

# Practitioners of Liturgical Spirituality

## Empirical Inside Perspectives in Abbey Churches

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### 1. Introduction

Who are the actors in liturgy? Those who lead the celebration, whether they play a solo role or not? Or the entire community acting in diverse capacities? Theology, especially since Vatican II, has stressed the activity of *all* participants (*participatio actuosa*). Yet liturgical practice in Western Europe sometimes indicates otherwise: it seems that in traditional liturgies participants sometimes play a less active role. In many parish churches they join in prayer, singing and movements to a limited extent only.

In liturgics these apparent contradictions give rise to fierce debates: are we witnessing a restoration of the old order and erosion of the new? Is tradition still alive? And what does that imply for the roles of the various participants in liturgy and the current shape of liturgical tradition?<sup>1</sup> In debates people too often speak past each other and fail to see the other's point of view. What strikes one party as plausible and natural from her inside perspective does not accord with the other's perception. Liturgical celebrations offer no scope for debate: discursive communication within liturgy between perspectives is neither feasible nor desirable, since it would undermine the organic community engaged in the liturgy.

If we broaden our view and avoid getting bogged down in such contradictions, we may opt for the perspective of liturgical spirituality. Here the focus is not primarily on canon law or the theological background of the person leading the celebration, but on the lived practice of liturgy – participants become practitioners, which presupposes a distinctive inside perspective. Then the experiential dimension is the premise of reflection.<sup>2</sup> Liturgical spirituality lies in real-life actions.<sup>3</sup> These seek to realize both the form of the liturgy in the relevant context and the participation of the group through the spiritual experience of a diverse set of practitioners, both presiders and other participants. Waaijman sees this as the strength of spiritual practice: 'Praxis consists of spiritual exercises and virtues which give form to the divine-human relationship. It concerns a

<sup>1</sup> G. LUKKEN: *Met de rug naar het volk. Liturgie in het spanningsveld van restauratie en vernieuwing* (= Meander 13) (Heeswijk 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Th. QUARTIER: 'Gelebte Liturgie. Rituell-liturgische Explorationen benediktinischer Tradition', in *Jaarboek voor liturgieonderzoek / Yearbook for liturgical and ritual studies* 27 (2011) 113-137.

<sup>3</sup> D.W. FAGERBERG: *On liturgical asceticism* (Washington 2013).

multi-colored network of practices: forms of religious life, devotions, prayer, reflection and concentration'.<sup>4</sup> In Waaijman's spectrum liturgy occupies a special place, since in liturgical celebration the many different practices are experienced in condensed form by a collective of people fulfilling diverse roles but all still acting as practitioners of liturgical spirituality.<sup>5</sup>

But does this apply to every liturgy? The often quite small liturgical communities in present-day practice that we have referred to appear to be moving in a different direction. There the various perspectives sometimes obstruct each other and the God-human relationship, which Waaijman sees as the crux of spiritual practice, is enacted rather weakly. Considering the variegated nature of liturgical spirituality it seems we need to create an atmosphere in which inside perspectives do not obstruct each other. In practice such a model has not yet been found. Hence it is no coincidence that Waaijman mentions 'religious life' as a prime example of spiritual practice. It does not mean that a spiritual liturgical basis (e.g. in a monastic context) is better than any other. But it does mean that liturgical practice is explicitly located in a spiritual tradition and is conducted by a core group of religious in terms of their own roles, which may overcome the dilemma of the relation between presider and other participants. In that case the charisma of the religious is to share their liturgical inside perspective with others, put it at their disposal and be enriched by the participants in their liturgical practice.<sup>6</sup> That is what is happening in many monastic churches nowadays. There participants find a form of liturgy not encountered elsewhere, and people participate who would never be seen in a parish church. One reason may be the contemplative nature of liturgy: it is celebrated in a way that permits personal meditation, group feeling and an encounter with the holy.<sup>7</sup>

These are surely positive signs for present-day practitioners of liturgy, whether they are part of a religious community, regular participants or merely casual visitors. But there is little or no scientific reflection on why the often highly traditional liturgical inside perspective of religious displays parallels with those of a diverse group of practitioners who are not members of the core group. The perspective of visitors to monastic liturgy in particular has hardly been explored. That is no doubt because monastic liturgy is primarily part of the worship of that religious community. But this has always included guests. The Benedictine tradition heavily emphasizes hospitality, which starts with prayer and should be mindful of *peregrini*. The latter could refer to pilgrims, but could

<sup>4</sup> K. WAAIJMAN: 'Spirituality as theology', in *Studies in spirituality* 21(2011) 1-43, p. 25-26.

<sup>5</sup> Th. QUARTIER: *Liturgische spiritualiteit. Benedictijnse impulsen* (Heeswijk 2013).

<sup>6</sup> E. BIANCHI: *Wir sind nicht besser. Das Ordensleben in der Kirche inmitten der Menschen* (St. Ottilien 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Th. QUARTIER: 'Kontemplatieve Liturgie. Liturgische Spiritualität aus ritueller und monastischer Sicht', in *Jaarboek voor liturgieonderzoek / Yearbook for liturgical and ritual studies* 29 (2013) 201-221.

also mean ‘strangers’. All must be ‘welcomed as Christ’ (RB 53).<sup>8</sup> Hence the personal perspective of guests affects the core of the liturgical spiritual tradition. For they have their own slant on the form liturgy assumes in that specific spiritual context and their own experience of their participation, which differs from that of the core group. How can these perspectives engage in dialogue with one another? How can the two groups act in order to overcome the aforementioned dilemma?

It calls for research which, in the first place, explores the liturgical spiritual tradition from within. The researcher is challenged to enter into the liturgy – to appropriate the tradition in a liturgical experience in collaboration with the religious core group. He then offers that experience to the guests, who have their own experience. He does so in a methodologically scientific manner based on the conceptual framework in which his observations were conducted. Contemporary research into the function of monasteries is significant and interesting, but it does not involve the liturgical inside perspective of either the monastic tradition or the guests in the actual research – these feature at most as research objects.<sup>9</sup> By proceeding from within the tradition one could start a dialogue that resolves the contradictions between liturgical perspectives. There are many methodologies for doing this. In this article we explore only one of them by way of an empirical liturgical-spiritual case study. Our research problem reads as follows: how does the experience of external practitioners of monastic liturgy relate to the spiritual liturgical tradition when it comes to the shape of and participation in that liturgy?

The case study presented below is the monastic liturgy of the German Benedictine abbey of Gerleve near Münster. In the summer of 2013 we conducted a survey of more than 150 liturgical participants. The collected data are apposite to our research problem, since the focus of the project was in fact to determine the participants’ perspective. The population is suitable, because the abbey church accommodates a diverse community of people, who are either familiar with the shape of monastic liturgy or not, and are either attached to a particular manner of participation or not. As for the perspective of the liturgical spiritual tradition, we familiarized ourselves with various perceptions of and testimonies by the Benedictine tradition. The article is confined to some aspects of the shape of and participation in liturgy in the wake of the nineteenth century restoration of Benedictine life in France led by Prosper Guéranger, one of the founders of the Liturgical Movement. Dom Guéranger was motivated by a twofold intention: (a) to re-constitute monastic life by way of liturgy, and (b) to deepen the French population’s involvement with liturgy.

<sup>8</sup> Th. QUARTIER: ‘Monastische Gütesiegel. Spirituell-liturgische Explorationen zu benediktinischem Stil und Sakralität’, in *Jaarboek voor liturgieonderzoek / Yearbook for liturgical and ritual studies* 28 (2012) 65-79.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. e.g. M. HOCHSCHILD: *Elastische Tradition. Biometrie des Klosters von heute* (= Studien zur monastischen Kultur 7) (St Ottilien 2013); K. DE GROOT, J. PIEPER & W. PUTMAN (red): *Zelf zorgen voor je ziel. Over de actualiteit van christelijke spirituele centra* (Almere 2013).

We hope that this will make a modest contribution to dialogue between different inside perspectives on monastic liturgy, which may also stimulate liturgical discussion of the actors in and form of the liturgy and may go beyond the avoidable differences that seem to arise between liturgical presiders and other participants nowadays. To this end the first section of the article deals with Dom Guéranger's view of the shape of and participation in liturgy, which he bases on two groups: monks and lay believers (2). In the third section we describe the research context in which we shared this view with participants in liturgy, as well as the research design and the research questions (3.1). After that we try to answer the questions derived from the field and outline the inside perspective of participants in monastic liturgy on the basis of some of our data (3.2). On the basis of these explorations the fourth section presents a possible spiritual liturgical interpretation in the form of concentric circles of practitioners (4).

## 2. Shape of and participation in the liturgy by monks and others

When Prosper Guéranger (1805-1875) sought to restore monastic life in France there was a great deal of turmoil in the country. In such turbulent times, would he give religious life a socially involved form? He opted for the Benedictine, hence liturgical way of life, and within that framework for a traditional liturgy.<sup>10</sup> Naturally Guéranger's position was hotly debated, and perceptions in various circles diverged greatly. From a spiritual liturgical point of view he is an extremely interesting source. We confine ourselves to a reflection from within the monastic tradition in which Guéranger operated so as to obtain a spiritual liturgical perspective that will enable us to grasp something of the various forms of practice encountered in condensed form in liturgy.

An essential part of liturgical life is the divine offices. Guéranger deliberately chose the Benedictine breviary, because this order performs the choral prayers not as an irksome duty but as a rich matrix: 'St Benedict's Rule makes monks Benedictines'.<sup>11</sup> Regular monastic life and the liturgy of the hours are indeed organically integrated: in practice it takes up a lot of time and structures the day, and spiritually it is one of Benedict's key themes. The underlying idea is two-fold. Firstly, the offices provide liturgical continuity, which becomes a spiritual matrix. Secondly, they establish a stable spiritual life, which in its turn ensures that the liturgy is lived in practice.

<sup>10</sup> L. SOLTNER: *Solesmes und Dom Guéranger* (St. Ottilien 2011) 117-118 [French original: *Solesmes et Dom Guéranger* (Solesmes 1974)].

<sup>11</sup> G.-M. OURY: *Dom Prosper Guéranger. Ein Mönch im Dienst für die Erneuerung der Kirche* (Heiligenkreuz 2013) 115-116 [French original: *Dom Guéranger. Moine au coeur de l'Église* (Solesmes 2001)]. Our translation.

Hence in Guéranger's view spirituality and liturgy are inextricably linked. The spiritual element is in fact liturgical. That was how the young community of Solesmes took shape in the early years after its re-establishment on 11 July 1833: 'Love for the liturgy was the primary condition for admission to Solesmes. Those who lacked it soon withdrew'.<sup>12</sup> When Dom Guéranger resuscitated monastic life at Solesmes a major aim was to fill a gap in bewildering liturgical times: that of creating a place with a natural, spontaneous liturgical framework. Thus the monastery became the home of sung offices that, as Guéranger said later, 'have never been interrupted since'.<sup>13</sup>

## 2.1. Roles

Monks play a very specific role in the church. They are not pastors, nor in their capacity as monks are they presiders of liturgy. They are baptised persons who assign liturgy a focal position in their lives, thereby creating scope for others as well. According to Guéranger that means we are dealing with two groups that participate in liturgy in their own ways: monks and other believers. But this is not the same as the contrast between liturgical presiders and what appear to be 'liturgical consumers' that we pointed out in the introduction. Whereas the monastic group is a kind of core group – a liturgical elite, to paraphrase Guéranger – the second group can also take part, in an involved way, as actors. In those turbulent days and adverse religious circumstances both groups were desperately needed.

Guéranger met this need in two ways: he fostered the liturgical tradition in the monastery, and also wrote bulky volumes to enable other believers to share it.<sup>14</sup> The following quotation expresses the notion of a liturgical spiritual centre which one group (the monks) cultivates and the other (lay believers) visits:<sup>15</sup>

For over a thousand years the church did not pray alone. It prayed in churches seven times a day, and the populace joined in. (...) But for some time now the holy night vigils are no longer kept and the holy hours no longer celebrated. Communal prayer has made way for personal, individual prayer. Yet one thing has remained: everywhere there are still churches and monasteries, where the prayers of past centuries echo day and night.

What Guéranger calls the 'church' is the worshipping community, in this case that of the monks at Solesmes. The people are bystanders. The liturgy is broad

<sup>12</sup> OURY: *Dom Prosper Guéranger* 159. Our translation.

<sup>13</sup> P. GUÉRANGER: *Anmerkungen zum Ordens- und Klosterleben* (St Ottilien 2009) 13 [French original: *Règlement du noviciat* (Solesmes 1858)].

<sup>14</sup> OURY: *Dom Prosper Guéranger* 269ff.

<sup>15</sup> P. GUÉRANGER: *Einführung in das liturgische Jahr* (= Studien zur monastischen Kultur 8) (St. Ottilien 2014) 13 [French original: *L'année liturgique 1. L'Avent et Noël* (Ed. nouv., rev. & mise à jour par les moines de Solesmes) (Solesmes 1948)]. Our translation.

enough to accommodate both groups and their individual members. According to Guéranger that has to do with its spiritual quality: ‘The divine origin of liturgy is demonstrated by the fact that it is both milk for the infants and bread for the dying’.<sup>16</sup> Hence Dom Guéranger’s spiritual vision specifically allows for diverse practitioners, which is what we are looking for in terms of our research problem. There is a liturgical core group along with a broad group of participants who venture into the liturgical atmosphere. What does that imply for the manner of liturgical celebration, its shape and the participation of the various groups?

## 2.2. Shape: content and form

When it comes to the shape of the liturgy we distinguish between content and form. In both areas Guéranger advocates great circumspection on the part of the core group. In the case of content they have to be people who truly experience the message of the liturgy: ‘When they [the monks] chant or recite the words, they must try to fathom and appropriate them in depth’.<sup>17</sup> That makes the liturgical message part of the substance of real life: ‘In the course of the day they must reflect joyfully on the impressions that the Holy Spirit grants them at these liturgical moments so that they genuinely earn the profound insights’.<sup>18</sup>

This substantive dimension of the liturgical shape also requires meticulous attention to the second dimension, the form. ‘They must be careful to omit or skip no genuflection prescribed for the prayers, the reading of the epistle and the gospel or other texts’.<sup>19</sup> Ultimately they all serve the purpose of putting liturgical spirituality into practice as the center of their own lives: ‘The more attention they devote to singing and ritual acts, the more they will avoid glances and movements that merely distract them from their main goal’.<sup>20</sup> The main goal is the portrayal of the God-human relationship, which to Waaijman is the crux of spiritual practices.

How should one envisage this form for people *not* living in a monastery? In one of the quotations Guéranger indicated that in his view liturgical prayer in society is in crisis. It does not receive proper attention and people prefer to pray on their own in their own, individual ways. That is dangerous, for prayer also has to be received – that is how we may interpret this idea. You cannot simply invent it in your personal life. Here monks and other participants in society come together: ‘Piety and personal prayer are shaped by liturgy’.<sup>21</sup> Without the core group it is hard to learn liturgy. At the same time we must

<sup>16</sup> GUÉRANGER: *Einführung in das liturgische Jahr* 20. Our translation.

<sup>17</sup> GUÉRANGER: *Anmerkungen* 48. Our translation.

<sup>18</sup> GUÉRANGER: *Anmerkungen* 48. Our translation.

<sup>19</sup> GUÉRANGER: *Anmerkungen* 48. Our translation.

<sup>20</sup> GUÉRANGER: *Anmerkungen* 48. Our translation.

<sup>21</sup> GUÉRANGER: *Anmerkungen* 15-16. Our translation.

realize that in Guéranger's view monastic life is not an end in itself but is lived in service of the church and has to be nourished by the church. If nobody is attracted to the liturgical spiritual center that a monastery represents, it loses its aura.

### 2.3. Participation: active and in spirit

It should be clear that in Guéranger's view different groups participate in liturgy in diverse ways. On the part of the monks their mode of liturgical participation is highly active, as we have seen: no detail must be omitted. That applies to monks leading the proceedings no less than to those who do not. But how do the other participants act? As we have said, Guéranger lived in times of liturgical upheaval: Gallican and Roman liturgy were on a tense footing and people were having difficulty finding a place to experience their own spirituality. Yet according to the abbot of Solesmes that was the task of every liturgical centre. Hence people had to be able to play their role as practitioners, quite apart from their liturgical tasks.

Active participation in liturgy invites others to participate as well: 'Liturgical prayer would lose its potency the moment believers lose sight of it and fail to commit themselves to it. They commit themselves at least in spirit even if they have no opportunity to take part in it physically'.<sup>22</sup> This is an exhortation to participation by everybody. We know that Guéranger certainly did not expect everybody to join in Gregorian chants, and that his concept of clerical office was by no means liberal. But the liturgical spiritual intuition that everybody is a practitioner does not interfere with that: people had to 'commit themselves to the liturgy'.<sup>23</sup>

Is this a role for the *peregrini*, the pilgrims and strangers mentioned in St Benedict's Rule? Clearly in an abbey church by no means everybody is able to join in actively. Even if they are physically present, they probably do not know Latin and are unfamiliar with the genuflections and other ritual elements. Yet there has to be a commitment, Guéranger insists, otherwise liturgy loses its essential quality: 'The spirit of the liturgy must revive in the sense that one draws on its natural source'.<sup>24</sup> Again Guéranger is referring to the divine origin of liturgy. Everyone draws on it in her own distinctive way, but people draw closer together watching each other in the spiritual practice that they experience together. They are all full-fledged practitioners of the same liturgy. They participate 'actively or in spirit', thus complementing each other.

What is certainly not modern in the quotations from Guéranger may be seen as an attempt to rediscover liturgy in a secularized, individualized society from the inside perspective of both the presider of the liturgy and the other partici-

<sup>22</sup> GUÉRANGER: *Einführung in das liturgische Jahr* 16. Our translation.

<sup>23</sup> GUÉRANGER: *Einführung in das liturgische Jahr* 16. Our translation.

<sup>24</sup> GUÉRANGER: *Einführung in das liturgische Jahr* 16. Our translation.

pants. As noted above, we do not dwell on the numerous debates on Guéranger's ecclesiastic and political views. What concerns us is that he makes the concrete enactment of liturgical practices the premise of spiritual living. That largely corresponds with our research problem. His notions about the content and form of liturgy and participation are found in the various elements of liturgical worship in the abbey church.

Here we may distinguish between elements of liturgical events in which the actors are members of the monastic community, and elements in which the actors are non-monastic participants, all being practitioners of the same liturgy. These are the elements from the monastic perspective that we have to incorporate into our study of the inside perspective of practitioners who are not members of present-day monastic communities – a group about which, we have noted already, we know little or nothing. Would they perceive concrete liturgical actions (to be specified in more detail in the field – cf. section 3.2) associated with the shape of the liturgy in the sense of its form and content in the monastic context, entailing various ways of participation, either physically or in spirit?

### 3. Empirical research among participants at monastery liturgy

Departing from the question what spiritual basis may be found in monastic liturgy for practitioners, the intuitions of dom Guéranger offer a challenging perspective. However, we have to be aware of the fact that the liturgy of Solesmes stands for a particular liturgical style that is in the sense of *participatio actiosa* surely not what recent debates understand by this notion. The Gregorian chant cultivated at Solesmes and the stress on certain liturgical traditions did not stimulate participation. In the perception of many, the opposite was true: the monks were the experts, and they should not be disturbed in their *opus Dei* by 'average participants'. They were sometimes present at the liturgy, but surely not actively participating. The notion of 'participating in the spirit' made them be involved as an act of private devotion, linked to liturgical prayer.<sup>25</sup>

This might have changed strongly in contemporary religious and liturgical life. How is the role of contemporary participants in monasteries to be seen, after we have experienced the re-discovery of an active role for all participants in parish liturgy in the twentieth century? It might be that the notions developed by Guéranger get a different meaning today. Here a methodologically driven empirical comparison is needed. We can conceptualize Guéranger's view and correlate it with views of visitors to abbeys today. In what sense do they experience the role, shape and kinds of participation of the abbot of Solesmes

<sup>25</sup> QUARTIER: *Gelebte Liturgie*.



from the nineteenth century, and what picture of contemporary practitioners can be derived from this empirical exploration?

In the next two subsections, we describe some steps from the case study already mentioned in the introduction to this article. It is not our aim to present the research extensively, but to report the steps of fieldwork, conceptualization, operationalization and empirical analysis that are relevant for the question dealt with here. First we describe the context, steps and questions (3.1), and after that we give some results from our quantitative study (3.2).<sup>26</sup>

### 3.1. Context, research steps and research questions

Our inquiry into practitioners of liturgical spirituality started in the field. One project was the consultative study at the abbey of Gerleve in Germany, mentioned in the introduction, conducted in dialogue with the brothers since 2011. The brothers invited the researcher to reflect with them on their liturgical inside perspective, which can be seen as ‘consultative research’.<sup>27</sup> This raised awareness of the relevance of the tradition outlined by Prosper Guéranger based on the abbey of Solesmes in the nineteenth century, also to present-day monastic practitioners, for many of their questions relate to challenges that confronted the abbot of Solesmes.

Many abbeys have enormous significance for contemporary church life, just like the abbey of Solesmes in nineteenth century France. We have already mentioned it in passing: as liturgical spiritual centers monasteries can help people to resolve contradictions and contribute to liturgy as a full-fledged spiritual practice enacted by a core group, with which many outsiders can associate themselves.<sup>28</sup> The same applies to the abbey of Gerleve. This abbey attracts a wide variety of visitors: house guests, regular churchgoers, people doing courses, school children and youth groups. All these spend either a short or a somewhat longer time in the abbey. At the time of writing, in 2014, it had forty-four monks and many amenities for outsiders.<sup>29</sup> The two groups of practitioners we are looking for can clearly be found in Gerleve.

Our explorations formed the basis of the following research questions, which specify our overall research problem in greater detail:

- 1) How do practitioners in the abbey church of Gerleve perceive certain key elements of the liturgy?

<sup>26</sup> For a more detailed description of the study: Th. QUARTIER: ‘Praxis liturgischer Spiritualität. Methode und Theorie im Bereich der Klosterliturgie’, in *Ecclesia orans* 31/2 (2014) (forthcoming).

<sup>27</sup> R.L. GRIMES: *Rite out of place. Ritual, media, and the arts* (Oxford 2006) 87.

<sup>28</sup> Th. QUARTIER: ‘Te gast bij Benedictus. Rituologische verkenningen van abdijbezoeken’, in: *Handelingen. Tijdschrift voor praktische theologie* 38/2 (2011) 49-59.

<sup>29</sup> For more details, see: [www.gerleve.de](http://www.gerleve.de).

- 2) How do practitioners perceive the spiritual shape of the liturgy in the sense of its form and content?
- 3) How do practitioners perceive their own manner of participating in the liturgy relative to that of the monastic community?
- 4) How do perceptions of liturgical elements relate to perceptions of the form and content of the liturgy and the various modes of participation?

In answering these questions our consultative study of the joint reflection with the brothers at the abbey presented the challenge of instigating a dialogue between the inside perspective we had identified and the inside perspective of visitors, the passers-by. Before explaining the steps that we followed we should briefly describe the researcher's personal position. In a study of liturgical spirituality the premise of the research is pertinent, whatever method is adopted. Waaijman indicates it explicitly: we can only fathom spiritual practices and study them 'if we look at the inside of this devout praxis'.<sup>30</sup> Ritual studies recognizes the researcher's existential involvement as inherent in scientific field research. Ronald Grimes constantly stresses that the researcher must really engage in the field, and that in-depth theoretical reflection presupposes fieldwork that also does something to the researcher: 'Ritualizing is the act of stepping in to be, whereas theorizing is the act of stepping back to know'.<sup>31</sup>

However, Grimes assumes that one primarily researches *other people's* rites. His method of stepping into the field entails appropriating it, but such curiosity in itself has no direct, explicit spiritual quality. In his view a study of one's own rituals would require 'to modify the method'.<sup>32</sup> Liturgical spiritual research faces the challenge of strengthening the existential substance of that method, for in a sense the researcher makes the liturgical practice under investigation his personal practice. Only then can he grasp what the existential dimension of liturgical spiritual engagement entails for practitioners. Together with the other practitioners the researcher develops his own inside perspective, which he presents to them to develop further, sophisticate and probe more deeply. This leads to a research cycle, whose spiritual dimension and dialogical nature make it part of the reflection on liturgical spiritual practice.<sup>33</sup> That is the basis for a methodological decision that can result from dialogue.

What was our actual choice against this background? At first glance our choice of a survey design may be surprising, for it seems detached rather than existentially involved. But it need not be. The aim was to make the inside perspective we had identified available to the other participants according to a

<sup>30</sup> WAAIJMAN: *Spirituality as theology* 26.

<sup>31</sup> R.L. GRIMES: *Reimagining ritual theory* (Inaugural lecture RU) (Nijmegen 2006) 5.

<sup>32</sup> R.L. GRIMES: *The craft of ritual studies* (Oxford 2013) 3, 12.

<sup>33</sup> A comparable cycle for empirical theology was devised by J.A. VAN DER VEN: *Practical theology. An empirical approach* (Leuven 1998).

proper scientific method, and a questionnaire is just as suitable for that purpose as any other method.

On the basis of insight acquired from tradition (Guéranger and Solesmes) and consultation (Gerleve) into liturgical elements performed in the abbey church by two groups of practitioners and their views of the form and content of the liturgy and the manner of participation, we constructed measuring instruments. The concomitant questionnaire was completed by 164 participants in the liturgy who were not members of the monastic community. The data were collected by the brothers at the abbey from a diverse group of visitors. The wide range of this method was in fact our reason for choosing it. Because we knew so little about the liturgical spiritual engagement of the majority of practitioners in the abbey church, it seemed meaningful to obtain a maximum number of responses to our inside perspective. To that end we operationalized the concepts in the four research questions cited above in items and requested respondents to indicate to what extent they agreed. The items derived from field communications during the consultative study conducted since 2011.<sup>34</sup>

Another preliminary comment is indicated. The results must be put in perspective. The respondents are by no means representative. All we can offer are exploratory impressions, which we trust offer some food for thought. The second qualification concerns the location of the study. Though the abbey of Gerleve is unquestionably suitable for a study of practitioners of liturgical spirituality, it remains a case study. Hence strictly speaking we cannot pronounce on other spiritual centers, although our case study may raise problems and suggestions that are relevant to other centers as well. Finally, we cannot lay claim to normativeness. The visitors did not cast a vote on either elements of the liturgy, its content and form, nor the various ways of participation. Nonetheless their responses can further hermeneutic reflection on present-day experience of liturgical spirituality, which may be helpful in future research.<sup>35</sup>

### 3.2. Empirical results

In general we can say the following about the surveyed people attending the liturgies: the respondents are largely Roman Catholic and consider religion to be very important in their lives. They attend church regularly to often, both in Gerleve and elsewhere. In the abbey church they most frequently attend mass, vespers and compline. Early morning prayer, sext and none are less frequently

<sup>34</sup> For a liturgical part of the same study, see: Th. QUARTIER: 'Participation in monastic liturgy and the experience of mystery', in *Leuven: encounters in systematic theology* 2014 (forthcoming). For spiritual aspects of the research see: IDEM: 'Contemplative hospitality. Empirical explorations of spiritual experiences among abbey visitors', in *Studies in spirituality* 24 (2014) (forthcoming).

<sup>35</sup> For the methodological steps of conceptualisation, operationalization, data collection and analysis, see e.g. Th. QUARTIER: *Bridging the gaps. An empirical study of Catholic funeral rites.* (= Empirische Theologie 17) (Münster 2007).

attended. Most respondents are between forty and sixty years old (51,8%) – average age is 58. They are 45,1% male and 54,9% female. Particularly with regard to religiosity, church attachment and church attendance we are confronted with a one-sided picture – although the question of whether this applies to all persons attending the Gerleve liturgies cannot be answered on the basis of our data. Still, the results can point us to interesting tendencies, keeping in mind that other populations gain others insights. In what follows we do not identify background characteristics and, for the sake of clarity, ask solely about general liturgical spiritual experience.

Our first research question concerns participants' experience of concrete liturgical elements. For our operationalization we decided to present respondents with a number of elements that had emerged as pertinent in our observations and interviews with both monks and other practitioners and that had co-determined the inductive phase of the study. We surmised that both elements in which monks were the primary actors and elements in which the other practitioners also participated explicitly would feature. From our observations we anticipated that these elements would be clearly differentiated in practitioners' perceptions, but that they would assign the monks' actions a more prominent place. Most participants in the abbey church seemed involved in monastic practices, but not in a very explicit, active way.

Elements performed by the monks that we presented to respondents are: the monks' entry and exit processions, their singing, and the priests presiding over the eucharist. Elements in which the other participants are also explicitly involved and active are: listening to the readings from the Bible, listening to contemporary language and receiving communion. By means of factor analysis we determined which clusters featured in respondents' perceptions. We found that they did in fact distinguish between liturgical elements performed by the monastic community (entry and exit, singing, presiding) and elements requiring explicit involvement by participants (listening to Bible readings, contemporary language, receiving communion). Hence our expectations were confirmed. However, when it came to the intensity of the experience the responses were surprising: while the monastic elements were considered important (3.6), the collective elements in which participants were explicitly involved were rated as very important (4.3).<sup>36</sup> Hence the assumption that participants attach special importance to their mere presence at liturgical practices performed by a core group to which they do not contribute much themselves was not confirmed. The accent is on explicit participation, and substantive participation at that, for the three elements entail consciously listening to texts.

<sup>36</sup> All data analyses were conducted by means of the SPSS computer program. The means cited here refer to scales constructed by way of a factor analysis of items on liturgical elements. Responses range from 1 ('Not experienced at all') to 5 ('I fully experienced it'). Statistical details of the analysis, a brief exposition and bibliographical references appear in the appendix, table 1. For more information on factor analyses cf.: A. FIELD: *Discovering statistics using SPSS* (London 2009<sup>3</sup>) 665-719.

This finding makes our second research question about the spiritual shape of the liturgy all the more interesting. Is it in fact a matter of the spiritual message of liturgy if the text being focal, rather than the form of monastic life that stipulates a fixed structure and regular performance of the liturgy? In operationalizing this question we again formulated items based on field communications with participants, in dialogue with the inside perspective of monastic studies, where on the basis of Guéranger we distinguish between form and content. Factor analysis revealed that respondents indeed distinguish between content and form, but they find form (4.1) more important than content (3.8).<sup>37</sup> By form we mean the formal grounding of liturgy in spiritual life rather than the formal aspect of services. Content relates to the spiritual quality of what they listen to rather than the act of listening. Clearly form is accentuated more when it concerns spiritual grounding; when it comes to concrete liturgical actions content is more important (cf. first research question).

The third research question concerns the manner in which practitioners participate in liturgy. Operationalized in terms of our fieldwork, we presented respondents with three modes of participation: active participation in which one physically joins (singing, prayer); following participation, in which one consciously follows the liturgy (e.g. by reading along with the reader); and attending participation, in which one is present without explicit involvement (and primarily enjoys the atmosphere). From a number of observations active participation seems to be relatively secondary, whereas attending participation definitely plays a role. These items were also subjected to factor analysis. Respondents in fact made a distinction between the three forms of participation as we had anticipated. Active participation had the greatest agreement (3.8). Following participation (3.6) was also acknowledged, but responses to attending participation were ambivalent (3.0).<sup>38</sup> This contradicted our expectations. Clearly the perception of a personal mode of participation goes together with the accent on liturgical elements presupposing explicit involvement (first research question) and the accent on form combines with the lifestyle encountered in the abbey church (second research question) in the minds of the respondents.

To examine this indication more closely, we finally tried to determine how responses on liturgical elements relate to structure and participation (research question 4). Here we found that elements performed by the monastic community correlate with the shape of the liturgy. The higher a spiritual way of life was rated, the more the elements performed by the monks were valued (.50). The higher spiritual content was rated, the more their actions addressed participants (.49). The monks' actions do not correlate with the manner of personal participation, but the latter does correlate with liturgical elements in which everyone is explicitly involved: the higher active participation is rated, the more importance

<sup>37</sup> Details of factor analysis of items on liturgical shape (form and content) appear in the appendix, table 2.

<sup>38</sup> Details of factor analysis of items on mode of participation appear in the appendix, table 3.

is attached to these elements (.44); the more conscious following is part of the liturgy, the more highly respondents rate elements in which they are personally involved (.36). The only negative significant correlation was between these elements and an attending mode of participation that requires mere presence without conscious, active participation (-.19).<sup>39</sup>

The image of liturgical consumers who derive little meaning from explicit participation is differentiated in these findings. The surprising results that general liturgical elements are preferred to exclusively monastic ones and that respondents attach great value to active, conscious participation are thought provoking. Another remarkable finding is that the liturgy manifestly has both a formal and a substantive shape arising from the monks' spirituality, which in its turn relates to the actions of the monastic core community.

In the next section we offer some suggestions for reflection based on the inside perspective that we identified at Guéranger.

#### 4. Reflection: concentric circles in a liturgical atmosphere

What does the stress on actual participation mean in a time when in Europe 'vicarious religion' has been identified in recent times? Do the results on the first research question contradict the idea that modern Europeans delegate the religious practice to professionals? Surely the monks could be seen as professionals. But the stress laid on self-participation seems to differentiate the concept of vicarious religion offered by, for example, Grace Davie.<sup>40</sup> This impression is also strengthened by the respondents' preference of liturgical form. They are interested in a particular content and function of the liturgy, but they also – and even more so – want to participate themselves in a concrete environment that shows stylistic formal elements that are not only recognizable but constitutive for their own liturgical action. Thirdly, vicarious religion would imply that the role of 'visitors' in liturgical surroundings is rather passive. We do not see this in the results on the third research question: participants see themselves as active and consciously participating, not passive and delegating their liturgical concerns to the monastic community. My conclusion from the impressions from a monastic liturgical context is that we can again differentiate the ideas of liturgical experts.

To become a genuine practitioner requires a lively liturgical atmosphere for both presiders (monks) and ordinary participants (visitors). That makes it possible for texts, symbols and gestures to penetrate at a real, existential level. The

<sup>39</sup> Correlations between our respondents' answers were determined by means of correlation analysis (Pearson's  $r$ ; a statistical test that determines how different variables correlate according to the answers of the respondents). Details appear in the appendix, table 4. We cite only significant values. For more information on correlation analyses, cf.: FIELD: *Discovering statistics* 262-292.

<sup>40</sup> G. DAVIE: *Religion in modern Europe – a memory mutates* (Oxford 2000) 59.

problem is that present-day participants are no longer accustomed to experience and fathom liturgical elements existentially, and presiders often have little scope to act meaningfully for the diverse groups of participants. Paul de Clerck demonstrates this convincingly with reference to the main eucharistic prayer: ‘The nerve center of the liturgical movement – active and conscious participation – consists in associating ourselves with the actual liturgical prayer rather than satisfying ourselves with an *Ersatz* product’.<sup>41</sup> By this he means that although people have been physically present at liturgical worship through the ages, they have not always truly participated in the sense of ‘committing themselves’, as Guéranger put it. Nowadays one could say: probably people are no longer present because they no longer experience an invitation to associate themselves with the liturgy. In this regard the liturgical spirituality that we have noted in monastic tradition via the example of Solesmes and in practice at Gerleve provides food for thought. For concrete liturgical practice the high appreciation of understanding the texts, actively participating in sacramental acts and communicating in contemporary language within the liturgy are an interesting combination of elements that are united in one cluster of answers among our respondents. Often they seem to be separated into liturgical practice and reflection. That separation needs be refined.

Lived religion in a contemplative tradition creates a liturgical atmosphere that enables us to participate in the liturgy in concentric circles.<sup>42</sup> What do we mean by that? In the discussion of Guéranger we noted that there is a core group in a monastery, a monastic community that is primarily liturgically constituted. Around it are what Guéranger calls ‘believers’. His catechetical work was meant to heighten these people’s participation. In that sense he spanned a bridge between the different circles. What is the position today? There are still several circles around the monastic core group, which include not only believers but also seekers. In Benedictine terms they comprise what were known as *peregrini*. This group merits our full attention, as our study seems to indicate.

Let us consider the findings with reference to this group again. The practitioners in our study clearly feel the need that De Clerck defines in terms of the Liturgical Movement: to participate authentically and commit themselves associatively, for they attach most value to elements that require explicit involvement (question 1). They do not simply delegate the form to the liturgical professionals, but perceive and experience it even more consciously than the content (question 2). In the case of participation their preference for active and following participation underscores this need (question 3). Interestingly, the special role of the monks is very important for the form and content of the liturgy, indeed in the sense of ‘liturgical experts’, but that in no way contradicts the conscious and active participation by all persons present at the monastic

<sup>41</sup> P. DE CLERCK: *De liturgie begrijpen* (Leuven 2010) 149-151. Our translation.

<sup>42</sup> Th. QUARTIER: ‘Laboratorium van het Heilige. Het liturgische ‘experiment’ van dom Paul Delatte als impuls voor Kerk en wereld’, in *De Kovel. Monastiek tijdschrift voor Vlaanderen en Nederland* 21 (2012) 42-53.

liturgy (question 4). They all manifestly find what they are looking for when there is a liturgical life that makes this conception (committing themselves to sacred events) plausible. The plausibility stems from a balance between spiritual content and form in the shape of the liturgy. Could concentric circles around a core group that embodies the liturgy create that balance? And could it be that people with a liturgical lifestyle are necessary for others to be true practitioners of liturgical spirituality?

Of course, monks are not found everywhere and it is not so easy to start a quasi-monastic community. Yet our impressions may be interpreted as advocating just that. We started the article by asking who are the actors in liturgy. The sometimes gloomy signs in the practice of parish churches should not lead us to assume a paucity of practitioners. The point is to broach the question of core communities that experience and live the liturgy spiritually. They are not necessarily the official presiders, although the latter naturally play a major role. Small core communities can support the presiders and provide a space for sacramental practices. That in its turn offers scope for circles of other practitioners around them. Concrete examples are volunteers in parishes that sometimes have a daily office on a small scale, for instance noonday prayer.<sup>43</sup> Another possibility is a group of professionals in health care institutions who create a liturgical venue to join in worship at the end of the week, thus bringing to life a meditation center.<sup>44</sup> These are examples of spiritual centers with a liturgical character and concentric circles around them – metaphorically speaking ‘monastic centers’. Then the liturgical practice we found in the monastic surrounding of Gerleve abbey can create openness to liturgical actions by all people present. Think about the entrance procession, chanting and presiding of monks: these elements are evaluated highly as a representation of the inner circle, but the support for liturgical actions by participants that form the outer circles is considered even more important. The stress on active and conscious participation supports this idea: the liturgical setting created by the core group allows full liturgical action and participation by the other participants.

This raises two questions. The first is whether the establishment of core groups is not in fact the problem that present-day liturgy faces. There seems to be a lack of candidates. In many cases that is no doubt true, and in many monasteries nowadays the circle of actively involved practitioners around the core groups is more lively than the monastic community. But it could be that the conception of the core group is too static. The boundaries between circles are fluid, which can intensify engagement. Just as monasticism cannot be rediscovered today in the same way that Prosper Guéranger did in the nineteenth century, so we have to find new ways of living liturgical spirituality. That calls for further research, but a clear sign is that people are found to be ready to attune

<sup>43</sup> QUARTIER: *Liturgische spiritualiteit* 48-59.

<sup>44</sup> Th. QUARTIER: ‘Liturgische spiritualiteit als bron voor gemeenschap’, in *Handelingen. Tijdschrift voor praktische theologie en religiewetenschap* 41/1 (2014) 6-12.



lifestyle to existential content in such a way that it radiates that which the liturgy celebrates.<sup>45</sup> A promising example is groups that attract visitors, not only in monasteries but also in parishes, where liturgical celebrations of transitions in life are open to guests from diverse backgrounds.

The second question is how these groups can serve to intensify involvement, also for *peregrini*. Our finding that the practitioners we questioned want to take part consciously is thought provoking. That applies to both concrete elements and their own role, active or at any rate following – ‘in spirit’, as Guéranger put it. The spiritual care offered by monasteries and parishes and liturgical groups sometimes includes few attractive catechetical structures and programs. Could there be a need for a new kind of catechism that intensifies existential involvement? An example would be conferences for monastery guests, for instance on Easter liturgy. But other meditative ways of immersing people in texts and symbols sometimes reach new groups around liturgical spiritual centers. Is that perhaps a possibility for liturgical pastoral work? Are we faced with a new need for ‘mystagogic catechesis’ that has been so meaningful in the spiritual tradition?<sup>46</sup> Again more research is needed to explore the question.

Liturgical spirituality can be a means of turning people to whom the familiar structures are no longer spontaneous into practitioners. It is comparable to Dom Guéranger’s times and context. We must realize, though, that our day and age requires different steps that can no longer take faith for granted. Furthermore, the pretention of contemporary visitors to abbeys is obviously different. Compared to Davie’s hypothesis that religion has a ‘vicarious character’, we can say that the picture given by our respondents is different. It is more of a searching movement and a need for involvement – not just delegating (Davie), and also not just based on private piety that is benefitted by the liturgical prayer of others (monks).

We cannot dwell on the ecclesiological implications of our study here, but the significance of liturgical spirituality for a review of church structures is obvious: they can help ‘to clarify the relationship between liturgical action and the Church’, as Alexander Schmemmann puts it.<sup>47</sup> Monasteries can do the church a great service in that, as Von Severus suggests it, they are ‘community for the Church’ in the truest sense of the word.<sup>48</sup> But the reverse is also true in the case of concentric circles: the many ‘monasteries’ that spring up in the vicinity of liturgical centers benefit by the *peregrini*. That has a spiritual side to it, for according to St Benedict guests are sources of divine revelation (rb 53) and strengthen the God-human relationship in Waaijman’s sense. And it has a social dimension, for without lived structures liturgical spirituality cannot become the

<sup>45</sup> G. AGAMBEN: *The highest poverty. Monastic rules and form-of-life* (Stanford 2013).

<sup>46</sup> J. GELDHOF: ‘Nieuwe wegen en bekende horizonten in een niet meer zo vertrouwd landschap. De theologische studie van liturgie en sacramenten’, in *Tijdschrift voor theologie* 50 (2010) 61-75, p. 70.

<sup>47</sup> A. SCHMEMMANN: *Introduction to liturgical theology* (Crestwood 2003) 17.

<sup>48</sup> E. VON SEVERUS: *Gemeinde für die Kirche* (Münster 1980).

form and content of life. The structures should preferably be fluid and flexible, but exploring them scientifically is a major task for liturgics. We trust that our empirical impressions have provided some pointers for such research.

## Appendix

**Table 1:** Liturgical elements (Varimax Rotation Factor Matrix), communalities ( $h^2$ ), percentage of explained variance

Item	$h^2$	F1	F2
Listening to biblical texts	.70	.79	
Receiving communion	.61	.74	
Contemporary language	.53	.69	
Entry and exit of the monks	.68		.83
Leadership of monastic priests	.56		.78
The monks' chanting	.55		.63
<b>Mean of scale</b>		4.3	3.6
<b>Standard deviation</b>		.63	.77
<b>Reliability of scale (Cronbach's alpha)</b>		.67	.64
<b>Number of respondents (n)</b>		163	163

Explained variance: 60,6 %

Scale from 1: not experienced at all, to 5: fully experienced it

N: 164

F1: Common elements

F2: Monastic elements

**Table 2:** Shape of the liturgy (Varimax Rotation Factor Matrix), communalities ( $h^2$ ), percentage of explained variance

Item	$h^2$	F1	F2
Because the liturgy is celebrated in a structured daily routine	.75	.87	
Because here I can encounter tradition	.66	.75	
Because the symbols and gestures speak for themselves	.68	.71	
Because the liturgy has a clear form	.64	.66	
Because I can hear the gospel here	.74		.83
Because I am familiar with the texts and chants	.67		.81
Because everything here points to God	.56		.65
<b>Mean of scale</b>		4.1	3.8
<b>Standard deviation</b>		.85	.88
<b>Reliability of scale (Cronbach's alpha)</b>		.83	.75
<b>Number of respondents (n)</b>		140	140

Explained variance: 67.3 %

Scale from 1: does not apply at all, to 5: applies fully

N: 164

F1: Form of the liturgy

F2: Content of the liturgy

**Table 3:** Participation in the liturgy (Varimax Rotation Factor Matrix), communalities (h<sup>2</sup>), percentage of explained variance

Item	h <sup>2</sup>	F1	F2	F3
Active participation makes the liturgy valuable for me	.76	.87		
It means a lot to me to be able to sing along at the liturgy	.70	.81		
It is important to me to be able to pray with the monks	.69	.70		
I want to understand what is being sung and prayed	.76		.83	
I would like to be able to read all texts, including Latin texts	.71		.81	
To experience the liturgy intensively it is enough for me to follow it	.74			.84
I enter into the atmosphere and do not need to do anything	.51			.52
I enjoy listening to the music irrespective of the text	.50			.51
Whether I understand what is being sung/prayed is not so important	.50			.50
<b>Mean of scale</b>		3.8	3.6	3.0
<b>Standard deviation</b>		.86	.99	.74
<b>Reliability of scale (Cronbach's alpha)</b>		.79	.73	.56
<b>Number of respondents (n)</b>		147	148	141

Explained variance: 64.8 %

Scale from 1: does not apply at all, to 5: applies fully

N: 164

F1: Active participation

F2: Passive participation

F3: No participation

**Table 4:** Correlations, elements, shape and participation

	Form	Content	Active	Following	Attending
Monastic community	.50**	.49**			
Broad community			.44**	.36**	-.19*

\*: p ≤ .005

\*\* : p ≤ .001

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