



Teacher Background

Unit: Spirituality and Ritual

Core Content Area One: What's it all about?

Spirituality

While spirituality is difficult to precisely define, it is about embracing the meaning of life, finding our purpose and living it. Spirituality is not something removed from life, but at the centre of life. Spirituality draws forth creation and form and flow out of the chaos of everyday living. A religious tradition can provide pathways for deeper understanding and spiritual formation. For example Catholic Spirituality is a living tradition dating back to encompass the stories and wisdom of the Old Testament that is read with New Testament eyes. It is forever new, and as such, is transforming our world today just as the first disciples transformed the Greco-Roman world in which they lived. **(See Catholic Spirituality)**

Christian Spirituality

Christian Spirituality is about consciously living our lives in relationship with God, empowered by the Holy Spirit and following Jesus Christ. Christian spirituality is visionary in that it involves a new way of seeing reality and of seeing through things to their spiritual core, of thus -interpreting spiritual things to those who are spirituall (1 Corinthians 2:13). Christian spiritual vision is incarnational – -The Word became fleshll. The Catholic spiritual vision flows from an incarnational understanding towards sacramentality which means that every created reality is imbued, to one degree or another, with the hidden presence of God. Christian spirituality is also relational. Neither Christian life nor human life itself is ever isolated existence. We are, therefore, relational beings: being in relation to God, neighbour, world and self. To be human is to live in community. To be Christian is also to live in community - the Church. Christian spirituality demands sensitivity to the presence, the needs and the gifts of others, as well as to the created goods of the earth. Finally, Christian spirituality is transformational. The spiritual Christian is consciously in touch with the presence of the Spirit as the power which heals, reconciles, renews, gives life, bestows peace, sustains hope, brings joy and creates unity. (See Lesson 1.1.3 for more background.)

Catholic Spirituality

There is not and never has been a single Christian spirituality, nor a single Catholic spirituality. The following historical account should make that unmistakably clear. For example, following the monastic thread alone:

Early Monastic

Thus the spiritual life is divided into three stages: purification (the 'purgative' way), meditation on the word of God (the 'illuminative' way), and union with God (the 'unitive' way)

Augustine (d. 430)

Spiritual discernment does not bring us knowledge of God in Christ so much as 'self-knowledge' in the light of Christ, the interior teacher of wisdom. On the other hand, ... ("St. Augustine") wrote in the 'City of God' that 'no man must be so committed to contemplation as, in his contemplation, to give no thought to his neighbour's needs, now so absorbed in action as to dispense with the contemplation of God.'

John Cassian (d 435)

Spirituality is not to seek anything beyond the Kingdom of God, and only purity of heart will open the mystery of the Kingdom to those who seek it. Christian life is one of constant prayer wholly inspired by the Gospel.

Benedict (d. c. 550)

„*The Rule of Benedict*“ speaks of the divine presence as 'everywhere and ... in every place,' but most especially in the monastic liturgy of the Divine Office.

A Catholic spirituality references a spirituality that encompasses a sacramental vision that sees God as Trinity in all things - other people, communities, movements, events, places, objects, the environment, the world at large, and the whole cosmos. The visible, tangible, the finite, the historical — all these are actual or potential mediators of divine presence. Indeed, for Catholicism it is only in and through these material realities that humans can encounter the invisible God. The great sacrament of the human encounter with God and of God's encounter with humans is Jesus Christ. The Church, in turn, is the fundamental sacrament of human encounter with Christ and of Christ with humans. The sacraments, in turn, are the signs and instruments by which the ecclesial encounter with Christ is expressed and celebrated.

Core Content Area Two: Ritual and Spirituality

Rituals

Terrance Deacon, in his book, *The Symbolic Species: The Co-evolution of Language and the Human Brain*, suggests that ritual has been used since the beginning of time to educate and socialise individuals and groups. He also suggests that ritual is an essential process in the development of the human brain and language. Ritualistic action makes meaning of the mysteries of life. Therefore rituals are inherent to human experience. Creating rituals is an art, because they deal with the heart of life; they enable the participants to name the reality behind the ritual, to engage with the symbols used and to move into the future.

Religious rituals focus on the mystery of the relationships between God, humankind and all of creation. Ritualistic actions, prayers and symbols are used repetitively and respectfully to create an atmosphere of devotion and connectedness with God.

In the Christian tradition, the events of the liturgical year provide an obvious focus for religious ritual, for example, Advent/Christmas, Lent and Eastertide which includes Pentecost. Other secular events can also be ritualised in religious settings, for example, Mother's Day, Father's Day, ANZAC Day and Australia Day.

The basic structure for such Christian rituals follows this general pattern:

- Gathering
- Proclamation of the Word (God's story/our story)
- Symbolic Activity
- Sending Forth.

Participating in Ritual

Terence Lovat describes five stages of a ritual for a participant:

1. Leaving of the ordinary and entering the ritual
2. Engaging in some type of preparatory rite
3. Experiencing a central or highpoint of the ritual
4. Joining in some form of celebration in the ritual
5. Leaving the ritual and returning to the ordinary world.

Goldburg, P. et al (2009) *Investigating Religion: Study of Religion for Secondary Students*. Cambridge University Press: Melbourne

Ritual is not a complete break from the ordinary, but more accurately, a more intense experience of reality. It is however a distinct experience and requires participants to assume a respectful and reverent state of being.

Rites of Death and Burial within the World Religions

Studying the way a religion or culture ritualises death expresses the essential values and beliefs of the religious tradition and culture. Five major world religions (Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam) and Indigenous spiritualities all mark the important events in a person's life such as birth, marriage and death in different ways, but there are often similar concepts. Death sees the close of a human life on earth, and the ritual and beliefs linked to death and the funeral are an important way for the family and friends of the deceased to express their grief and acknowledge the passing. It is often seen as an opportunity to celebrate a person's life and mark their transition to another life or stage, whatever that may be.

Christian Funerals

Christianity covers a broad variety of cultures, crossing all continents. It is estimated that there are up to 220 different Christian denominations, and funeral rituals may differ between denominations. Essentially, the Christian belief is one of bodily resurrection and the eternal continuation of the human soul, the state of which is usually dependent on how life on earth has been lived. Many churches have specially written funeral services, as well as special readings, prayers and hymns (songs). These will include readings from the holy book, the Bible. Some funerals may include a special service called Holy Communion, Eucharist or Mass which recalls the last supper that Jesus Christ shared with his disciples before his death. At the end of the service, special prayers are said either when the mourners are standing around the grave, or if it is a cremation, when the coffin disappears from view. Christian funerals focus on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and are generally one great prayer of hope and trust in God's mercy. A Catholic funeral ritual is called Rite of Christian Funerals and a strong connection is made between the Funeral rites and baptism.

Jewish Funerals

In Judaism, life is valued above almost all else. Death is not viewed as a tragedy, even when it occurs early in life or through unfortunate circumstances. For Jewish people there is an afterlife, where those who have lived a worthy life will be rewarded. Jewish funerals are governed by a set of rituals and traditions that particularly apply to the seven immediate family members: the spouse, mother, father, son, daughter, brother or sister. Some of the rituals may differ according to the different Jewish communities. Every Jewish community has a burial society called a *Chevre Kadisha* who prepare the body for burial and help make the funeral arrangements. Jewish burials are usually held within 24 hours of death, but may be delayed if immediate family members have to travel long distances. Most Jews are buried in a cemetery and some communities consider cremation a desecration of the body.

At the cemetery, the family and friends congregate in a room with the coffin. A symbolic small tear (Keriah) may be made in the mourner's clothes which represents a broken heart. A eulogy (hesped) is given by the rabbi or close family friend. The Kaddish, an ancient prayer for the dead, is recited in Hebrew and again after the coffin has been interred. The coffin is taken to the gravesite and it is considered an honour to help shovel in the earth. There is a symbolic washing of hands by everyone and then everyone returns home. In the evening, the first shiva will take place. This is the time when the mourners stay at home and will be visited by friends and acquaintances. A year of official mourning follows and certain communities will have specific customs associated with the year.

Hindu Funerals

For Hindus, death represents the transition of the soul from one embodiment to the next and is the means by which the spirit can ascend its journey. Hindus believe in reincarnation and a Hindu funeral should be as much a celebration as a remembrance service.

Hindus cremate their dead, and the burning of the dead body signifies the release of the spirit. The flames themselves are important as they represent the presence of the god Brahma, the creator. The vast majority of Hindus come from the Indian subcontinent and it is often regretted that a loved one has died far away from their homeland and its traditions. As with all religions, ritual plays an important part. Ideally a Hindu should die while lying on the floor, in contact with the earth. Family members will perform prayers, and although touching the corpse is considered polluting, many mourners will need to do so to say farewell. White is the traditional colour for mourners. If you are attending the funeral of a Hindu friend, it may be as well to ask what is appropriate to wear.

Prayers are usually said at the entrance to the crematorium and may be offered en-route. Offerings such as flowers or sweetmeats may also be passed around and noise is also part of Hindu rituals, which may include horns and

bells. The chief mourner, usually the eldest son or eldest male in the family represents the whole family in saying goodbye to the deceased. They and sometimes all the male members may shave their heads as a mark of respect. Scriptures are read and then the chief mourner will push the button to make the coffin disappear, as well as going below to ignite the cremator. After the cremation, the family may come together for a meal and prayers and begin a period of 13 days mourning, when friends will visit and offer condolence.

Islamic Funerals

There are two major groups of Muslims: Sunni Muslims and Shi'ite Muslims. Funeral traditions tend to have developed over the centuries, rather than being set out in the religion's holy book - The Qur'an. Muslims try to bury the body within 24 hours of death if possible. They believe that the soul departs at the moment of death. The deceased is placed with their head facing the Muslim holy city of Mecca. Ritual washing is performed usually by family members or close friends, usually according to the gender of the deceased. The body is wrapped in a shroud of simple, white material. Afterwards, salat (prayers) will be said for the deceased.

Funerals should be kept simple and respectful and it is forbidden to cremate the body of a Muslim. Muslims are buried with their face turned to the right, facing Mecca and it is customary not to use a coffin. Mourners may throw earth onto the body in the grave. The grave may be raised above ground level and the gravestone should be simple.

There is an official mourning period of three days (longer for a remaining spouse) and this may include a special meal to remember the deceased.

Buddhist Funerals

It is estimated that there are up to 570 different varieties of Buddhism. There are few formal traditions relating to funerals and they are essentially seen as non-religious events. The simple approach and emphasis on the person's state of mind leading up to death, have led to a marked increase and interest in Buddhist funerals in the West. Most Buddhist schools of thought concentrate on the spirit or mind of the deceased and agree that the physical body is just a shell. Many also share the Tibetan belief that the spirit of the deceased will undergo rebirth, usually after a period of 49 days. Cremation is the generally accepted practice in Asia. For example, the Buddha himself was cremated. A simple service may be held at the crematorium chapel at which Buddhist readings may be recited.

Meditation and Contemplation

Meditation is a form of mental prayer, involving an extended reflective thought on the presence and activity of God. It is a practice developed by the monastic tradition, which requires stillness of body in order for the mind to be active and fully focused on God. Christian meditation is generally understood to involve discursive reasoning, traditionally using the *lectio divina* - the prayerful reading and meditative reflection upon sacred Scripture, the Christian classics, or other types of spiritual writing. Three well-known styles of meditation have emerged from the Benedictine, Ignatian and Augustinian monastic traditions.

Benedictine meditation focuses on the concept of *lectio* or, as Benedict called it, -listening with the ear of one's heart. In it, one listens to, or reads over, or reflects on a Scriptural passage, pausing to sit with any word that presents itself and allowing it to speak to one of God or the works of God.

Ignatian meditation involves reflecting on a passage of Scripture, especially the words or actions of a Biblical character and then imagining that one has the opportunity to have some time alone with the character in order to seek further explanation of the character's words or actions. What would one ask? The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola (known as -The Examen) can be used as a guide in fostering or teaching about the mental prayer of meditation. Caroline Berger and Maureen Burton have adapted and modified the spiritual exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola for school students. Their publication, *Kids Connect*, contains a variety of activities based on these spiritual exercises to assist students to become more reflective and spiritual. The adapted Examen has been used in this module to introduce students to this form of interior prayer prayed by many Christians.

Augustinian meditation involves inserting into a passage one's own name - for example, where God or Jesus addresses Israel, the crowd, or an individual, one replaces them with oneself in order to ask what God is saying to us.

Contemplation is part of the movement from -mentall prayer to a still, thought-free state of being in God. Rather than talking to God or thinking about God as in meditative prayer, contemplative prayer is about silence and stillness of mind and body. The best distinction between meditation and contemplation is that meditation is a kind of -mulling overll while contemplation is -stillnessll but this is within the context of a movement within the same prayer experience. For example, a person meditates so that he/she might be drawn into contemplation.

Centering prayer is a special method of contemplation in which the person simply attends to the presence of God within - at the centre of one's being. A mantra or short phrase is sometimes repeated to keep one's attention centred. An example is the *Jesus Prayer*, which requests, 'Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me, a sinner' when repeated in a mantra.

Mantras, which assist centering prayer, involve the repetition of a particular phrase or word (for example the word Maranatha is often used) as part of one's breathing pattern. Repetition is essential, as it aids the rhythmical nature of this kind of prayer and of the breathing itself, while assisting one to maintain focus. Over a period of time, however, the words become less important in themselves, when a place of inner silence and stillness is reached. This takes constant practice and an adequate amount of time given for the mantra. The Rosary has been used within the Catholic tradition as a form of contemplative mantra, as well as for meditation on the lives of Jesus and Mary.

The Rosary

It is usually suggested that the rosary began as a practice by the laity to imitate the monastic Office (Breviary or Liturgy of the Hours), by which monks prayed the 150 Psalms. The laity, many of whom could not read, substituted 50 or 150 Ave Marias for the Psalms. Sometimes a cord with counters on it was used to keep an accurate count. The first clear historical reference to the rosary, however, is from the life of St. Dominic (+1221), the founder of the Order of Preachers or Dominicans. He preached a form of the rosary in France, at the time that the Albigensian heresy was devastating the faith there. Tradition has it that the Blessed Mother herself asked for the practice as an antidote for heresy and sin. One of Dominic's future disciples, Alain de Roche, began to establish Rosary Confraternities to promote the praying of the rosary. The form of the rosary we have today is believed to date from his time. Over the centuries, the saints and popes have highly recommended the rosary, the greatest prayer in the Church after the Mass and Liturgy of the Hours. Not surprisingly, its most active promoters have been Dominicans. Rosary means a crown of roses, a spiritual bouquet given to the Blessed Mother. It is sometimes called the Dominican Rosary, to distinguish it from other rosary-like prayers (e.g. Franciscan Rosary of the Seven Joys, Servite Rosary of the Seven Sorrows). It is also, in a general sense, a form of chaplet or corona (also referring to a crown), of which there are many varieties in the Church. Finally, in English it has been called "Our Lady's Psalter" or "the beads". This last derives from an Old English word for prayers (bede) and to request (biddan or bid).

Inspiration and Blessing

Blessing Prayers

Blessing is the act of declaring, or wishing, favour and goodness on others. The blessing is not only the good effect of words; it also has the power to bring them to pass. In the Scriptures, even if spoken by mistake, once a blessing was given it could not be taken back. The nature of blessing is always reciprocal: we are blessed and, in turn, we must bless. But to be blessed and to bless, we must be compassionately connected. Blessing is a technique of inner transformation which moves us to a greater realization of self and God. It is a concrete action.

Benediction is a prayer that God may bestow certain blessings on people. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the form of priestly benediction was prescribed in the Law: -The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. ll You may recognise this formula as now forming part of the Rite of Blessing in the Dismissal Rite of the Christian Eucharist.

Blessings have four distinct purposes:

1. God blesses creation: eg nature (Gen 1:22); humanity (Gen 1:28); the Sabbath (Gen 2:3); nations (Ps 33:12); and individuals (Gen 24:1). God also blesses people by giving life, riches, fruitfulness or plenty (Gen 1:22, 28).
2. People —blessll God - for the purposes of worship, adoration and praise (Deut. 8:10; Ps 101:1, 2 etc.).

3. Those in positions of power and authority and holy leaders can bestow blessings on others: patriarchs pronounced benefits on their children, often when near death (Gen 49:1-28). Leaders often blessed people, especially when getting ready to leave them - eg Moses (Deut 33); Joshua (22:6-7); and Jesus (Luke: 24:50).
4. People can bless things when they are set aside for sacred use. (1Cor:10:16).

Inspirational Prayers

Prayers (written, spoken or sung) composed or constructed for one purpose by an author or community, can themselves inspire others to seek the same qualities, behaviours or state sought in the prayer - eg peace, service, generosity, compassion, consolation, inspiration and commitment. Readers/hearers of these prayers (many of the prayers which inspire others are constructed in very personal contexts) are inspired to respond with, or say to God, -me too!!!. They are drawn on to better/greater things or belief by the words, values, emotions and/or aspirations contained in the prayer. Inspirational prayer opens the space for the Holy Spirit to bring about *metanoia*: a change of heart.

What attributes make a prayer -inspirational??

The following quote may help to come to an understanding of Inspirational prayer.

If prayer were intended only to inform God of our desires and deficiencies, it would be unnecessary. Its true purpose is to raise the level of the supplicants by helping them develop true perceptions of life so that they can become worthy of God's blessing.

Prayers by others become inspirational when the self-discovery of the authors, or their perceptions of life become so clear through reflection and experience, that in expressing them they capture the essence of what many others are also seeking and so others can also say -yes!!! to their discoveries of how or what one should be. Many of the great inspirational prayers and aspirations come from mystics and saints who spent many years reflecting and contemplating before being able to express simply but clearly an insight into the human condition or relationship(s) with God.

Inspirational prayers, then:

- are often composed in the context of an intense life, or spiritual experience

- may be the culmination of many years of thought, reflection and prayer

- express simply and with great clarity some of the complex mysteries of life

- capture the hearts and minds of ordinary people because of their insight, capacity to express complexity simply, or in the case of music, to touch human emotions.

- can provoke intense emotional responses by their content or the context in which they are heard or presented.

The context of the experience of the prayer can also be inspirational: for example, prayer in beautiful settings or prayer with and among people bowed down by oppression or pain or sorrow can inspire the hearer to want to act or to respond in a variety of ways. What appears to be a quite mundane prayer can be made inspirational when used or presented in an inspirational setting.

Sacred Texts

All religions have some way of recording and retelling stories which are significant for the believers within their tradition. Usually, the stories are recorded in special books and are regarded as holy or sacred. Christianity's sacred book is called the Bible. It is however, more a library of books than a single book. The word 'scripture' is used when referring to the sacred texts of all world religions. Religions that depend on oral traditions often express and pass on their sacred stories through art, totems, tattoos, body painting, masks or ritual objects.

(Adapted from Goldberg, P. (2009) *Investigating Religion*, p. 50)

Spiritual Experience: Words are not enough

The goal of Christianity is a sharing in the Trinitarian life; the believer's divine relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Some world religions have as their goal, a higher consciousness. They teach that a higher consciousness is an immanent reality and not above reality or super-natural. It is part of the spiritual journey and our capacity for awareness of spirituality. This awareness is thought of as realisation, awakening, enlightenment, -ah-ha! moments of inspiration, insight and transcendence.

In a sense, the words used to describe this awareness are not important, the experience of it is. Paradoxically, once experienced, it is difficult to explain it in words. The words simply are not adequate to describe the fullness of the reality of spiritual experience. For this reason, symbol and metaphor are essential. This is why St Thomas Aquinas insisted that music and art and poetry were essential for worship. When we truly are on holy ground, we can know things of which we cannot speak. We experience communication beyond words. This knowledge of spiritual experience is awareness. It is like waking up to more. What you see is what you get. Those who don't see beyond the surface of reality don't get it.

St Augustine used the metaphor of the Journey (*peregrinatio*) to describe spirituality. At any moment, each individual is on their own journey. This means that in any room of people, one would expect people to be at different places on their journey. This is why spiritual masters have always used stories, aphorisms and koans to teach. These spiritual teaching tools are deceptively multi-layered and have the ability of speaking to each individual where they are. This also means that there is never any one correct interpretation of a spiritual story, aphorism or koan.

Something else about spiritual stories, aphorisms and koans is that they gestate and lie dormant until the listener is ready for the revelation they carry. A popular Buddhist aphorism, -when the student is ready, a teacher will appear illustrates this point.

Sacred Spaces for Sacred Rituals

A 'sacred space' is not only to be equated with a holy or religious space. Neither should the term 'sacred ritual' name only that which is identifiably religious. Sacred spaces are abundant in all of God's creation including interpersonal and intra-personal relationships in the ordinary and extraordinary events of one's daily life. A prayer or sacred space therefore need not be a church or modeled on the layout of a church any more than a prayer or ritual needs be presided over by a priest or deacon or prepared by an 'expert'. The 'realm of the sacred' (Amy Florian 2001:32) can also be found in homes, schools and everyday places, people, things and events. These ordinary places, people and things can be used as 'markers' to engender a relationship with and understanding of God.

A prayer space for any occasion should be adequate in size, simply and aesthetically prepared, dignified and worthy. Markers such as symbolic, decorative and practical items to signal that something special is about to take place in this space can be used. Such items may include a cross, a scented candle, special furniture or decorations, water, flowers or plants, coloured cloths or banners, the Bible and appropriate music or any number of symbols which suggest an encounter with the sacred. While these may require explanation in the learning context of the classroom, they should by their very placement, composition, colour and symbolism, be allowed to speak clearly for themselves in the ritual space and time. These items must be chosen and used appropriately for the unique prayer context. Certain markers, however, may need to be used consistently and frequently, especially for more formal and official prayer contexts such as in the Mass, as they are an instantly recognisable part of a predictable pattern (Margaret Bick 1998:27) and engender a sense of security and continuity over time.

Sacred Rituals

Rituals are co-evolved (worked on together) symbolic acts. A ritual includes not only the ceremonial aspects of the actual presentation or performance, but the process of preparing for it and responding to it. They may or may not include words, but do have both open (changeable) and closed (unchanging) parts which are held together by a guiding metaphor (or theme or purpose). Repetition can be part of rituals, either through the content (words, songs, and actions), form (the order of the ceremony and roles) or the occasion. There should be enough space in rituals for the incorporation of multiple meanings by various members and leaders as well as a variety of levels of participation.

Characteristics of Rituals include:

- Special time/s
- Special place/s
- Special symbols
- Special dress
- Special action/s
- Special music/sounds/words
- Special people

- Special relationships, roles.

Symbols for Sacred Spaces

Symbols are the building blocks of rituals. It is critical that symbols connect and fit with the participants of a ritual. In many cases, participants should be able to connect with/choose from a variety of symbols. Symbols give rituals the power to provide multiple meanings and different levels of participation for individuals and groups.

Symbolic markers for rituals include objects such as water because it can symbolise cleansing or life, and candles, because they provide light in the darkness just as Christ is described as the light of the world. A symbol is known to be such if, as something physical, concrete and material, it points beyond itself to another reality, belief or thought, such as a spiritual belief of God's love or Christ's light, without losing its own identity (Amy Florian, 2001, *Sign and Symbol Word and Song*). In ritual, symbols may contain as many meanings as there are participants, but this is all part of their power and purpose.

Core Content Area 3: What's in it for me?

Sustainability

Australians live within one of the most diverse eco-systems on the planet - the —Land of the Holy Spiritll, as the first European maps recorded our ancient continent. Environmentally, it is important for us to -read the signs of the timesll - -the signs of the Spiritll. We have been gifted with the care of this beautiful land and must hand it on to the next generation in a healthy and pristine condition. To carry out this sacred duty expresses our love for the Creator, each other and the rest of creation. This is sometimes called our -ecological vocationll. On Holy Ground, QLD version. Catholic Earthcare, 2006

Before ecological vocation is a possibility, one needs to hear the call of ecological conversion. This is a spiritual and moral calling that promotes a journey towards more ecologically sustainable practices. Sustainability is about care for all of creation. *Cura Anima* is the ancient art of -care of the soulll. Spirituality needs to be nurtured and sustained. By nurturing and sustaining our spirits, humanity can also sustain creation. Creation theology and ecology are but two discourses that provide people with a spirituality and culture of personal and global sustainability.

Australian Indigenous Perspective

Sustainability of the earth is of paramount importance and value to Aboriginal people. Their love of, and strong belief in their connectedness to the land, is deeply rooted in their spirituality. This is also reflected in their sustainable and respectful earth practices that have spanned over 60,000 years (approximately) in this land. Aboriginal spirituality promotes a deep sense of responsibility for the welfare of the land entrusted to their care. Aboriginal people do not own the land - rather, they believe the Creator Spirit is the true landowner and human beings are like trustees responsible to the Creator Spirit for the care of this land. This love of the land and sense of connectedness has been also nurtured through power-filled stories about the earth. Some of these stories tell about the earth as a vast featureless plain or desert until the Rainbow Spirit transformed its nature to what is visible today. Other stories suggest the land was covered with mud or water.

(Rainbow Spirit Theology: Towards an Australian Aboriginal Theology. Rainbow Spirit Elders, Blackburn Victoria Australia: Harper Collins, 1997, pp 31-35.)

Aboriginal people believe that land is alive within, filled with the life forces of all the species on earth. The land is itself alive, dynamic and creative. Non-indigenous and contemporary indigenous people can gain considerable wisdom from many aspects of indigenous spirituality, especially the love of and connectedness to the land and the sustainable practices they lived by.

Spiritual Growth and Action

Moses gave the Hebrew people commandments from God written in stone, with which to create their world after their experience of slavery. Jesus gave his followers a new commandment that completed, or perfected that understanding and it was oriented in love. Jesus' new covenant points to the importance of the heart, the inner life or the spiritual life, but does not disregard the outer life governed by the Law of Moses. Whereas the Law of Moses discouraged people from doing the wrong thing, the new commandment of Jesus encouraged his followers to do the right thing for the right reason, love. From a spiritual perspective, the *heart* is connected to the *eyes*. What is in our hearts, will determine what we make of our world. As the saying goes, "*What you see is what you get*".

This is similar to the Buddha's famous saying, "*With our thoughts, we create the world*". This means that what exists in the outside world is projected from our inner selves. When Christians pray "*Thy Kingdom Comell*", they do more than remind themselves of the hope of something to come. They are committing themselves to the task of making the reign of God a reality by their own thoughts and actions. What this Kingdom will look like is a mystery. As Kierkegaard said, "*we live forward, but we understand backward*".

Faith and Film

The Catholic Church views the cinema as a distinctive artistic expression and encourages its pedagogical, cultural and pastoral role. Creativity and technical progress, intelligence and reflection, fantasy and reality, dreams and sentiments come together in film sequences. The cinema is a fascinating instrument for transmitting the perennial message of life and describing its extraordinary marvels. At the same time, it can become a forceful and effective language for condemning violence and the abuse of power. Thus it teaches and denounces, preserves the memory of the past, becomes the living conscience of the present and encourages the quest for a better future.

The cinema can be the mirror of the human soul in its constant search for God, often unknowingly. With special effects and remarkable images, it can explore the human universe in depth. It is able to depict life and its mystery in images. And when it reaches the heights of poetry, unifying and harmonizing various art forms — from literature to scenic portrayal, to music and acting — it can become a source of inner wonder and profound meditation.

(Adapted from the address of the Holy Father Pope John Paul II to Conference sponsored by Councils for Culture and Social Communications, 1998.)