

# Religion and Tourism Intertwined

## Visiting Abbeys as a Tourist Experience

### Exploring the Applicability of a Model

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## 1. Introduction

Every year again, many tourists visit convents, monasteries or abbeys.<sup>1</sup> For many holiday-makers traveling through Europe, a monastery is one of their destinations. In most cases, these will be medieval monasteries, fallen into decay and turned into well-kept ruins, admired for their beautiful location and surroundings, their monumental architecture and their history. In France, Ireland and England in particular we can find many of these monasteries, famous examples being Fontenay, Cluny, Glendalough, Clonmacnoise and Tintern. If they are no longer the functional buildings they were before, they attract people as sites of cultural heritage and they draw many visitors. It is only then that they are included in travel guides as cultural historical monument or as frozen remnant of a distant past, and that they are qualified as being 'worth the journey' or 'worth a detour'.

Monasteries are much less visited when they are residences of living communities. Nevertheless, these too enjoy great popularity, most definitely so if we compare their attraction to the average church involvement and church attendance. Not only has there been a popular and highly appraised show on monasteries and monastic life on Dutch TV for years, not only do we find beautifully published and well-selling books on monasteries coming out on a regular basis, but interest in visiting monasteries or spending a few days there has likewise remained high and shows no sign of diminishing. We will not find these monasteries mentioned in the travel brochures of the well-known tour operators, but there are special books and guides with descriptions of monasteries and information on the possibilities of staying there for a day or a few days.<sup>2</sup> Some of

<sup>1</sup> Monastery or abbey will be used in this article as a cover term for buildings where monks or nuns live together in a community. Convent is normally used for communities of nuns; monastery for communities of monks. Abbeys are convents or monasteries with considerable independence. In this contribution, the terms monastery and abbey will be used indiscriminately.

<sup>2</sup> See M. COLINON: *Abdijengids België, Nederland, Luxemburg, Frankrijk* (Averbode 1979); J. PALM: *Kloosters in Nederland. Plaatsen voor bezinning en inspiratie* (Baarn 1994<sup>3</sup>); M. VAN BIEMEN: *In stilte. Retraïtes in Nederland en België* (Amsterdam 2011); H. VAN GILS: *100x abdijen, kloosters en bezinningscentra. De beste adressen* (Tielt 2011); F. BORGER: *Hemelse oorden. Tien spirituele pleisterplaatsen* (Zoetermeer 2012); J.-W. WITS: *Eerste hulp bij kloosterbezoek. Informatiekit voor kloostergangers* (Utrecht 2014).

these guests will be visiting a monastery for specifically religious or spiritual reasons while for many other visitors a stay is both useful and pleasant without any explicitly religious expectations. The monasteries themselves actually nourish and cherish this wide range of expectations in the way they present themselves and in the varied spectrum of activities they offer. There is a broad range and variety of activities and programs being offered, including traditional liturgical prayer, modern meditation techniques such as yoga, as well as wellness activities such as those offered at the Abbey of Arenberg; this abbey of Dominican Nuns, situated near Koblenz in Germany, introduces itself as a wellness center, offering a variety of therapies (water, herbs, exercise – hygienics, motion therapy) as part of its rich hospitality program. And there are many more ways of spending one's time at monasteries in a non-specifically religious way: walking or cycling in the environment, or enjoying products manufactured at the abbey itself or at an affiliated abbey.<sup>3</sup>

Monasteries not only present themselves in a broader than strictly religious sense, they are also recommended as being attractive destinations for leisure activities. In a Belgian magazine I found the following message:<sup>4</sup>

Which abbey fits your character? An abbey boring? Not on your life. The abbeys of Wallonia are a *phenomenal heritage* for just as much phenomenal enjoyment. Get the superlatives out: the abbey that, for example, *offers the best culture* is Stavelot. It has three museums with excellent temporary exhibitions. Around the abbey of Maredsous you will find the quaintest surroundings, where you can take lovely walks or go rail biking in the beautiful valley of the Molinee. The abbey of Orval offers the *very best total experience*: a beautiful historical abbey, a mysterious legend, wonderful forests and a very special beer and cheese-making tradition. Bon appétit: you are in Wallonia.

The text is not merely an advertisement for a number of Wallonian abbeys; it at once removes any prejudice there might be about abbeys being inaccessible and having nothing attractive to offer. Something similar can be observed on the site of the Tilburg Tourist Information Office (vvv) in the Netherlands, where the Abbey of Our Lady of Koningshoeven is mentioned under 'day trips / fun things to do in and around Tilburg', together with a number of museums, Vincent van Gogh's drawing studio, theme park Efteling and safari park Beekse Bergen.<sup>5</sup> The abbey is recommended as one of the city's tourist attractions.

<sup>3</sup> [www.kloster-arenberg.de/index.htm](http://www.kloster-arenberg.de/index.htm) (accessed 4 April 2014); see also M. STAUSBERG: *Religion und moderner Tourismus* (Berlin 2010) 111-115; IDEM: *Religion and tourism. Cross-roads, destinations and encounters* (London / New York 2011) 130-134.

<sup>4</sup> *Touring Explorer* no. 200 (May 2012) p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> [www.vvvtilburg.nl](http://www.vvvtilburg.nl) (accessed 4 April 2014).

The appeal of these abbeys has never been studied, and neither have the motives for visiting them.<sup>6</sup> The reason so many visitors are received, is linked to hospitality, which is a central element of religious life. It is laid down in the Benedictine Rule, which the contemplative life of Benedictines and Trappists is based on.<sup>7</sup> Abbeys are generally described and studied as religious or spiritual centers, as a consequence of which attention for visitors and guests tends to be approached from that perspective.<sup>8</sup> My perspective is a different one. I want to approach the abbey from a tourist point of view, as a destination to spend a day or a few days at. To this end, I will use a model developed by E. Cohen and worked out further and operationalized by J. Lengkeek and B. Elands, in which types of tourists are distinguished on the basis of differences in tourist experiences.<sup>9</sup> The underlying assumption is that a varied pattern of expectations on the part of the visitors of the abbey and a fair range of activities offered by the abbeys will result in a varied perception of the phenomenon of visiting abbeys. In this contribution I want to explore if this model, which is employed in Leisure Studies, can also be used in the setting of abbeys and the people visiting them. The question is if the model lends itself to the characterization of visitors to abbeys and allows us to differentiate between them. To explore this, I will

<sup>6</sup> For a modest initial exploration of a limited investigation of motives for this, see H. ZONDAG & M. MAASEN: 'Meer dan de kerk. Een onderzoek naar motieven van weekendkloosterlingen', in *Jaarboek voor liturgieonderzoek / Yearbook for liturgical and ritual studies* 26 (2010) 201-220; see also H. RANSIJN: *Op zoek naar grazige weiden. Een semiotisch onderzoek naar de motiëntie van deelnemers aan activiteiten van bezinningscentra* (= Theologische perspectieven. Supplement series 3) (Bergambacht 2012), which incidentally not only includes monasteries.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. L. VAN TONGEREN: 'Monastieke gastvrijheid en identiteit in het spanningsveld tussen afstand en nabijheid. Een cultuurhistorische verkenning', in *Jaarboek voor liturgieonderzoek / Yearbook for liturgical and ritual studies* 28 (2012) 27-49, p. 40.

<sup>8</sup> See for instance K. DE GROOT, J. PIEPER & W. PUTMAN: 'Nieuwe spiritualiteit in oude kloosters?', in *Jaarboek voor liturgieonderzoek / Yearbook for liturgical and ritual studies* 28 (2012) 81-102; IDEM (red.): *Zelf zorgen voor je ziel. De actualiteit van christelijke spirituele centra* (Almere 2013); RANSIJN: *Op zoek naar grazige weiden*; see also ZONDAG & MAASEN: 'Meer dan de kerk'; COLINON: *Abdijengids België, Nederland, Luxemburg, Frankrijk*; PALM: *Kloosters in Nederland*; VAN BIEMEN: *In stilte*; VAN GILS: *100x abdijen, kloosters en bezinningscentra*; BORGER: *Hemelse oorden*; WITS: *Eerste hulp bij kloosterbezoek*.

<sup>9</sup> E. COHEN: 'A Phenomenology of Tourist Experiences', in *Sociology. The journal of the British sociological association* 13 (1979) 179-201 (= IDEM: *Contemporary tourism. Diversity and change* (Amsterdam, etc. 2004) 65-85); J. LENGKEEK: 'Leisure experience and imagination. Rethinking Cohen's modes of tourist experience', in *International sociology* 16/2 (2001) 173-184; IDEM: *Van Homo Ludens naar Homo Turisticus. Regressie of een stap in de menselijke evolutie?* (valedictory lecture, Wageningen 2009); B. ELANDS & J. LENGKEEK: *Typical tourists. Research into the theoretical and methodological foundations of a typology of tourism and recreation experiences* (= Mansholt studies 21) (Wageningen 2000); IDEM: 'The tourist experience of out-there-ness. Theory and empirical research', in *Forest policy and economics* 19 (2012) 31-38.

concentrate on one abbey, the Abbey of Koningshoeven, and discuss it as a (representative) case in point. I will base my discussion on personal experience and observation, on various conversations I had with people involved, and on previous studies.<sup>10</sup> I will start by giving a brief outline of the abbey. After this, I will describe a number of different forms of visits to abbeys and link these to the concept based on different modes of tourist experience. Finally, I will formulate a number of concluding remarks on the applicability of the 'Modes of experience' model to visits to abbeys and on the interaction between religion and tourism, which appear to be tightly linked and densely interwoven.

## 2. The Abbey of Our Lady of Koningshoeven

Abbeys in the Netherlands receive tens of thousands of visitors and guests every year, people paying a short visit to the abbey on a special occasion or for a special activity, or staying at the guest house for a few days. The abbeys that are popular destinations are not those of the younger congregations mostly founded in the nineteenth century and whose activities tended to be concentrated on missionary work and on activities within the local communities, in education, health care and social welfare. Because of their presence in the local communities these are also called active congregations. The abbeys with the strongest appeal, receiving many visitors and having the facilities to accommodate guests, tend to be those of contemplative orders like the Benedictines and Trappists, and older orders like the Franciscans, Poor Clares, Norbertines, and Dominicans.

Koningshoeven is an abbey of one of these contemplative orders, an abbey of Cistercians of the strict observance (OCSO), better known as Trappists, a name that refers to the French monastery of La Trappe, where this order originated in the twelfth century as a result of a monastic reform movement. The Koningshoeven Abbey is situated on the city border between Tilburg and Berkel-Enschot. The foundation of the abbey in 1881 from the French Katsberg monastery is connected to the consequences of the repressive anti-Catholic government policy in Germany during the so-called *Kulturkampf* and of new legislation in France, strongly biased against the clergy and the church. The Netherlands – often by way of Belgium – was a cherished haven for the flow of religious refugees that got under way as a result of these developments at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>11</sup> By offering

<sup>10</sup> VAN TONGEREN: 'Monastieke gastvrijheid en identiteit'; IDEM: 'Distance and proximity. Abbeys as contested sites', in P. POST, Ph. NEL & W. VAN BEEK (eds.): *Sacred spaces and contested identities. Space and ritual dynamics in Europe and Africa* (Trenton, NJ 2014) 187-202.

<sup>11</sup> L.J. ROGIER & N. DE ROOY: *In vrijheid herboren. Katholieke Nederland 1853-1953* ('s-Gravenhage 1953) 406-407; J. BANK & M. VAN BUUREN: *1900. Hoogtij van burgerlijke cultuur* (= Nederlandse cultuur in Europese context 3) (Den Haag 2000) 411-412, 424,

shelter to foreign monastic communities, monastic life in the Netherlands was restored after it had almost totally disappeared as a result of the Reformation. As far as contemplative orders are concerned, Koningshoeven in 1881 was the first to be founded since the Reformation.<sup>12</sup> The abbey was not only the first to be established again in the Netherlands; it was also the biggest. When the monks acquired the land for an abbey, the vast terrain of 120 hectares (some 300 acres) included three farmsteads built by Dutch King William II, which the abbey was subsequently named after: Our Lady of Koningshoeven ('Our Lady of the King's Farmsteads'). One of the farmsteads included a big sheepfold and that was where the first monks took up residence. Soon after this a huge neo-gothic complex was built which in the heyday of the abbey housed over a hundred monks.



**Illustration 1:** Entrance of Abbey Koningshoeven [Photo L. van Tongeren]

Monks from contemplative orders live an isolated and secluded life; their main task is the *opus Dei*, that is to say: they continue the song of praise by singing the

431-433; J. SMITS: *Vademecum van religieuzen en hun kloosters in Noord-Brabant* (Alphen aan de Maas 2010) 23-25; B. BONNET-EYMARD: 'De religieuze congregaties op de vlucht voor de Franse Republiek', in *De katholieke Contrareformatie in de xx-ste eeuw* 8 (2000), no.1; J. VAN EIJNATTEN & F. VAN LIEBURG: *Nederlandse religiegeschiedenis* (Hilversum 2005) 290-291; H. SELDERHUIS (red.): *Handboek Nederlandse kerkgeschiedenis* (Kampen 2006) 614; 626-627; 654-655.

<sup>12</sup> For what follows and for a history of the abbey, see A. TERSTEGGE: *Honderd jaar monnikenleven in Koningshoeven* (Tilburg 1984; 1992<sup>2</sup>); P. SPAPENS: *Bier in alle eeuwigheid. 125 jaar Trappistenbrouwerij De Koningshoeven 1884-2009* (s.l. 2009).

Hours seven times a day in the monastery church. Unlike the monks in active congregations, they do not hold any social positions in education or health care to secure an income for themselves. They are expected to be self-sufficient and as the Rule of Saint Benedict says: 'live from the work of their hands'. Managing their own farm generally yielded enough to provide for themselves and earn a livelihood, which would sometimes be supplemented by other activities that generate income, such as specialised and labour-intensive handicrafts like bookbinding or liturgical needlework.

Although Koningshoeven ran a farm up until 1996, the decision to brew beer was taken quite soon after its foundation. When in 1881 work on the large terrain started, it soon became clear that the poor soil would not be able to provide enough food for the growing community to live on. It was for this reason that in 1884, in line with an old tradition within the order, the first abbot made the decision to start a brewery. Monastic tradition and personal background linked up perfectly as the abbot was from a family of brewers in the south of Germany and there was one other monk who had already mastered the art of brewing beer. Although the history of the brewery is not an outright success story, the brewery did make it possible for the monks to live from the work of their hands, as they are supposed to according the Benedictine Rule. A number of radical decisions and initiatives taken over the past few decades have resulted in the brewery becoming a significant market player in the commercial beer market, which it has been for years now. The brewery has succeeded admirably in exploiting its product's unique selling point, namely that of being the only certified abbey beer in the Netherlands. Its new commercial partner has been a major contributing factor in this success. Since 1997, the abbey brewery has been an independent subsidiary of Bavaria NV (Bavaria Breweries Ltd.) in Lieshout (N-B), which rents the brewery from the abbey and brews Trappist beer there by order of and supervised by the abbey. This has resulted not only in a considerable rise in sales figures and thus in turnover and profit, but also in the abbey being 'positioned in the market'. Abbey and brewery are one. Those taking a negative view of the combination might say that abbey and brewery are condemned to being forever intertwined, as one cannot survive without the other. But taking a positive view, one can simply conclude that each profits from the other's success and that the two strengthen one another. The monastery needs the brewery financially to generate enough income to live on and to keep up the maintenance of the huge building complex and the grounds, just as the brewery needs the monastery to be able to sell the abbey beer as an 'Authentic Trappist Product' - for it to be proper abbey beer it has to be brewed within the monastery walls and partly under the auspices of the monastery itself. A commercial partner was needed because the monastery did not have enough manpower and know-how at its disposal. The commercial partner needs the abbey for marketing reasons.



**Illustration 2:** Brewery of Abbey Koningshoeven [Photo L. van Tongeren]

The beer not merely generates the necessary revenues; it also contributes to the abbey's renown. The promotion of the abbey through its beer received a boost when the name of the brewery was changed. The old name *De Schaapskooi* (The Sheepfold), which referred to the origins of the abbey, was replaced by *Koningshoeven*, and a picture of the abbey was printed on the label. The beer – which today is called La Trappe –, the brewery and the abbey have become a unity and in a sense have become one and the same product. For a while this new product was positioned in the market through commercials on TV, presenting the beer, the abbey and monastic spirituality as a unity. The abbey was shown together with a glass of frothing beer in the foreground, with the slogan *proef de stilte* (taste the silence) appearing on the screen and nothing being said. This not only made for a stark contrast with all the other quite literally 'screaming' commercials, but it also got the product associated with a characteristic of the abbey.

As in all contemplative monasteries, there is a modest community living within the walls of Koningshoeven. A group of no more than twenty monks are living a secluded life there in silence, according to their own pattern and rhythm of life, which is dominated by prayer and reflection. The guesthouse is situated in a separate wing and guests are received throughout the year. In this respect, Koningshoeven is an abbey not unlike all the others. However, Koningshoeven does hold a unique position in other ways. Not only does the abbey differ with regard to its age, being the oldest and largest in terms of its size, but the presence and success of the brewery have resulted in there being more activity than in other monasteries. This is true even more so after the establishment of a *proeflokaal*, a tasting house (a public house for 'tasting' the beer) in 2008, annexed to the brewery and constructed in the shape of a sheepfold, a historical

allusion to the origins of the abbey. The tasting house is a charming space with a large outdoor pavement café, which makes it a perfect place to have lunch but also a suitable location for receptions and conferences. Over a hundred thousand people visit the abbey each year, twenty-five percent of them taking a tour of the brewery. In the wake of this activity, many also visit the abbey shop, where an increasing variety of products are being sold.



**Illustration 3:** Tasting house [Photo L. van Tongeren]

Koningshoeven does not just stand out because it presents itself in a very pronounced way, especially through its commercial activities, by advertising these and thereby attracting most of its visitors. More so than other abbeys, the monastery also promotes opportunities for spiritual and reflective activities, is involved in social initiatives, presents itself publicly through its own (digital) channels of publication, and features in the media on a regular basis, particularly in the local and regional press. These outward-aimed activities are consciously undertaken to enable the monks to give a unique expression to their own spirituality and to convey this to the world outside, but they also reflect the monks' own views of the present-day monk's life and the meaning it has for society and what it imparts to society. According to abbot Bernard, such initiatives contribute to the present-day significance of monastic life because they make the abbey into a meaningful place 'for those who live here and those who come to visit'.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *Brabants Dagblad* (8 November 2011) p. 19.



### 3. Different types of visits to the abbey

While there may not be many people living at the abbey, the number of visitors is quite considerable. People visit the abbey for different reasons and in different ways. I will discuss a number of different types of visits, which I have subdivided into four categories. I will present them separately but it should be kept in mind that the different types of visits can overlap or be combined. The first two categories are visits of a type that contemplative monasteries have traditionally offered to guests. I will only go into these briefly. I will discuss the third and fourth categories in some more detail, including the way these are filled in at the abbey of Koningshoeven.

#### 3.1. Liturgy

Because the community living at the abbey is so small, the daily Hours are not held in the big abbey church but in a smaller chapel. Recently the old chapter hall has been converted into a day chapel. The abbey church is only used on special occasions now and for the Eucharist on Sundays, as many people from the surrounding area take part in these celebrations either regularly or once in a while. On average, some 200 visiting churchgoers attend mass on Sundays; sometimes there are as many as 400 or more, in any case always vastly outnumbering the members of the community itself. This disproportionate relation gives rise to all sorts of questions relating to the distinct character of the celebration as a celebration of the community and relating to the vastly unequal distribution of guests and monks.<sup>14</sup>

#### 3.2. The guesthouse

As is the custom in the monasteries of contemplative orders, a separate area in one of the wings of the Koningshoeven building is reserved for rooms where people or groups can stay if they want to spend a few days at the abbey. The guests have their own refectory where they can have meals together and there is a common room where they can meet. Apart from the church and the chapel, the rest of the abbey is out of bounds for guests. They are, however, permitted to stroll around the grounds and the garden. It is much appreciated if guests show some involvement in monastic life and the community by taking part in some of the Hours that are prayed seven times a day in the chapel. This is also the only time that members of the community can be seen. Although most of the guests come to the abbey to find peace and quiet and for contemplation and spiritual deepening, they are often disappointed by the very limited contact they have with the resident monks there. It is possible to request a meeting with a monk, but in general contact is limited to the host monk, who is responsible

<sup>14</sup> VAN TONGEREN: 'Monastieke gastvrijheid en identiteit' 41-44.

for the guesthouse and looks after the guests. As is the case at all abbeys, the guesthouse at Koningshoeven has been a popular place to stay for decades and it still is. The guesthouse opened its doors in 1970 and right from the start it has been necessary to make early reservations for those who want to stay there for a few days.

### 3.3. Activities

As was mentioned above, the abbey organises activities for people from outside on a regular basis. Although the monastery is surrounded by a wall and a moat and the entrance is protected by a massive gate, these are not meant to shut it off from society and from the outside world. The monks are quite aware of what is going on in the world outside and all it has to offer. They live a life of simplicity and frugality, but they are by no means estranged from the world and neither do they wish the world to become estranged from them. They emphatically want to maintain a connection between the world inside and the world outside and they do so, among other things, by organising a variety of activities. Sometimes the monastery participates in these by having one of the monks giving a lecture or one of them making a musical contribution; sometimes it contributes by making facilities available or taking responsibility for the organisation of an activity. These types of incidental activities attract large numbers of visitors to the abbey each year. A few examples will suffice to illustrate the varied nature of these events:<sup>15</sup>

- There are study and reflection days on a variety of topics, for instance on the importance and the meaning of the monastery in and for society, on art and religion, or on spirituality in business.
- Concerts and theatrical performances. For some 30 years now, the abbey has organised abbey concerts in the abbey church three times a year, events drawing large numbers of visitors.
- Every now and then exhibitions are held, as was the case two years ago when at different locations on the monastery grounds people could visit the ‘Pilgrimage’ exhibition, showing works by artists Claudy Jongstra and Marc Mulders.
- Each year in May, from 2011 onwards, linking up with the popular culture of jogging, the abbey has organised a so-called ‘Trappist Run’. A 5-km course has been laid out on the abbey grounds, which are normally only accessible to those staying at the guesthouse. A maximum of 350 participants take part and run the course once, twice or three times following the starting shot given by the abbot. The restricted number of participants (which include some of the monks) and the fact that it takes place on the abbey

<sup>15</sup> For more on the various activities, and for additional information on the abbey, see the newsletter *Kijk Koningshoeven*, which from the winter of 2007 appeared four times a year in a paper version; in 2012 the switch was made to a monthly digital version, which is sent by e-mail; see [www.koningshoeven.nl](http://www.koningshoeven.nl).

grounds, which are usually out of bounds to non-guests, give the run a certain measure of exclusivity that makes it even more attractive, as is obvious from the great numbers wanting to enter.

### 3.4. Brewery, tasting room and abbey shop

Most of the people who visit Koningshoeven come for the brewery, the tasting room and the abbey shop. Those who wish to visit the abbey itself can choose not to include these locations and the – predominantly commercial – activities taking place there. The grounds are designed in such a way that the buildings stand in close proximity to each other, but are nevertheless clearly separate, thus enabling life in the abbey to continue undisturbed. Although there is a separate entrance for visitors going to the tasting room, the brewery and the shop, it is obvious that they are on the grounds of the monastery. The neo-gothic abbey, with its two high steeples, dominates the countryside and anyone approaching the complex will associate it with an abbey or in any case with some kind of religious purpose, but most certainly not with the advanced industrial design of a modern brewery. Visitors have access to part of the monastery grounds, which include a large and beautifully kept park, by crossing a small bridge across the moat and going through a gate in the monastery wall. The first building one gets to is the abbey shop. This used to be the women's garden and the shop itself was the guesthouse for women as they were not allowed to enter the abbey.



**Illustration 4:** Entrance for visitors [Photo L. van Tongeren]

On arrival or when they leave, virtually all visitors pay a visit to the abbey shop, where the line of products offered is getting more and more varied. In addition to a broad range of books on theology, mysticism, spirituality and religion, the shop also has a wide assortment of religious music cds, and all kinds of religious objects such as rosaries, candles, icons, etc. And naturally the shop also sells abbey products, either produced at the abbey itself or from other abbeys. These are first of all products from their own brewery, but in the last few years the monks have also begun to produce their own bread, biscuits, chocolate and cheese to be sold in the abbey shop.

Continuing along the path through the gardens one reaches the tasting room, from where the tour of the brewery next door starts. After an introductory promotion talk about the various types of beer brewed at the abbey, one can enjoy a glass of beer whilst watching a film about the history of the brewery. This film is not only about how the beer is brewed, about the characteristics of abbey beers and the reason why the abbey opened the brewery 125 years ago. Apart from the production of beer, the film gives a detailed impression in words and images of life inside the abbey, of monastic spirituality and the life rule. The film is not merely a mixture of instruction and promotion of the beer and the brewery; the brewery and the abbey are intertwined. The beer is used to introduce the abbey. Also during the tour, the connection between the brewery and the monks and life at the abbey is often mentioned. The guide regularly alludes to the strict and ascetic pattern of life at the Trappist abbey; points out the plaque with a quote from the Rule of Saint Benedict justifying the handicraft supplied; takes the guests past old paintings in the brewery that refer to the history of the order, and garnishing his information with numerous anecdotes, shows his visitors around other old workshops such as the former bakery, now conserved as a small museum.

As was already mentioned, the tasting room, brewery and shop stand separate from the abbey even though they are on the same grounds. This sometimes causes disappointment among visitors because they hardly get to see any of the monks. The best chance of running into a monk is in the shop rather than in the brewery or the tasting room, the reason for that being that the latter is not run by the abbey itself. People are sometimes also disappointed that they cannot visit the abbey and the abbey church. On the abbey grounds, the abbey is a constant presence, but visitors cannot go there. The reason for this lies in the seclusion inherent in monastic life. To protect and secure this seclusion, the abbey itself is out of bounds for visitors. Moreover, the abbey is not a museum but a home to a living community of monks. A constant stream of visitors to the abbey proper, to the actual residence of the monks, would not only entail an enormous amount of work; it would infringe on the monks' way of life and be detrimental to the peace and quiet within the abbey and the privacy of the monks. The disappointment of not being able to visit the abbey itself and the abbey church appears to be connected to the desire for religious or devotional expression. In order to meet this need, a chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary

was built in a quiet spot at the back of the garden in 2009. A visit to the shop, brewery or tasting room can now be combined with a stroll to the chapel of the Virgin Mary, where one can light a devotional candle and leave a personal prayer intention that is read during vespers in the abbey. It is quite remarkable that a devotional, religious custom like that should be connected to what is in fact a secular tourist outing to an abbey shop and a tasting room. Apparently not everyone is ‘only here for the beer’. The specific ecclesiastical and religious context makes it easy to link devotion and spirituality to pleasure and relaxation.



**Illustration 5:** Chapel of Our Lady in the garden [Photo L. van Tongeren]

#### 4. Monastery tourism

It is not very likely that all types of visitors to Koningshoeven will look upon themselves as tourists, neither will the abbey label itself as a tourist attraction. After all, the abbey complex is first and foremost a religious institution and will also be experienced as such. And from a theological and religious perspective it is not customary to qualify a monastery or any another representative manifestation of religion as a tourists attraction. This is not surprising considering the fact that for a long time religion and tourism were seen as opposites rather than as related entities.<sup>16</sup> As prototypical representatives of the two poles, pilgrim

<sup>16</sup> For the complex and ambivalent relationship between religion and tourism, see E. COHEN: ‘Tourism and religion. A comparative perspective’, in IDEM: *Contemporary tour-*

and tourist for a long time were seen as being diametrically opposed. In this opposition, tourism stands for superficial, amusement, superabundance, momentary, fun, horizontal and man-centered. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman views rising tourism with great skepticism and qualifies it as a disease when he discusses the phenomenon as tourist syndrome. Religion, by contrast, is characterized by qualifications such as spiritual deepening, asceticism, eternal, serious, vertical and God-centered.<sup>17</sup> Gradually the two types have begun to merge and attention is increasingly being focused on the connections linking religion and tourism.<sup>18</sup> The anthropological and sociological approach within culture studies, leisure studies, and religious studies has contributed significantly to this development.

Because of this link between religion and tourism, it makes sense to also study visits to monasteries from the perspective of leisure studies. The various activities and initiatives at Koningshoeven that I have just mentioned make the abbey an attractive place visited by many. The nature of the activities differs greatly and they are very varied; the types of visitors drawn to them will likewise vary considerably. This differentiation could be further specified using the typology worked out and applied by Jaap Lengkeek and Birgit Elands. Their typology was based on Erik Cohen, one of the pioneers in tourist studies.<sup>19</sup>

#### 4.1. Tourist experiences

In an attempt to get to the heart of the phenomenon of tourism, Cohen investigated the variable and diverse experiences of tourists, and ordered the different modes of experience of tourists in a fivefold typology. This typology distinguishes five different perspectives that apply to tourists depending on the circumstances: recreational mode, diversionary mode, experiential mode, experimental mode, existential mode. Lengkeek and Elands modified Cohen's typology; their approach is based on empirical studies related to a wide variety of tourist contexts.<sup>20</sup> Lengkeek and Elands's adapted typology consists of the following five modes:<sup>21</sup>

*ism* 147-158. See further Z. Bauman: 'From pilgrim to tourist. Or a short history of identity', in S. HALL & P. DU GAY (eds.): *Questions of cultural identity* (London 1996) 18-36; A. FRANKLIN: 'The tourist syndrome. An interview with Zygmunt Bauman', in *Tourist studies* 3 (2003) 205-217; LENGKEEK: *Van Homo Ludens naar Homo Turisticus*.

<sup>17</sup> STAUSBERG: *Religion und moderner Tourismus* 13, 41.

<sup>18</sup> STAUSBERG: *Religion und moderner Tourismus*; IDEM: *Religion and tourism* 19-71; P. POST: 'De pelgrim en de toerist. Verkenning van een topos', in *Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift* 67 (2013) 135-149.

<sup>19</sup> COHEN: 'A phenomenology of tourist experiences'; LENGKEEK: 'Leisure experience and imagination'; ELANDS & LENGKEEK: *Typical tourists*; IDEM: 'The tourist experience of out-there-ness'.

<sup>20</sup> For instance, visitors of the Veluwe National Park, experiences of drivers 'doing' Auto Routes of the Dutch Automobile Club ANWB, experiences of members of the

- 1) Mode of **amusement** (fun; a short break; carefree separation from ordinary everyday reality; superficial distance from everyday reality; does not create any tension with everyday life);
- 2) Mode of **change** (the difference between it and normal, everyday life is more strongly felt; away from the boredom or stress of everyday life; relaxation; recovery; recharging energy);
- 3) Mode of **interest** (the experience of contrast is stronger still; search for interesting vistas and stories derived from elsewhere; stimulation of imagination and fantasy; the feeling that there is more between heaven and earth);
- 4) Mode of **rapture** (the tension between the suspension of the ordinary and the inaccessibility of the other reaches its climax; confrontation with oneself or the outer world; new awareness of one's own identity; open to the unknown or unexpected);
- 5) Mode of **dedication or mastering** (the unknown and the inaccessible are opened up; appropriation and devotion; the extraordinary becomes ordinary; it creates a new everyday reality; wish for a permanent stay).

This typology covers a broad spectrum, the extremes of which are shaped by 'the experience of the tourist as the traveler in pursuit of "mere" pleasure in the strange and the novel' to that of the tourist who devotes himself entirely to the place and the world elsewhere and who profoundly connects himself to this.<sup>22</sup>

#### 4.2. Elsewhere and different: out-there-ness

The tourist experiences that Cohen was looking for in an attempt to arrive at a more detailed description of tourism and that resulted in his fivefold typology are crucially connected to modern man's relation to society and culture, to his worldview. This world of everyday experience and daily routine is taken as the center. The typology covers the range from this center at one end to the other and the unknown at the other end, subdividing this according to the extent to which the tourist gets removed from this center and everyday experience and gets focused more on the other and the unknown,<sup>23</sup> i.e., on the ex-centric. This

Dutch Nature Camping Club (NTKC), visitors of Costa Rica National Parks. See ELANDS & LENGKEEK: *Typical tourists*.

<sup>21</sup> For some short descriptions and key characteristics, see LENGKEEK: 'Leisure experience and imagination' 180-182; IDEM: *Van Homo Ludens naar Homo Turisticus* 15; ELANDS & LENGKEEK: *Typical tourists* 18-19; IDEM: 'The tourist experience of out-there-ness' 33.

<sup>22</sup> COHEN: 'A phenomenology of tourist experiences' 183.

<sup>23</sup> LENGKEEK: 'Leisure experience and imagination' 175.

concept of the 'center' in Cohen's model and typology is based on Victor Turner's distinction between the center and 'the center out there'.<sup>24</sup>

More in general the fundamental sense of the tourist experience involves the double movement: alienation from everyday routine and the attraction of the other.<sup>25</sup> This movement is based on a fundamental characteristic of tourism: its contrast to daily routine. In contrast to being engaged in everyday routine, the tourist does something else and does it elsewhere. This means tourism involves displacement, a withdrawal from normal life and going elsewhere. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) mentions displacement as a central element in the definition of tourism. According to the UNWTO:<sup>26</sup>

Tourism comprises the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited.

The definition shows that for UNWTO displacement is central in connection with three criteria: 1) tourism involves a displacement outside the usual environment; 2) no minimal duration is mentioned, only a maximum; this means that tourism displacement can involve as little as a single day without there being an overnight stay; 3) the purpose of traveling is not related to any activity remunerated from within the place visited. All three criteria mentioned also apply to the various types of visits to monasteries as described above.

However, for Lengkeek and Elands these approaches fail to adequately capture the phenomenon. They modified the concept of the center as employed by Cohen and Turner. In their opinion, the center-out approach does not do sufficient justice to the spectrum of tourist experiences – the full range of the tourist experience involves more than a mere contrast of place or social environment; it is more complex than that. Tourist experiences are not merely related to (and thus restricted to) socio-spatial settings; their context needs to be expanded to temporal and bodily changes, as well as changes in consciousness dimensions.<sup>27</sup> They are related to 'the temporary exchange of an everyday reality for another' and this applies to all aspects of behavior: practices, rituals, way of living, etc. This means that 'there is an infinite number and several types of possible cen-

<sup>24</sup> COHEN: 'A phenomenology of tourist experiences' 180-182. Reference to V. TURNER: 'The center out there. The pilgrim's goal', in *History of religion* 12/3 (1973) 191-230.

<sup>25</sup> See also R. WELTEN: *Het ware leven is elders. Filosofie van het toerisme* (Zoetermeer 2013).

<sup>26</sup> <http://torc.linkbc.ca/torc/downs1/WTOfdefinitionontourism.pdf> (accessed 15 mei 2012); cited after STAUSBERG: *Religion and tourism* 6 because the site is no longer available (April 2014). For commentary on this definition, see STAUSBERG: *Religion and tourism* 6-7 and IDEM: *Religion und moderner Tourismus* 17-20.

<sup>27</sup> ELANDS & LENGKEEK: 'The tourist experience of out-there-ness' 32.



ters-out-there'.<sup>28</sup> It is therefore not just about physical distance. It is for this reason that they stipulate the concept of 'out-there-ness', referring in their choice of the term to J. Potter, 'who used this concept to indicate some authority or universe out-there, independent of our own, which is connected to our known world, but which we do not entirely understand, making it intriguing and fascinating to us'.<sup>29</sup> There is a mental distance rather than just a physical distance. Tourism is more than simply a change in time and space. Out-there-ness can be related to anything 'different' and is referred to not only from the perspective of locality, but relates to all aspects of a person's relation to their environment.

### 4.3. Abbey visitors and tourist experiences

Monasteries and abbeys are outstanding examples of such centers of 'out-there-ness'. The contrast and the distance so characteristic of out-there-ness and tourism are also a distinctive characteristic of monasteries. Monasteries are different from everyday life, not just in a special sense because of their remote and isolated location and their seclusion, but also in terms of lifestyle, of the rhythm of life there, of the actions, the clothes worn, and the rituals. Entering the walls of an abbey complex, one enters another world. The abbey has a reality of its own, with its very own authority structure, its own fabric, its own activities, resting upon its own myths and founded on a long tradition. All these aspects contribute to visits to abbeys being experienced as forms of out-there-ness. They make abbeys alluring places and tourist attractions for many people to go to for only a few hours or visit for a few days.

Although since Victor Turner's research the prototypical tourist is manifested in the pilgrim and pilgrimage, a topic widely researched and being researched to this day, the tourist experience as it is worked out in Cohen's as well as Lengkeek and Elands's work lacks the specifically religious setting. Nevertheless, the typology of the tourist that they developed on the basis of a variety of experiences does appear to be applicable to various religious contexts, monasteries being one of them. Just as we can distinguish between different types of tourists, we can also distinguish between different types of visitors to abbeys and different ways in which abbeys can be visited. In the sections above, an outline was given of the varied range of activities offered at the Koningshoeven abbey and the many ways in which this abbey caters to the great number of guests visiting it. It is on the basis of this that I want to explore to what extent the fivefold typology of the tourist experience as developed by Lengkeek and Elands can also be employed to further specify or classify the different types of visitors to this abbey on the basis of their experiences. I will therefore return to Lengkeek and Elands's five modes of experience and their characteristics, and

<sup>28</sup> LENGKEEK: 'Leisure experience and imagination' 177.

<sup>29</sup> ELANDS & LENGKEEK: 'The tourist experience of out-there-ness' 33. Reference to J. POTTER: *Representing reality. Discourse, rhetoric and social construction* (London 1996).

make them more concrete by linking them to activities that visitors to the abbey can engage in and the various experiences they can have there.

- 1) Mode of **amusement**: In the Netherlands we do not have any monasteries that advertise themselves as wellness centres. However, Koningshoeven does offer activities or create conditions for experiencing momentary pleasure, such as the yearly Trappist Run, or enjoying a beer or having lunch at the tasting room's outdoor pavement café, examples of opportunities being offered for a superficial and carefree break from the ordinary day-to-day routine.
- 2) Mode of **change**: To help people escape from the boredom, tensions and stress of everyday life for a while the monastery offers possibilities for relaxation and recovery and to recharge one's battery with new energy. An excursion to the brewery, a visit to the tasting room and a walk through the monastery gardens are ways of putting daily work and worries behind one in a different environment. This mode of experience can also take the form of attending an abbey concert or taking part in the Sunday liturgy in the monastery church; ways to relax after a busy working week.
- 3) Mode of **interest**: Exhibitions and study days provide opportunities for contemplation and spiritual deepening and can open up new horizons. Those who are interested in the history of the abbey and the brewery and in the background of monastic life can get more information on this in an excursion. Staying as a guest at the abbey for a few days allows one to become acquainted with the atmosphere there in a more intensive way. Moreover, in talks with the monk responsible for the guests one can gain more insight into the history of the order and the abbey itself, into the spirituality of the order and the background of the monks' way of life.
- 4) Mode of **rapture**: For those attending Sunday liturgy at the abbey, either occasionally or on a regular basis, as well as for those staying at the guest-house for a few days, their visit can be related to a desire for spiritual deepening and reflection. The liturgy in particular, whose intensive rhythm determines the pattern of life at the abbey, will often be a facilitating element in this; the many biblical and hymnal texts resounding, the frequent singing and the rituals turn out to be a source of inspiration to many and open up a world to them that they are not familiar with. In addition to this, there is the peace and quiet reigning here that the guests are looking for in particular, brought about for a large part by the remoteness of the monastery and its daily rhythm. It is all these aspects, together with the architecture and the location, that define the atmosphere of the building. This is what many guests are in search of and what inspires them. Staying at the monastery, one experiences first-hand what it is that distinguishes life inside the walls of the monastery from life outside them.
- 5) Mode of **dedication**: The guest temporarily takes himself out of his own usual pattern of life and briefly exchanges it for a stay at the abbey. Those who wish to commit themselves more deeply to a monastic style of life will

enter the order and the monastery. However, from that moment on they are no longer visitors and can therefore no longer be approached from the perspective of the tourist. While the most extreme form of this final mode in the fivefold typology is when the dedication is so strong that identification with the community ensues and one subsequently enters into it, thereby effectively moving beyond the typology, ceasing to be a tourist-visitor and becoming a member; the somewhat less intense form can be found in the case of the oblate, whose commitment is great and who is familiar with the community, but who at the same time keeps a certain distance because he does not enter into it and is therefore not part of it.

## 5. Conclusion: interaction between religion and tourism

Elands and Lengkeek conclude their article on the tourist experience of out-there-ness by observing that the model needs to be tested and applied further in different contexts and environments.<sup>30</sup> In this contribution, I have explored the model in a different setting, deciding on a case that at first sight looks like it involves a religious rather than a tourist destination, namely visits to the Koningshoeven abbey. It turns out that the different modes of experience are also recognizable and applicable in connection with visits to monasteries. The fact that this model can be successfully applied here, together with the fact that the criteria for tourism adhered to by the UNWTO are also met,<sup>31</sup> justify qualifying and studying visitors to Kongingshoeven as tourists, more specifically as monastery tourists. My exploration of this model does however need to be worked out in more detail and operationalized. This requires further empirical research among visitors. That way the experiences of visitors and their various attributions of significance can be mapped and differentiated between, and a possible dominance of particular experiences or combinations of experiences can be established. It will also bring out certain correlations, such as those between the different modes of experience and the separate activities, or between the experience and the guests' demographic or religious backgrounds. Eventually, it will be possible to distill from the data a typology of visitors to monasteries. This will yield important information for monasteries in that it will help them decide which policy it might be desirable to pursue. After all, the activities offered and the visitors' experiences affect the public image of the abbey and its attractiveness, both of which are determining elements in the abbey's own identity.<sup>32</sup> In offering specific activities and facilities, a certain amount of steering is possible and an attempt can be made to influence one's image among visitors and make it correspond to the image one wants to convey.

<sup>30</sup> ELANDS & LENGKEEK: 'The tourist experience of out-there-ness' 38.

<sup>31</sup> See section 4.2 above.

<sup>32</sup> VAN TONGEREN: 'Monastieke gastvrijheid en identiteit'.

The case of Koningshoeven shows that there is an interplay between the activities and facilities offered on the one hand and the number and types of visitors on the other. The wide range of activities offered not only attracts a great number of people, but also a very differentiated group of people. There is something there for everyone. Every mode of experience is available there. This is not the case, or to a far lesser extent, with monasteries that only have a few rooms available in the guest house and where the only activity offered to visitors is to take part in the liturgy and to enjoy the peace and quiet in and around the monastery. By offering a different range of activities, such a monastery will present a different profile to the world, distinguishing itself from an abbey like Koningshoeven, and making it attractive to a different type of visitors.

This explorative contribution draws attention to an interesting connection between tourist- or leisure studies and religious studies because the model of tourist experience also turns out to be applicable to religious contexts. Also in religious settings, objects, events, experiences and activities can be approached and studied from a tourist point of view, from the perspective of tourist studies. This applies in any case to the monastery as a specifically religious context. I have shown that visiting monasteries can be analyzed and interpreted not only from a religious, theological or spiritual point of view with its own concepts and qualifications, but also from the framework of tourism studying the attractive force of the monasteries. By studying visiting monasteries as a form of tourism, the broad field of tourism is rendered more complete and monasteries are moved from an exclusively religious setting into a more societal context.

The typology of the tourist worked out by Cohen and Lengkeek is based on the central notion of the experience of otherness, of that which is different, of contrast. This notion not only includes the tourist experience but also clearly connects to (the study of) religion and ritual, where the contrast to everyday life is central. The case shows that in visits to Koningshoeven we are dealing with a complex interplay of religion and tourism. In the activities aimed at relaxation and recreation, the perspective shifts from time to time in the direction of religion or monastic spirituality. Conversely, the guests visiting the abbey predominantly for religious or spiritual deepening find themselves confronted with worldly affairs and recreational activities. What we have here is a fascinating and interesting mixture, an interplay between tourism and religion where commerce and trade are not exclusively based on stringent economic laws, but also on personal religious principles and monastic spirituality. As a result, the general and personnel management at the abbey does not always follow current conventions.

After attending Mass on Sundays, people can go to the shop for a wide range of products, from spirits, spiritual literature and devotional objects to a wide variety of products produced at the abbey (cheese and chocolate, but also soap and shampoo). And with a little luck one can strike up a conversation with the monk at the cash register. During the excursion to the brewery, the scenery changes regularly and the explanations given with regard to beer production

alternate with information on the order, on monastic spirituality and monastic life. Those who want to relax in the park-like garden can light a candle in the Lady Chapel. In visits to the abbey, no matter in what capacity, one will always be confronted with religion, in a more or less emphatic fashion. No visitor will fail to notice their having entered the grounds of an abbey, a quintessential exponent of religion. The case of Koningshoeven presented here as an illustration of popular visits to monasteries is a good example of what in religious studies is currently referred to as 'framing'.<sup>33</sup> Religion is the frame that guides each visitor's perception of their stay. Whether this be in the guest house, attending a concert, visiting an exhibition, attending Sunday Mass, or in the tasting house, in all cases the expectations and the experiences will inevitably be co-determined by the fact that one finds oneself in the religious setting of a monastery.

This means that religion and tourism should not be forced to compete. The wide range of activities the abbey has to offer and the great variety of visitors show that there can be an explicitly religious motive lying at the basis of the visit; this applies to the attendance of Sunday Mass for instance. But it is equally clear that most activities are not emphatically based in religion, but can nevertheless be furnished with a religious component. Religion does not necessarily manifest itself explicitly, nor is it restricted to being obtained as a separate independent entity. The implicit role of religion cannot be underestimated, if only in its being (inextricably) attached to all kinds of other manifestations of culture. The application of the modes of experience of out-there-ness model, developed in tourist studies, to the popular visits to monasteries makes clear that religion and tourism are not opposites, but rather interacting fields.

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<sup>33</sup> See for instance C. BELL: *Ritual Perspectives and dimensions* (New York / Oxford 1997) 74, 160-161; *Ritual framing: Gregory Bateson*, in *Journal of ritual studies* 26/2 (2012) 1-80 (special issue); P.J. STEWART & A. STRATHERN: *Ritual. Key concepts in religion* (London etc. 2014) 1-2, 123-129.

