

# Tourists or travellers?

## Rediscovering pilgrimage

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**M**ASS TOURISM BEGAN ON 5 JULY 1841 when Thomas Cook arranged to take a large body of people, variously numbered at between 570 and 485, on a day-trip from Leicester to Loughborough, two towns in the Midlands of England. He did not think of it as a 'package tour', of course. It had a much more sober purpose – literally, for Cook was a Baptist preacher, a teetotalter with a passion to spread the gospel of temperance. His idea was that such an excursion might develop into a more suitable form of recreation than that currently available in the town's taverns and on the local racecourse. Cook did a deal with the secretary of the newly opened Midland Counties Railway Company for a return fare of a shilling per head. When the great day came, brass bands and a large crowd of onlookers set the excursionists on their way. At their destination they 'perambulated the town in goodly array', according to a report in the local paper. They played jolly games, drank endless cups of tea, and held a meeting full of long and earnest speeches. The day finally done, a well-satisfied Cook declared, no doubt with one eye on the future: 'One cheer more for Teetotalism and Railwayism!!!'<sup>1</sup>

### *Travels and tours*

Cook was the first tourist agent, but not, of course, the first tourist. The actual word 'tourist' appears to have entered the English language around the end of the eighteenth century, when Samuel Pegge in a book on changes in linguistic usage observes that 'A Traveller is now-a-days called a Tourist'.<sup>2</sup> At that point the two terms were more or less interchangeable. But as the technological advance of the Victorian age shifted perceptions of travel from adventure to recreation, the two terms began to take on quite different connotations. Today the traveller is associated with freedom, authenticity and romance. Mention the term 'tourist' and for most people it will conjure up pictures of aeroplanes and hotels, sun-drenched beaches and exotic locations, full of homogenized holiday-makers ruthlessly relaxing and enjoying themselves.

There is a cruel irony in the way that Mr Cook's business, begun with such noble purpose, has attracted some quite derogatory overtones. A 'Cook's tour' has now become synonymous with an instant introduction to a subject. The expert overview smooths off the awkward edges and enables us to enter into the experience of what is always different, forbidding and strange. But it does so at the risk of becoming superficial. Such a tour – whether round the metaphorical foothills of some mountainous facet of history, philosophy and theology, or up and down the more literal tracks which make up the standard tourist experience – has a distinctly pejorative sense.

If we are honest, many of us prefer to distance ourselves from other tourists. We like to think that we are enjoying the more authentic experience, the privileged insight which the others, for whatever reason, are missing. 'Tourists' are the gullible herd, 'we' the intrepid travellers. But at some level it would seem that the majority of us need, and enjoy, the 'package', the controlled account, the guide which takes us safely into unknown terrain – literal or metaphorical. The same can be said for that form of religious travel known as pilgrimage. Our argument in what follows is that the contemporary phenomenon of tourism provides important insights into the motivations behind the desire to travel; more particularly that it can help Christians to recover a sense of pilgrimage *in* life – and of life *as* pilgrimage.

### *Typologies of tourism*

Let us begin by looking at the tourist/traveller distinction in a little more detail. The stereotype is that the traveller works on something, is actively committed to experience and adventure, and seeks involvement with the local culture and daily life; the tourist is a pleasure-seeker, expects everything to be provided as they are used to in familiar ways and acts as cultural voyeur. In practice, of course, nothing is quite so simple. Most serious accounts of the subject of tourism find the distinction quite difficult to uphold with any consistency. Typologies abound, most of which consider a spectrum of roles based on personal motivation, demands as a customer, and/or the relationship between the individual and the environment.

One of the earliest, and still influential, models highlights the modern tourists' search for the new and different while acknowledging that most need to be kept in touch with the home environment. Many tourists, according to Cohen, seek a degree of change and

stimulus but in a secure environment.<sup>3</sup> His typology is based on a spectrum of possible variations in the novelty–familiarity relationship. At one end is the organized mass tourist with a low level of adventurousness who is totally dependent on hotels, guides and all the paraphernalia of the ready-made package tour. Next comes the individual mass tourist who is at least semi-independent, relying on the tour operator to set up the holiday in advance but ready to escape occasionally from the ‘environmental bubble’<sup>4</sup> in which the organized mass tourist travels. Both these types Cohen refers to as ‘institutionalized tourism’.

Towards the ‘novelty’ end of the spectrum are two ‘non-institutionalized’ types, seeking to avoid as much contact with the tourist industry as possible. Of the two variations, the ‘explorer’ likes to get off the beaten track as quickly as possible, while the ‘drifter’ has no fixed itinerary and wants only to merge into local communities. These ‘non-institutionalized’ variants seem to fit the ‘traveller’ stereotype. In practice, of course, they cannot separate themselves totally from the industry; independent travel is now almost as institutionalized as mass tourism. And there is some irony in the fact that the more adventurous individuals unwittingly contribute to the development of mass tourism by seeking out and discovering new and more exotic locations which will eventually be engulfed and tamed by the package.

More detailed typologies focus upon the tourists’ relationships with their destinations. Smith, for example, sets the ‘explorer’ at one end and the ‘charter tourist’ at the other, with various gradations in between.<sup>5</sup> The former is more like an anthropologist, fully open to local lifestyles and customs, while the latter is less bothered about the exact location than whether it can replicate home comforts.

Other typologies concentrate on the personal motivation of the individual tourists. These place the tourist seeking adventure, escape from everyday life and meaning in the life of others at the opposite pole of a continuum from those seeking entertainment, escape from boredom, relaxation and recuperation in an artificial pleasure environment.<sup>6</sup> Another more recently established continuum uses a different set of roles which are more host-orientated.<sup>7</sup> This recognizes that at some point most tourists strive to become more than mere outsiders, content to be entertained by specially prepared events, and seek to establish their individual identity by developing some sort of contact with the local people. By going shopping,

using local transport, eating out in a restaurant, they indulge in the same activities as the host community. They share the same space, becoming customers and perhaps, by returning to the same community on a regular basis, even friends.

Such accounts, which consider the significance of personal motivation, must ultimately recognize that tourism serves many different purposes – even for the same person. There is, for instance, a growing number of people who take two holidays a year – one of which explores some new location while the other is a return to a familiar routine. Thus, to return to our introductory remarks, while some version of the tourist–traveller dichotomy is helpful as a starting point in any attempt to understand the tourist phenomenon, it can provide too static a model of what is always going to be a fluid and ever-changing set of interactions between ‘hosts’ and ‘guests’. It would be naïve to assume that any relationship of ‘hospitality’ is straightforward where there are pronounced disparities of wealth and perceived power between a tourist from a developed country and a local in a developing country.

This leads Thiem to analyse the host–guest relationship by highlighting the culture which the tourist adopts at the destination and the service culture into which the local population steps.<sup>8</sup> Tourists do not meet others in the same ways that they would if they were ‘at home’; they project the particular persona of the tourist. Similarly, local people will act out particular roles which relate to their position as hosts. In other words, it is not so much that host meets guest directly but that two secondary or role-derivative cultures interact. The host–guest relationship develops where the holiday and the service subcultures meet – a situation which applies to all forms of tourism from the independent explorer to the pilgrimage and the package deal. This interaction can create a whole range of problems in relation to its socio-cultural impacts.<sup>9</sup>

### *Where cultures meet – the ethics of tourism*

It is not, however, just the socio-cultural impacts of tourism which create ethical problems. Tourism raises serious ethical issues about economics – power and profit – and about treatment of the environment. For the young English aristocrats who set off on the ‘grand tour’ of Europe in the period before the Napoleonic wars, travel was expected to expand cultural and philosophical horizons.<sup>10</sup> Today’s tourism is not an élite activity. Travel and holidays are an accepted

part of everyday life, supporting a massive industry – according to some accounts it is the biggest business in the world. World tourist arrivals have increased from around 25 million in 1950 to over 531 million in 1994, with estimates of 1.3 billion by the year 2015.<sup>11</sup> For many developing countries tourism is the biggest earner of foreign exchange; it has often been seen as the panacea for their economic problems.

The impacts of tourism are, however, far from wholly beneficial and are at times quite deleterious. There can be no doubt about the problems which mass tourism raises, given its potential for exploiting local people, their environment and culture, and increasing the power of multinational businesses. It may, for example, contribute to the balance of payments in developing countries, but how much money leaks back to the developed world?<sup>12</sup> As for the environment, how does one balance out the erosion and degradation of local flora and fauna with the positive effects which development, in terms of improved local facilities, can bring?

For the huge multinational, multi-billion-dollar service industry of tourism the questions are practical: how to enable the mass of tourists, safely gathered together on the package tour, to take in the novelty of the host country without coming too close and – perhaps – being disturbed by it? Thus air travel, standardized hotel accommodation, familiar attractions, are all aimed at reducing the level of strangeness and the sense of dislocation. This, as much as economic and environmental questions, is what can give tourism a distinctly ambivalent ethical edge: it is concerned at once with the preservation and the elimination of distance and otherness. The risk, of course, is that the business of providing the multitude of tourist sites and commodities only ends up destroying their original attraction.

On the other hand, carefully planned and monitored tourism development can promote environmental and cultural progress and preservation, and profit both host and guest communities – a profitability which goes beyond economics to international understanding and a recognition of the needs of all stakeholders. Thus the most important, and quite complex, ethical question which has to be asked is: how is tourism to be made ‘sustainable’?<sup>13</sup> How can we avoid destroying the very object which creates the phenomenon in the first place? In fact, is it possible to be a tourist without to some extent exploiting the host country?

*Transformation of self*

Such ethical questions are one aspect of modern mass travel which clearly has important implications for the way in which hosts and guests come to see themselves and the relationship between them. Researchers have tended towards a concentration on the impacts of mass tourism upon host countries and their peoples, and understanding the complex global phenomenon of the tourism industry. Comparatively little attention has been given to the effect of tourism on the tourists themselves. This might seem a little surprising, given that so much of the tourist literature promises 'the experience of a lifetime' in which the tourist will be 'changed for ever' and become a 'different person' by encountering another world untouched by time. According to Edward Bruner, however, such phrases are simply a mask for a distinctly western style of discourse which seeks to control the whole process of change.<sup>14</sup>

In this discourse, We, the powerful observers who are capable of self-transformation, are set over against the timeless Them, the powerless and primitive who are, by definition, incapable of change. In reality, as Bruner points out, the reverse is nearer the truth. All the evidence suggests that local people are by no means passive respondents, even if their room for manoeuvre is limited. They react to tourist demands by producing what they want – artefacts which appeal to western tastes, and dances and other performances which make for good photographs. Tourists, on the other hand, are protected from direct interaction, spend most of their time with other tourists and are never radically challenged. By remaining in control of the discourse they get what they expect – and are not, therefore, changed by the experience. 'Someone once said', notes Bruner,

that by reading newspapers, one really does not acquire new information, but confirms his or her view of the world and validates his or her position in it. The same might be said for the tourists' experience.<sup>15</sup>

Tourism in its institutionalized form works on a binary opposition between the familiar and the novel, the ordinary and the extraordinary. What the tourist wants is a change from the everyday – but only ever in a safe, controlled form. The point is neatly made – and with appropriate cynicism – by the Sri Lankan journalist who

defined a tourist as 'someone who travels to see something different and then complains when he finds things are not the same'.<sup>16</sup>

### *Tourism as pilgrimage and pilgrimage as tourism*

Some accounts of tourism even see it as a form of secularized 'sacred journey', promising an escape from the ordinary, familiar round of life. Graburn, for example, comments that just as for traditional societies pilgrimage brought its own rewards, so 'the rewards of modern tourism are phrased in terms of values we now hold up for worship: mental and physical health, social status, and diverse, exotic experiences'.<sup>17</sup> The problem here, however, is that there is precious little agreement about what the term 'pilgrimage' is supposed to mean. It can be used to cover a wide range of journeys with many different meanings – a journey out of the normal round of life, an entry into a different world, a search for something new and 'holy', the homage and veneration paid at a shrine or sacred site. The fact that such travel is often described in implicitly religious language does not make the process of definition any easier.<sup>18</sup>

It is, however, difficult to avoid the impression that visits to sacred shrines and holy places have become an extension of the tourist industry. The way pilgrimages are organized makes them a very different experience from what tended to happen even a few decades ago. The journey begins with much the same formalities and rituals as any package tour, while the speed and convenience of air travel places all the emphasis on getting there, to the obvious neglect of the formative process that is the journey itself. Destinations are packaged with all the trimmings of the tourist resort – the sights, souvenirs and special experiences. The dangers are obvious. Travel is so much taken for granted that, if the pilgrims think about it at all, it is no more than the awkward hiatus between departure and arrival.

Traditional forms of pilgrimage have always had a cosmic significance. Pilgrimages to Jerusalem and Mecca, Varanasi and Rome, Compostela and Lourdes, are often made in fulfilment of some vow or in order to deepen the sense of the divine, but more profoundly they mirror the reality that is humanity itself – a disparate community gradually converging on a distant goal, their ultimate destiny. Pilgrimage has given Christian faith one of its most important metaphors for the spiritual life. Medieval pilgrimage (one thinks of Chaucer and his merry band setting out from the Tabard Inn for

Canterbury) was a deeply social as much as a religious experience. The ultimate aim was to visit the shrine, but the immediate concern was the journey – and the spiritual value of travel for its own sake. The community aspect of pilgrimage – in many ways its most important dimension – cannot be developed if time is not taken over arriving and departing together, time when friendships are made and their significance reflected on. Without such gradual consolidation of relationships, the sudden arrival at the shrine or the sacred place takes all the attention, reducing the experience to some religious version of the ‘environmental bubble’. The pilgrim has not changed because he or she has not been given time to change.

### *A ritual establishing the present*

It sometimes seems as if visits to sacred shrines and holy places have become an extension of the tourism industry. How far has the carefully controlled concept of the package tour infiltrated into the world of religious pilgrimage? Has the concept of the ‘packaged holiday’ invaded the sacred space? How not to get swept up by the ease, the sheer convenience of it all?

That it is perfectly possible to organize a religious pilgrimage in much the same way as one would plan a holiday is clear; the two can easily become coterminous, even confused. But not all pilgrimage fits this model, any more than all tourism can be neatly filed under the sociologists’ favourite typology. Whether in response to the collapse of institutional religious practice or a more direct result of the accessibility of convenient ways of travel, there is no doubt that there has been a resurgence of popular pilgrimage in recent years.<sup>19</sup> Much of this is born of a certain nostalgia for a past which probably never existed. But there is something else. One recent study of first-person accounts, diaries kept by today’s pilgrims, makes for interesting reading.<sup>20</sup> According to Post’s summary, all the emphasis is on the journey, with the arrival hardly mentioned, as if it is something of an anticlimax. The journey itself has something of the quality of a ritual, in which a ‘daily model’ or routine of progress is established. This forms the pattern of experience, allowing pilgrims to incorporate into their personal story reflections on significant, maybe slight, experiences which might otherwise have escaped their notice. The minutiae of the natural world around them, chance encounters and digressions on the way, begin to form a narrative thread and serve to put the pilgrims in touch with a past no



longer remote and lost. Such a retrieval of an ancient religious practice rooted in the rhythm of travel offers a clear continuity with tradition, but, as Post points out, there is also a clear discontinuity – not because present-day pilgrimages along traditional paths are different but because the pilgrims themselves are different. They have different needs, different insights, different sensitivities, and different ways of using the ritual which the pilgrimage forms.

Every ritual fulfils this role to some extent and serves as a vessel, but pilgrimage provides to a high degree an open framework, and its structure itself determines the degree of attraction and the function to a very important extent.<sup>21</sup>

A new type of pilgrim is emerging, one formed by the modern availability of mass travel, but anxious not to be taken over by its controlling tendencies. Such pilgrims are not so much concerned with using tradition in order to anchor present existence in a more reliable past – retracing their footsteps, as it were, into the byways of memory. Rather, they deliberately seek a contrast between the present, what is experienced here and now while travelling, with the comparatively static experience of ‘everyday life’, in order to provoke and appropriate something new. In other words, the rhythm of repetition heightens the awareness not of the past but of the present moment and therefore of different possibilities for the future.

### *Pilgrimage and the value of the present moment*

For modern western civilization the real and authentic are considered to lie ‘elsewhere’, somewhere different and other. Hence the search for the ‘unspoilt’ and the ‘exotic’ is what characterizes much modern tourism. There is clearly something valid and significant in such a quest; people have always thought that salvation, fulfilment, however characterized, was to be found not here but in ‘another place’, perhaps in another time. But the quest for the earthly, or the anticipating of the heavenly paradise does not exhaust the complex and perhaps indefinable reality which is pilgrimage.

Bruner’s hypothesis, that the modern tourist is not significantly changed by the experience of travel, works well only for the ‘institutionalized’ end of Cohen’s spectrum and for those not sensitized to the complex ethical issues noted earlier. It is less obvious that the individual traveller, whether the drifter or explorer, is uncritical of

the received western discourse or impervious to the various powerful influences which mass tourists in their 'environmental bubble' largely manage to avoid. The 'traveller end' of the tourist market keeps open the value of genuine change – and therefore self-transformation. In the same way, not all pilgrims opt for 'holy holidays'. There are also those for whom the journey is not a value additional to attendance at the shrine, with its sense of anticipation of the purpose of life itself, but *the value* itself – the practice of faith in the present moment, a faith formed in the middle of everyday life.

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#### NOTES

1 Quoted in Piers Brendon, *Thomas Cook: 150 years of popular tourism* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1991), pp 5ff. See also Peter Bailey, *Leisure and class in Victorian England* (London: Methuen, 1978) and J. Allan Patmore, *Land and leisure* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), p 10.

2 See *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edition (1989), vol 8, p 306, column 2.

3 See E. Cohen, 'Toward a sociology of international tourism', *Social Research* vol 39 (1972), pp 164–182.

4 A term first used by D. Boorstin in *The image: a guide to pseudo-events in America* (New York: Harper, 1964).

5 In V. L. Smith, *Hosts and guests: an anthropology of tourism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977).

6 See, for example, S. L. Plog, 'Why destination areas rise and fall in popularity', a paper presented at the Southern California Travel Association, 1972; E. Cohen, 'A phenomenology of tourists' experiences', *Sociology* vol 13 (1979), pp 179–202. For an accessible overview of all these typologies see Gareth Shaw and Allan M. Williams, *Critical issues in tourism: a geographical perspective* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp 68–74.

7 See Chris Ryan, *Recreational tourism: a social science perspective* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp 36–38.

8 Cited in H. Kahn and H. J. Kagelman, *Tourismuspsychologie und Tourismussoziologie – ein handbuch zur Tourismusswissenschaft* (München: Quintessenz-verlag, 1993).

9 See Jayne Hoose, 'International tourism on trial', *STUDIA Varsoviensis*, Białystok, Drohiczyn, tomza, 1998.

10 See Peter M. Burns and Andrew Holden, *Tourism: a new perspective* (London: Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp 32ff.

11 World Tourist Organization figures cited in M. Oppermann and Kye-Sung Chon, *Tourism in developing countries* (London: International Thompson Business Press, 1997), p 8.

12 A recent estimate from the Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) indicates that only 15 per cent of money spent in most host countries actually stays there; some locals see only ten pence out of every tourist pound.

13 Sustainable development was defined by the Brundtland Commission as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. See World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our common future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

14 Edward M. Bruner, 'Transformation of self in tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research* 18 (1991) pp 238–250.

15 *Ibid.*, p 246.

16 From the introduction to an issue of the Christian justice and peace journal, *Logos* (Colombo), devoted to tourism, vol 32, nos 1–2, p 7.

17 N. H. H. Grabum, 'Tourism: the sacred journey' in V. Smith (ed), *Hosts and guests: the anthropology of tourism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), p 24.

18 See the accounts of different forms of pilgrimage, from visits to war graves to organized tours to Gracelands, Elvis Presley's home, in Ian Reader and Tony Walter (eds), *Pilgrimage in popular culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993).

19 See introduction to *Pilgrimage*, edited by Virgil Elizondo and Sean Freyne, *Concilium* 1996, 4.

20 Paul Post, 'The modern pilgrim: a Christian ritual between tradition and post-modernity', *Concilium* 1996, 4, pp 1–9.

21 *Ibid.*, p 7.