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Pilgrimages or Religious Tourism

1. An attempt to establish the terminology

The history of pilgrimages is longer than the history of the Church. It probably dates back to times earlier than the history of the chosen people in the Old Testament. It certainly does not belong only to Christianity either. Followers of other religions went in the past and still go on pilgrimages.

The term “religious tourism” is a new concept. It originated over the past several decades and is certainly not older than the term “tourism” itself. Was there not, however, in earlier epochs, a phenomenon defined only in contemporary times as religious tourism? It was not of such a mass-scale character. But don't we find in history wayfarers of various types, who on pilgrimages sought to get to know the world and to satisfy their curiosity rather than reach religious objectives?

Let us try to define more precisely these terms, with the reservation, however, that it is only a general outline of the issue. A pilgrimage is “a trip to a place considered sacred owing to a special influence of God therein”. It is undertaken for religious motives, to perform specific religious acts of piety and penance. It is dictated by the need to be close to the sacred.¹ Religious tourism means tourist wandering, with the religious element as one of its leading objectives. And thus added to the common motives behind tourism, such as the need to move, recreate, see new surroundings, meet new people, see the cultural heritage, are new quality aspects.

The term religious tourism has been accepted not only in the secular terminology but in the Church as well. A term of this kind was used in the “Directorium Generale pro Ministerio Pastoralis quoad Turismum”, a leading publication for contemporary pastoral activity, issued by the Holy See. The original Latin text of this document used the term “turismus religiosus”, which is a kind of Latin neologism. Added immediately next to it, in parenthesis, is the word “peregrinatio”. A more detailed analysis of this fragment does not provide a firm basis for distinguishing between the two terms or, the more so, a clearer basis for defining religious tourism.²

Popes Paul VI and John Paul II called the pilgrimage a special form of tourism³. However, the papal statements and the “Directorium” cited above do not

form the basis for the scientific construction of the definition of both concepts. They may not be regarded as any official definitions on the part of the Church either.

A more detailed analysis of the problem confirms that the term religious tourism is justified and demonstrates a distinction between this term and the term pilgrimage. The basis for the distinction is the main motivation behind both types of wandering. In the pilgrimage, and not only in Christianity, there is a strong religious motive – to reach the place regarded as sacred. The whole act is performed in the cult framework. It is connected with prayer, penance and other forms of cult performed both on the way and at the pilgrimage destination (*locus sacer*). The pilgrimage does not preclude other motives: making friends with other pilgrims, seeing interesting surroundings, and even experiencing a specific adventure, entertainment or pleasure.⁴ According to the researcher into this problem, the geographer A. Jackowski, religious/educational or only educational aspects come to the foreground in religious tourism. A sacred place is visited during the travels, but it is not the point of destination. For tourists, even though they participate piously in the acts of cult, by, for instance, visiting a sanctuary or a church, it is the visiting of religious culture sites which are also of general human importance that comes into the foreground.⁵ I. Baumer, an expert in pilgrimage problems, refers to “two lines of meanings” of travelling. Various motives either come to the foreground or intermingle in a variety of situations. In the pilgrimage, “the religious meaning is fundamental one and permeates into and exerts its impact on the further motives”. There are, however, also other human desires that want to be satisfied.⁶

A slightly different phrase with respect to the phenomenon under consideration was used at the 6th World Tourist Pastoral Congress held in Rome in 1990. The final document referred to cultural tourism with a religious orientation. The Congress saw in that term travels undertaken for cultural and religious motives at the same time, which led to both the communion with God and a deeper understanding of the life of people as one community making pilgrimages on earth.⁷ Tourism so understood is pursued to contribute to learning about the rich cultural heritage of the whole human family. An integral part of this heritage is religion that connects man to God. Getting into cultural values is becoming at the same time the tourist’s path to supernatural realms.

Some researchers use the term “educational religious tourism” to define the phenomenon in question. J. Kosiewicz, to mark the difference between pilgrimage and religious tourism, used the phrases: “educational religious tourism of strictly religious character” and “educational religious tourism of secular character”.⁸ Without discussing the issue whether the term itself is justified, let us say immediately that this is not the type of tourism we have in mind. Educational religious tourism may be equally pursued by non-believers. For them, the leading motive is to learn about the religion, centres of cult or rituals. They do not, however, demonstrate a personal attitude to the religion. Tourism so understood may also be pursued by

believers, who are only detached researchers and do not demonstrate their personal views on the world. It may also be pursued by followers of one religion visiting places of cult of other religions. They do show deep respect for the dissimilarity, but remain in the observers' position.

Can we conclude then, based on the above analyses and facts, that the concept of religious tourism has a scientific foundation? It is certainly not completely deprived of it. However, we should be more in favour of the statement that this term has originated not so much in a strictly organised scientific reflection but is a result of the observation of a certain reality. What we deal with quite frequently is a certain type of travelling in which educational and religious objectives intermingle. The former ones, however, come to the foreground more or less conspicuously. This seems to be an indication of a specific human need to see in tourist wandering, next to recreational and cognitive motifs, some deeper motives, reaching the human spirit. Further analyses will provide a deeper justification to our statement.

2. Difficulties with distinguishing between the terms

A brief attempt to compare the pilgrimage with religious tourism shows that it is quite difficult in practice to distinguish between the two concepts. The intensity of the religious element, which fills the wandering, can be taken as an objective basis for the distinction. What we have in mind in the first place are the main aims of the wandering. In the pilgrimage it is the wish to reach a sacred place or considered by the pilgrim as such that is a place with a special presence of the sacrum, the supernatural reality. Then there is the programme filled with a suitable number of pious practices, prayers and services. An even more significant element should be noted as well. This is the faith of the participants of religious wandering and their personal religious attitudes. What we deal with here, however, is a subjective factor, not fully measurable or possible to examine. A very pious pilgrimage with a strictly religious programme may be joined by persons who are in fact guided by motives other than religion – such as education, the desire to experience something new, to be in a human community, etc. And quite the opposite, an ordinary trip to sacred places may be an opportunity for very deep religious experience for many participants.

Reversing the issue, let us ask whether the notion of a “pure pilgrimage”, filled with religious acts only (prayer, services), can be adopted. Even on the human, psychological side, there is the need for a break in religious experiences which are quite intensive, after all, in a pilgrimage. Man is only human, and different motives intermingle in his life. The pilgrim too, is led by the need to satisfy human curiosity, to see new places, surroundings, heritage sites, to meet new people. In ordinary human terms, man needs recreation, entertainment, a meeting in a community of acquaintances. This is more than confirmed by the observation of the pilgrims' everyday life. A special example may be many days' pilgrimages, particularly on foot. Pursuing this type of activities, pilgrims do not cease to be pilgrims at all.

The wisdom of many masters of spiritual life says that religious life filled with prayer cannot be lead incessantly with the highest intensity. Also here a pause is needed. Experience indicates that excessive overloading may yield results contrary to what was intended. Man needs both physical, psychic and spiritual hygiene. The latter consists *inter alia* in the internal balancing between very sophisticated and prosaic experiences.

These “prosaic” experiences may also become a path to reaching values of higher rank. Isn’t a religious community of brethren in Christ built through a joyful meeting by the table or a bonfire during a serene evening? Aren’t Christian joy and the evangelic “new culture” expressed in singing and play?

We can go a little further in our considerations and ask how to distinguish between religious tourism and the ordinary visiting of a church. There are, after all, a number of examples of this kind. We have to say at this point too, that quite a lot depends on the attitude itself of those who enter a sacred building. In religious tourism, as we have said above, there is an assumption that the travellers are believers that is people looking at what surrounds them through the perspective of religion and faith, with moments of prayer or pious meditation. It is not only the sign of the cross made at the entrance to the church, the kneeling down and appropriate behaviour. Visiting means that a tourist (even a believing one) comes into a church to see something interesting there, and sometimes simply to fill the time of walking in a city’s old town. For this type of tourists, signs are placed on the churches’ doors: “no entry with ice cream”, “no smoking”, “no dogs allowed” or “keep quiet!”.

An ordinary visit to a church, an ordinary trip too, however, as the 2nd Polish Plenary Council concluded, may become a pilgrimage⁹, on the condition that it is well prepared and conducted. A lot depends also on the guide or the curator of the sacred place, the teacher taking his students, who will aptly show the most important values of the place. Moreover, by their own example, they will confirm the place’s sacred character.

It is worth to point out yet another aspect of the issue under consideration. The observations of the author of this paper indicate that many of those who do the so-called religious tourism today, started with ordinary tourism understood in the ‘secular’ way. In the course of years they discovered new deeper values. It was the result of personal thoughts but also the influence of the guides. The guides were able to show the spiritually proper religious meaning of the places visited. The priest sometimes participating in the trip suggested a prayer together and a service in the church visited. The entering of a sacred place was no longer limited to seeing heritage places previously unknown. It became a religious act.

3. Controversies around the issue and an attempted solution

Many people shrug at hearing the term religious tourism. From the religious point of view, it is a strange language form. What's more, an ambiguous one. Isn't this phenomenon a result of secularisation spreading across the world, the losing of the sense of the sacred – the supernatural dimension to human life – they ask? Isn't it then a sign of losing of what belongs to the essence of religion itself? Pilgrimage is, after all, a thoroughly religious act. A growing concern is arising whether the concept of pilgrimage does not become subordinated to a more general concept of tourism understood in a thoroughly secular manner, on equal terms with such notions as sports tourism, congress tourism or the so-called sex tourism.

A geographer – a secular researcher – has the right to use term religious tourism. He does research in and describes various forms of people's travelling, examines their motivation and objectives. From the point of view of detailed (secular) sciences, he is unable to reach extraterrestrial, supernatural realms. That is why he defines them in the language of his domain of science. In ecclesiastical circles, a question arises though whether geography should not be left to geographers, abandoning the new language form within the area of ecclesiastical activity, sticking to the term pilgrimage only.

We have considered many pros and contras already before. They have not seemed to give a reason for abandoning the new term, which reflects the fact of the contemporary creation of a new form of tourism on the borderline between the sacrum and the profanum. The idea rather is to understand the terms properly, and even more so, properly shape the facts themselves. A lot will depend on the animators of tourist trips or pilgrimages, the secular or ecclesiastical people responsible for preparing the itineraries.

A solution to our dilemmas seems to lie in a deeper theological understanding of the concept of recreation. Tourism, after all, is one of the forms of active recreation. Light is thrown on the issue by the statement made by the Holy Father during his first pilgrimage to Poland, in Nowy Targ, on 8 June 1979. The Pope spoke about the beauty of the Podhale region to which people come from all over Poland to relax. They seek recreation in the communion with the beauty of nature, in mountain walking, in skiing. It was here that John Paul II cited the poet C.K. Norwid saying that: "*To recreate means to create anew*". To create in the bodily sphere, but also in the sphere of the spirit. At this point the Pope referred to Apostle Paul, saying that recreation means building new man in the biblical meaning of the term.

There are many aspects to recreation understood in the Christian way, in the full meaning of the concept. They include regeneration of physical energy through

rest or movement and even an effort of the muscles. Further, this is psychic regeneration which is perhaps best stimulated by peace and quiet, and by the communion with the beauty of the world, both nature and human creations. Finally, there is the enrichment of human spirit which first occurs in the cognitive sphere. We call it cultural enrichment: the communion with the material and non-material culture. Going further into this issue, true recreation means meeting other people in order to deepen the sense of community with them. Finally, recreation in the deepest meaning of the term is the recreation of the spirit, an encounter with the sacred, with God. This is time for meditation on the final sense of human existence and orientation at this sense, the encounter with God who is the ultimate recreation for man. This is the path for genuine recreation that is “creating anew”, for the building of “new man”, complete man – in the sphere of the flesh and the spirit.

It seems that religious tourism, perceived from such a perspective, acquires a great value. It is an opportunity for comprehensive recreation for man. We would say that it prevents contemporary trips from being one-sided. It is actually a proposal less challenging than a pilgrimage. But does everyone have to be a pilgrim during his or her holidays? Everyone should avoid, however, a model of thoughtless recreation or recreation in which the bodily aspect, the search for more and more sophisticated experiences prevail, and sometimes even fundamental moral norms are exceeded.

4. Evangelisation opportunities connected with religious tourism

As we have emphasised on a number of occasions, the primary objectives of religious tourism are not acts of cult. However, the religious itinerary comprises prayer or participation in a service. Visits to places connected with religion themselves direct man, quite naturally, towards the sacred dimension. Thus they do not reduce any of the objects to what is secular. They do not concentrate on their generally human, cultural or architectural values. They aim to show the complete truth about their origins and the reason for their existence.

This fact has its evangelising significance. What we mean is the religious influence on persons of weaker faith or those being far from faith and the Church. We may expect that it would be more difficult to invite such persons to a pilgrimage with a strictly religious programme. It might simply discourage some of them. It is easier to attract people to an ordinary tourist trip even with religious accents in its itinerary. A skilfully conducted excursion will allow for slow, quiet religious influence. It may create numerous opportunities for the evangelical testimonies. It could become a sort of dialogue, both verbal and non-verbal, with man of weak religiousness. In this delicate manner man will be attracted to supernatural values.

By this we do not intend to say that the pilgrimage does not create the same opportunities. There are numerous examples to demonstrate that also many pe-

ople of weak faith go on pilgrimages. They do it for various motives: encouraged by friends, wishing to experience something exceptional, etc. In this way they are becoming slowly subject to the evangelical influence.

Following what is said about new evangelisation today, religious tourism gives this very chance of preaching the Gospel. It is an original method of preaching the Gospel which corresponds to the term sometimes used with reference to contemporary man as “homo turisticus”. The new language of this method is the “language of the way”.

Let us refer back at this point to the motives behind religious tourism. The first to be emphasised is an approach with faith to the cultural heritage, which one has the chance to see on the tourist path. On his way, a tourist visits many places connected with religion. The point is not only for him to consider them as such. Neither is the point for him to accept the fact that the object visited was created for religious motives that it was or is still used for religious purposes. There is more to it, that is the acknowledgement that the sacred is present in that place, the acceptance of the truth that he sees not only an object of historical value, but also a place that is now the revelation of the sacrum enabling man to encounter supernatural reality. In yet other terms, it is the belief that the place is still a centre of religious life and not only an object worth admiring because of the beauty of the architecture, painting, the picturesque beauty of its location, etc. It is a continuously lively place of meeting God or saints. This is where we touch a more important issue. The point is for the tourist who enters the realm of this sacrum to be more than an external observer – to become a participant in the mystery. We talk then about the need for living faith which makes him fall to his knees, not only metaphorically. A straightforward consequence of an approach with faith to sacred places is prayer, and even more, adoration. And thus the tourist becomes a pilgrim – man wandering with faith.

5. Conclusions and desiderata

a) For the “secular side” (tourist organisers, tourist agencies, guides, hosts of pilgrimage destinations, etc.).

The notions of pilgrimage and religious tourism are quite often regarded as identical. They are defined in the categories of the so-called tourist product. We have to agree that services rendered to pilgrims may be a source of honestly earned money for the hosts at pilgrimage destinations. Hence care should be taken of the marketing aspect of the issue. However, in the light of what we have said above, a one-sided, materialistic approach – an approach “with no spirit to it” – will mean the end of not only pilgrimages but also of properly understood tourism and its educational values. Let us say more broadly – it will put an end to culture, which owes its value to the fact that it is rooted in the most profound layers of the human spirit.

Secular organisers of tourism should take into account the specificity of pilgrimages, and above all their religious character and their itineraries. It is on purpose that we list separately the terms “character” and “itinerary” as they are not completely identical. The inclusion itself in the programme of the participation in a service, a holy mass, a prayer, etc., does not necessarily affect the character of the whole “event”. There is something more to it, that is the fact, which needs to be taken into consideration, that from beginning to end there are religious motives behind the travel. These are of leading and priority importance. All other experiences and items on the programme have to be subordinated to them. And therefore the feelings and expectations of the participants in the pilgrimage need to be acknowledged and respected. This will be demonstrated also by providing the guides appropriate for the task. It is unimaginable that a pilgrimage be conducted or guided by non-believers. At worst, these should be persons who respect the religious ideas of the pilgrims.¹⁰

b) For the “ecclesiastical side”

Certain commonplace concepts should not be clung to so firmly. Without crossing out hastily a lot of very rich pilgrimage traditions, it is necessary to open our minds to new forms of wandering accompanied with religious motives. On the other hand, following the conduct well known in the Church, we need to think how to “baptise” the newly developing contemporary forms of human behaviour. In our case this means reconsidering new opportunities for the evangelising activity of the Church, which are created by religious tourism. This will be in practice continuous purification, the deepening and sophistication of the motives beyond Christian wandering.

c) For those setting off on the way

Those setting off should decide what the leading, dominating motive should be which will direct the entirety of their experience. Pilgrimage, understood in the strict meaning of the term, requires the adoption of a specific way of conduct, such as, for instance, adapting oneself to the rhythm of services, the preparedness for limitations and relinquishments relating to the pilgrim’s life, the acceptance of a specific hierarchy of experience (acts of cult in the first place, and other activities further in the order). A pilgrimage is certainly more challenging to the traveller.

References:

¹ A. Jackowski, *Pielgrzymowanie* [Pilgrimages], Wrocław 1998, p. 6-7.

² Congregation for the Clergy, “*Directorium Generale pro Ministerio Pastoralis quoad Turismum*”, of 27 March 1969.

³ Paul VI, speech of 1 September 1963; John Paul II, speech to the participants of the 6th World Tourist Pastoral Congress, 17 November 1990.

⁴ For instance, the itinerary of very popular walking pilgrimages to Jasna Góra provides for joint serene evenings (by a bonfire), songs with not only religious themes, meetings among friends. Accounts of participants refer to specific adventures and entertainment on the way; other pilgrims, on their way to sacred places, visit heritage sites, museums or monuments of nature.

⁵ *Pielgrzymki i turystyka religijna w Polsce* [Pilgrimages and religious tourism in Poland], Warsaw 1991, p. 8-9.

⁶ *Wallfahrt heute*, Freiburg/S 1978, p. 27-28.

⁷ *Pastoral - Information XXIV*, Katcholisches Auslandssekretariat, Bonn 1991, p. 63.

⁸ *Turystyka religioznawcza a pielgrzymki pątnicze - refleksje historyczne i teoretyczne* [Religious educational tourism and pilgrimages – historical and theoretical reflections], in: *Personalistyczna wizja sportu*, collective work edited by M. Barlak, Warsaw 1994, p. 170-180.

⁹ Working texts, *Kościół w Polsce wobec problemów kultury* [The Church in Poland and the problems of culture], Poznań - Warszawa 1991, p. 325.

¹⁰ It would be a scandal to have a non-believing guide, who includes religious matters among legends and superstitions, taking believers to sacred places. And, regrettably, such cases are noted.

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