religious spirit and lived in according to the value of humanism.

Among academics, references to religious tourism as a catalyst of the human faith are scarce and normally deployed to illustrate the position of Church representatives. Similarly, Nolan and Nolan (1989) consider that there is a rising interest in religious related tourism and that this proves emotionally satisfying, including within this framework visiting sanctuaries with works of art, participating in retreats and walking the pilgrimage routes of Medieval Europe. According to these authors, these trends are complemented by actions undertaken by the ecclesiastical authorities that perceive tourists as potential pilgrims and integrating the traditional religious focus into the interests of these secular visitors while approaching the process as some missionary challenge



As regards the ecclesiastical perspective on the transformation of the designation pilgrimage into tourism and, more specifically, religious tourism, Arrillaga (1989), without actually deploying the latter term, finds that, as justifications, both material (those fostering the development of all types of tourism travel) and spiritual (the growing search for personal orientation) in nature, apply as much to tourists as they do to pilgrims, the reasons underlying each category enable substantial differences to be established (see table 3).

Table 3 – Material and Spiritual Type Features Constituting Tourism and from the Pilgrimage Perspective

	Services	According to the Pilgrimage Perspective
Material Type Features	Modern means of transport, air or land, especially railways and roads	When chartered for exclusive utilisation by pilgrims, those travelling share, in addition to the actual destination, the motives for travelling.
	Public accommodation, hotels and guesthouses	Frequently, on pilgrimages, not only for economic reasons but also out of austerity, participants stay in parallel accommodation (convents, religious residencies, seminaries, etcetera).
	Promotional campaigns made by official and private organisations	Advertising by pilgrimage centres and specialist pilgrimage travel agencies, in religious type publications as a good means of attracting the attention and boosting demand for participation in travels and pilgrimages.
	Assumptions	According to the Pilgrimage Perspective
Spiritual Type Features	Reaction against the materialism and consumption prevalent in post-industrial societies	Man is a spiritual being and, unable to pack his heart only with perishable goods, seeks out the superior, spiritual, the eternal, the divine.
	Personal challenges	The pilgrim seeks to consolidate his inner conversion, seeking to exceed himself.
	Search for places that resolve personal doubts and issues	Places of pilgrimage have always encouraged pilgrims to advance along the path towards Christian perfection and giving oneself over to others.



Spiritual Type Features	Social isolation (daily interaction with atheists, agnostics and even declared enemies against everything religious)	Pilgrimages are a good occasion for union with those sharing the same faith, to travel alongside those holding the same criteria, wishes and aspirations and thereby finding oneself among one's own.
	A public that is not attracted to tourism poles, that does not wish to be isolated or that does not attain satisfaction with normal travel agency packages	A desire for something different, something based on reflection, on prayer and adoration, opting above all for travels with a religious content, such as pilgrimages.
	Attraction wielded by many religious sites due to their cultural, historical and artistic values	As believers, they are moved by works based upon the devotion and piety of their ancestors. God may be worshipped anywhere but doing so in certain places takes on a particular significance and the reason pilgrimages select them as their destinations.
	Religious events, such as Holy Week, the Corpus Christi procession and popular religious festivals	In manifestations of faith, those who attend out of devotion participate imbued in the feeling of being part of a religious community.

Source: Transposition of the table of features included in Arrillaga (1989)

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