

Subject

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Unit 1, Section A the Search for Meaning & Values

TOPIC

Evidence of sacredness & spirituality in contemporary culture



Sacred can be defined as: “connected with God or a god or dedicated to a religious purpose and so deserving veneration”.

Spirituality defined...the quality or state of being concerned with religion or religious matters: the quality or state of being spiritual. It is a broad concept with room for many perspectives. In general, it includes a sense of connection to something bigger than ourselves and it typically involves a search for meaning in life. As such, it is a universal human experience—something that touches us all.

The Camino de Santiago, the Way of St James is one of the most famous pilgrimages in the world today. It is an example of spirituality and sacredness in contemporary society.

The Camino is a walk from a town called St Jean Pied de Port in southern France, along an 800km route through northern Spain to Santiago de Compostela. It is estimated that over 200,000 people attempt or part attempt the walk each year.

There are several reasons why the Camino endeavour.

- 1) The remains of St James reside in the Cathedral in Santiago de Compostela. St James was one of the disciples of Jesus and in Christian theology, Jesus is God. Therefore, the remains of St James have a close connection with the divine, making them sacred.
- 2) The pilgrimage has been walked by Christians since the time of the Crusades. For many, it was undertaken as a process asking for forgiveness from God, through sacrifice and hardship. The idea being that Jesus suffered for our sins and Christians should go through suffering for the forgiveness of their sins. Many of the historical pilgrims



would wear the same clothes throughout the pilgrimage to Santiago and the blessing in the mass at the cathedral. These filthy clothes would represent their sins and once they had been blessed in the mass they would be forgiven. They then would remove their clothes to symbolise the removal of sin from their lives. Then they would walk to Finisterre and ritually burn their dirty clothes as a sign of their sins been taken away.

This process enables one to call the Cathedral in Santiago de Compostela a sacred place. As the process of being forgiven of your sin connects one to the divine, as it is God who takes the sin away. This is also spiritual, as the forgiveness of sin demands one to communicate with an unseen, spiritual God for the sin to be forgiven.

- 3) Thirdly, many of those who now walk the Way of St James are not Christians or religious. They are doing it for many different reasons but some of the overriding reasons are that it brings a “pilgrim” (one who walks the way) a sense of achievement. The goal of reaching the cathedral in Santiago the “sacred” end to your journey to achievement and your purpose. For many today, this sense of achievement and the overcoming insurmountable obstacles is a “sacred” goal. Walkers will cherish and document the success of reaching the goal, even the most secular will attend the pilgrim's mass to complete their sacred process.

There are aspects to this that could be considered spiritual but I want to focus on another aspect to discuss the spiritual side of the Camino.

- 4) All along the Camino are pillars that mark the number of kilometres to the destination in Santiago de Compostela. On most of them are same stones that denote the laying off of personal burdens as the pilgrim feels they have let them go.



The theory behind this ritual is that pilgrims will bring stones with them that represent a particular burden in their lives. This could be a bad relationship, a personal problem that one is endeavouring to overcome or the loss of someone. When the pilgrim believes that they can let go of this issue they will leave the stone on the kilometre marker where it happens.

This is a most spiritual matter. No one can say how burden you are by the issue; no one can measure the release from this issue or whether it will be permanent or not, this is a spiritual occurrence that touches each person who walks the Walk of St James. Whether they be a believer or not. It is something without clinical understanding but is something that edifies the very essence of each pilgrim and this is one of the most spiritual aspects of the Camino.

