

## Examples of students' Coursework drafts

*Thank you to those teachers and students who kindly allowed us to explore the following examples of work. It is suggested that these drafts are read in association with the document 'Monitoring students' Coursework homework'.*

***These drafts do not constitute sample answers nor do they indicate any particular assessment standard for the purpose of State Examination.***

### ***Religious Education Support***

#### ***Coursework: Exploring students' work***

***The following material does not constitute a sample answer***

### ***SECTION G: WORSHIP, PRAYER AND RITUAL***

☉ Buddhism ☉ Christianity ☉ Hinduism ☉ Islam ☉ Judaism

- An exploration of the features which mark a particular place as sacred for **one** of the above major world religions.

#### **Example 1:**

An exploration of the features that mark a particular place as sacred for one of the major World Religions (Christianity)

#### **Part A**

For my coursework as part of my religious education class I choose the title, "An exploration of the features which mark a particular place as sacred (Christianity)". I choose this title primarily because it was of great interest to me and the sacred place I have chosen is Lourdes at the foot of the Pyrenees in the South of France. My reason for choosing Lourdes is based on my family's experiences and the opportunity to travel there myself. Also the areas rich cultural and religious history was an incentive to choose Lourdes for my coursework. My investigations into what makes Lourdes a sacred place were concentrated on the cures and miracles that took place in Lourdes in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary to a young girl called Bernadette. Having heard about Lourdes and my family's devotion to this sacred place, I was given the opportunity to explore this place for myself as part of the [ ] Diocesan pilgrimage later that year. My aunt, who had for many years fundraised to send sick people to Lourdes, was very supportive in helping me with my exploration of the features that make Lourdes a sacred place.

"The sustained attraction of religious mystery and adherence" is the question used by Scholar Ruth Harris as she focused her investigations on Lourdes. I applied the same question to my coursework as I tried to learn of the features that reveal Lourdes to be a place of worship for Christian and non-Christian pilgrims. Harris' work was not the only source for my explorations in Lourdes; I also found web based material extremely useful in my research. Websites generated by Google and Yahoo on key words (Lourdes, Bernadette etc.) include [www.lourdes-france.org](http://www.lourdes-france.org), [www.catholic.org/clife/mary/lourdes1.php](http://www.catholic.org/clife/mary/lourdes1.php) and various others which are included in the reference section. I also used many books from the school and public library to further my understanding of Lourdes. Books I used as part of my investigations include "Lourdes" by Gerard Ausina and Luigi Prodomi, Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the/ Secular Age by Ruth Harris, and the World Encyclopaedia by assorted authors. Aside from sources I have afore-mentioned, my own personal experience led me to greater understanding of this features that make Lourdes sacred. I gathered information for my coursework by interviewing pilgrims who I accompanied, other youth helpers, numerous Brancardiers (Non-Medical helpers who assist the sick in Lourdes), accompanying teachers and handmaids who volunteer on the Accueil (a hospital near the Grotto in Lourdes that cares for the pilgrims during the duration of there stay). These personal accounts of why Lourdes is sacred to them provided invaluable support for my coursework. The material found as part of my investigation is greatly complimented by the personal accounts of pilgrims and helpers in Lourdes.

As part of my coursework I had to learn new skills that would enable me to carry out my exploration to the highest standard. I had a structured plan for my coursework but even so numerous problems arose which I had to develop skills to overcome. Loss of web material and the unavailability of books of the specific topic of how Lourdes may be defined as sacred were among the problems that presented themselves. I enquired how to use the *Dewey* Decimal System in both my school and public libraries to further organise how to structure my coursework. I found this an invaluable skill in allowing me to develop my understanding of the task. I further detail the skills I used in Part B.

The findings of my explorations were both striking and thought-provoking. Lourdes was officially recognised by the Catholic Church on the 18<sup>th</sup> of January 1862 by Bishop Laurence, Bishop of Tarbes. This was: after a local priest, Father Dominique Peyramale was told by Bernadette that she was the "Immaculate Conception or "que soy era Immaculada Councepcion" in Latin (this is the inscription in the Grotto in Lourdes) .. According to the official Lourdes website there have been 67 miracles or cures in Lourdes to date. Diseases cured include TB, Multiple Sclerosis (a disease in which a Brother called Leo Schwager of Switzerland was cured of in 1956). Apart from the documented cures there is the miracle of acceptance in which one is able to accept their illness and receive strength. This acceptance helps those with a life threatening illness or condition come to terms with their life; I would consider this a miracle in itself and shows a miracle isn't always a physical healing of wounds. The word "sacred" is defined as "regarded with reverence". These findings showed me that Lourdes is a sacred place for many Christians and this was again shown in 2004 when Pope John Paul 11 visited Lourdes not as the pontiff of the World's largest church but as a humble pilgrim. The respect shown in Lourdes is yet but another feature that makes Lourdes truly a sacred place. (Word count = 818)

**References :** [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) and [www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com)

[www.lourdes-france.com](http://www.lourdes-france.com)

[www.catholic.org](http://www.catholic.org)

[www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)

[www.newadvent.org](http://www.newadvent.org)

[www.catholic-forum.com/saints/saintb06.htm](http://www.catholic-forum.com/saints/saintb06.htm)

[mike.freise.com/pilgrimage/paris/bernaut.html](http://mike.freise.com/pilgrimage/paris/bernaut.html)

[www.catholicpilgrims.com](http://www.catholicpilgrims.com)

[www.ewrn.com/library/MARY/BERNADET.htm](http://www.ewrn.com/library/MARY/BERNADET.htm)

[www.wav.org](http://www.wav.org)

All above websites were fully functional at time of research, for general websites further searches were carried out to locate relevant

Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age by Ruth Harris Lourdes

An Official Production

Material received from the [ ] Diocesan Pilgrimage. A large part of my investigations were carried out in Lourdes in September 2007 on a personal pilgrimage, interviews for the coursework were arranged for and carried out in Lourdes.

## ***Religious Education Support***

### ***Coursework: Exploring students' work***

***The following material does not constitute a sample answer***

#### **Example 2:**

##### PART A

The title I chose for coursework is from section G: Worship, Prayer and Ritual: **'An exploration of the features which mark a particular place as sacred for one major world religion.'** The particular place I have chosen is The Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes which is the area surrounding the shrine (Grotto) to Our Lady of Lourdes in the town of Lourdes, France. This site is a sacred place to Christianity. In my exploration I hope to ascertain how the features of this sacred place have caused it to be one of the world's leading Catholic Marian shrines.

My first step was experiential, with my first hand experience of Lourdes. My investigation began last year when I went to Lourdes in September as part of the 2007 [ ] Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes from the [ ] to the [ ] of September. I was lucky enough to experience this sacred place first hand as a helper of the sick pilgrims. I gained a great insight into what makes this particular place one of the most sacred sites in Christianity and how it signifies so much to the members of the Catholic Church who go on pilgrimage there. Through the priests, nurses, chaplains and pilgrims I met through out the pilgrimage they helped forge my opinions for this coursework. As I absorbed as much information as I could during the pilgrimage. I found that my people skills where put to the test. Some of the sick pilgrims' health was very fragile and I had to be careful not to upset them. By the end of the pilgrimage in Lourdes I had acquired a new sensitivity to the needs of others.

On my return from Lourdes I initiated my next step in my research on the coursework. This was the main body of researching I carried out. It involved firstly searching up web based materials. I found [www.lourdes2008.com](http://www.lourdes2008.com) and [www.lourdes-france.org](http://www.lourdes-france.org) among the most helpful of sites. The Dublin Diocese also has a good website, [www.dublindiocese.ie](http://www.dublindiocese.ie). Next I went to the local library and found some interesting books on the history of St. Bernadette and Lourdes, Lourdes In Bernadette's footsteps by Fr Joseph Bordes and Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age by Ruth Harris. I also found 'Funk and Wagnalls New encyclopaedia' to be a great help when searching for the general information on the area of southern France. The Concise Oxford Dictionary also helped. I used my researching skills to find the best information I could on the different mediums, computers etc. I used search engine web pages to find the information I needed. I also established that I needed these research skills in order

to use the library to full its extent. I had to apply a critical approach here as there were many sources available to me.

The next stage in my investigation was to conduct an interview with a woman named Laura Motherway a student nurse who has been going to Lourdes for the past 3 years. I conducted the interview by asking her a number of questions which I wanted to be answered by someone who had returned to Lourdes on consecutive occasions. I needed to have a different personal view point to help my investigation. I used skills that I haven't used before, the ability to interpret, contrast and evaluate different approaches to a topic. I decided on an interview because I felt that it added a human touch to the topic which a survey would never be able to do.

Final step was firstly a period of self reflection to contemplate my thoughts on this coursework. I then went on to amalgamate all my information I had collected and began to sort through and edit by discarding what I believed to be irrelevant. I sought to have a finished piece which presented my ideas concisely and cogently. My analytical skills became my most versatile tool in this step of the topic in the assimilation of my personal experience with the other perspectives I came across.

On undertaking this coursework I naturally discovered many fascinating facts along the way. The sacred is defined by The Concise Oxford Dictionary as a safeguarded or required by religious, reverence, or tradition. The Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes was the site where in 1858 a Bernadette Soubirous claimed to have experienced a series of apparitions which is a religious experience characteristic of sacred places. This is what initially caused Lourdes to become a sacred place however, there is a lot more involved to making it sacred. In my Interview with Laura Motherway we touched on the question of what makes this place so sacred to the sick. She replied "That Lourdes is the most peaceful place on earth this along with their desire to be in the place where their lady appeared for them and a place to pray and reflect makes Lourdes so sacred". She also spoke about the importance of mass in Lourdes. There are masses every day being offered up for different intentions and usually by heads of different catholic churches presiding over them. Candle light processions highlighted the reverence shown by the pilgrims for this hallowed area. The Stations of the Cross are also daily occurrences. Pope Benedict XVI has recently authorized special indulgences to mark the 150th anniversary of the Virgin Mary's reputed appearance at Lourdes, this shows the Church's continued awareness of the importance of Lourdes to their followers.

(Word count = 908)

## PART B

The reason why I chose my title is simply a combination of a huge interest in the expression of faith by sick pilgrims, youth helpers and my desire to learn more about a place which has left its mark on me. Thanks to Lourdes's rich history and remarkable occurrences I found it very enjoyable to explore. Also when I was in Lourdes I never fully understood the connection between the pilgrims and the sanctuary, so this also attracted me to the title.

Upon undertaking the coursework I came across many different perspectives spanning from the official stances of the Catholic Church, well known literary figures, my own perspectives and finally other people who have experienced Lourdes. It's natural for people to have different opinions. It's what makes us human. For example I found a very harsh commentary on Lourdes from Richard Dawkins in his Channel 4 TV programme, *The God Delusion*. He argues that 'the hard fact is, over the years, with their millions of pilgrims, there have been 66 supposed miracles'. I found this man's perspectives to be very one dimensional. He doesn't see that millions of visitors to Lourdes have benefited spiritually from its presence. Laura Motherway's perspective was that of an optimistic young person who wants to help and advance her spiritual beliefs at the same time. She explained to me how Lourdes has a profound effect on her. When I asked her about it she replied "you just can't really explain it", I can defiantly relate to her on this. When you're asked about your pilgrimage to Lourdes I find I'm always lost for words. That's just the effect the sanctuary of Lourdes has on you. I felt this most when I was at a midnight prayer session at the Grotto, the silent serenity was astounding.

Many interesting and challenging questions arose on the way to accomplishing my coursework. I personally found the first question which arose to be the most challenging and rewarding. What makes Lourdes so sacred to all the millions of people who have travelled there? Well like most questions which arise from unusual occurrences, they by nature are arduous to decipher. However you can only form your own ideas and present them as best you can. Another question which confronted me was how the special waters of the baths cured so many people through out the years? This answer eluded me initially as there is no scientific evidence to prove it. However the answer which I received from my interview with Laura Motherway, "I believe that the waters have healing powers for those who believe in them and who have faith in Our Lady".

Upon completing my coursework I believe that my own personal views have altered. I have gained new fascinating insights into this title. At the beginning of the coursework I only knew my own views on Lourdes. This limited my outlook on the exploration. Nevertheless due to nature of how I conducted the coursework it allowed me to develop deeper appreciation for Lourdes. In my research of books, other forms of media and my interview. I now have different perspectives on which to form a

fresh insight on my own spiritual mentality. Also this coursework has helped my awareness of other people's faith and to have a greater respect for them.

There have been many valuable parts to my exploration. But if I had to decide I would have to say the most valuable part of this entire coursework to me was the mix between experience and academic research which I rarely venture into in my daily life. I have learned to think laterally thanks to all the different stages which I have undertaken in the coursework.

(Word count = 618)



## *Religious Education Support*

### *Coursework: Exploring students' work*

*The following material does not constitute a sample answer*

#### **Example 3:** Mecca: What makes it holy and Sacred *Part A*

What makes a place holy and sacred? Its symbolism, its history or its meaning for the people who worship it. For Muslims throughout the world Mecca in Saudi Arabia is the holiest and most spiritual place in all Islam. Its importance stretches back to Biblical times. God ordered Abraham to send his wife and child there. The child kicked the ground in frustration out of thirst and the Zom Zom well shot up there. Since this old parable Muslims have been going to Mecca from 632 a.d after Muhammad led the first pilgrimage there. Since that old parable every Muslim performs the Hajj once in his life. I wished to understand that a) does Mecca hold the same symbolism and importance as it did in 632ad and b) what is the importance of Mecca beyond historical value?

#### **Sources used in Coursework**

In my coursework I had to rely upon a number of sources. These sources varied from factual and informative to historical and political to spiritual and ecumenical. Encyclopaedia Britannica: This source was primarily factual and informative. It was crucial to me at the start of my coursework. It contained a condensed and balanced definition as to what the Hajj is and its purpose. Its easy layout enabled me for more complex reading that I was to ensue with.

'One Thousand Rods to Mecca' by Michael Waife; Grove Press 1997. This was a more advanced study into Mecca. Historically it was unsurpassed, it was my best source. It contained a detailed look into the origins of Mecca for Muslims, the predating pagan rituals and a wonderful prologue talking about Mecca in a geo-political context today. Its interviews with leading scholars such as Mircea Eliade and many other key Muslim imams were particularly entertaining.

'The Great War for Civilization' by Robert Fisk; Penguin 2004. This source was the beginning of my interest in Mecca. I have a passion for history and current affairs and this one of my favourites. It deals with conflict in the Middle East primarily. However in one chapter Fisk meets three Mujahadeen warriors from Afghanistan during the Russo-Afghan war of 1979-1989. The men wish to travel to Mecca and Fisk interviews them. It is an enthralling interview which began my fascination with Mecca.

'In the Presence of Mystery' by Michael Barnes. This source was a spiritual and theological one. It examined the ecumenical importance of ritual and symbols in world religions. It contained many excellent insights into Mecca and the Hajj dealing the symbolism of the rituals and how the rituals bear importance on a Muslim's daily life that they do in Mecca.

'Le grand Voyage by Ismael Ferroukhi. 2004. This was more of an influence than a source. This film was about a Muslim father and son who travel from France to Mecca by car. It is a deeply moving story but the director's commentary was very important for my coursework. The film was the first film to be shot at Mecca.

While doing this coursework the most crucial *steps* were the first. Reading through my various sources, collecting information and fine tune my essay of Mecca. I found that this process required many skills.

#### **Skills Used**

The first process was obtaining sufficient information on Mecca and Islam. I was particularly wary at avoiding the internet as it is a misleading and false source sometimes. For this reason I stayed to books as it was easy to see if they were valuable as sources. Also they contained a more advanced bibliography section which helped for further reading.

### ***Analysing Information***

The most challenging aspect of the coursework process was analysing and cross-referencing my sources. This was a process that was relatively new to me. Many sources contradicted one another on dates. For example “Encyclopedia Britannica” states Muhammed’s 1<sup>st</sup> pilgrimage to Mecca was in 632ad, while “1000 Roads to Mecca” uses 629 AD as its date. Also attempting to select crucial information that was necessary was another key challenge.

### ***Communication***

A skill that I found most relevant to my education and myself was Communication. It was vital to be able to communicate my learning and summaries efficiently and clearly without losing focus of my key objective what makes Mecca such a Holy place. Mecca: What makes it Holy and Sacred

Mecca is situated in the east of Saudi Arabia. Every year between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> days of Dhul Hijjah (an Islamic month) millions congregate to perform the rituals of the Hajj. The Hajj is the 5<sup>th</sup> pillar of Islam and the main pilgrimage for the religion. Mecca is associated with Islam and Muhammed. However its sacredness predates Christianity. It was a place for pagan idolatry for Arabian religion. It dates for at least 2500BCE when religious artefacts were discovered by archaeologists. Michael Barnes believes its importance may from its physical beauty rather than a particular symbolic value. It was near a port and many sailors gave thanks to their pagan gods after voyages through the Indian Sea. As a landscape it was scenic and contained a fresh-water well. These aspects led to its pagan symbolism. As the Christian Church used many pagan festivals, such as Lughnasa, to increase Christianity, Islam began to use Mecca as a symbol of unity for Muslim. By allowing their religion to be influenced by customs they could build a more faithful following. Barnes states that rituals have been part of human activity since the beginning of time, they told the stories of a reality in a comprehensible way for people. This is very true during the Hajj. The ritual such as Eid ul-Adha is a ritual that signifies defiance at the devil. In the ritual the pilgrims throw stones at the devil. This is supposed to emulate that in life must be struck back with will and resolve. The rituals that Mecca and Hajj provide for Muslims help them to understand their duty in life. From understanding these rituals I can understand why Mecca is Holy and Sacred for Muslims. It teaches them about their duty in life.

The Holiest site is the Ka’ba. It is believed to have originated during the second century ad., built by King Bin-al-Faisal. It is a large black stone covered by a kiswa (a black silk scarf). All Muslims pray towards the Ka’ba. When in Hajj, ritual is to circumnavigate the Ka’ba 7 times and attempt to kiss it. The history of the pilgrimage is also fascinating. . It began in 632 Ad when Muhammad led a group of followers to Mecca. They performed all the rituals that exist today and spent 8 days there. After Muhammed’s death his followers went again and soon it became tradition. The history associated with the pilgrimage make Mecca a holy and Sacred place.

During the Russo-Afghan Robert Fisk a journalist, went to report on the conflict. The war was very bloody and the scars of war are still evident in Afghanistan today. Fisk met three Mujahadeen warriors when were leaving Afghanistan to go Mecca during battle. Fisk asked them if not be better to stay home and defend their families and homeland. One of them replied “we are men of Afghanistan and we love our country but we are not violent men. It is against Allah’s will to be violent. For us Mecca will bring peace and salvation. I love my country but every Muslim’s heart is in Mecca. In Mecca there is no nationality only men all linked to Allah. “This interview answered my question son Mecca. Its ritual and mystery make it holy and sacred. But it has a deeper meaning, a semblance of unity and peace. It links all men together. It is firmly within the soul of a Muslim. Its holiness and sacredness for its unique interpretation for each Muslim and what it means for them. That is what makes Mecca so holy and Sacred.

### ***My interest in Mecca***

My main reason of interest was my love of history and current affairs. In today’s world war is waged directly because of religion. The growing Islamic fundamentalism is an area of interest. I wanted to explore into a different side of Islam. The collapse of Communism and the failure of Marxism to overcome the stigmas of atheism has made Islam seem an attractive ideological weapon. I wanted to explore the opposite side to that argument.

Another interest came from the film “Le Grand Voyage” directed by Ismael Ferroukhi. This film was more of an influence than an interest. It explored the Hajj and its rituals in a simple and moving way. Ferroukhi was allowed to shoot the first film ever in Mecca during the Hajj. During the scenes at the Ka’ba no one looked at the camera. Ferroukhi explained that “everyone there was in his own world and did not wish to break their peace with Allah at that time.”

My final reason for choosing the title was my holiday in Dubai last year. My family and I spent time in the ever changing metropolis of Dubai. I was fascinated by the growing multiculturalism and consumerism present in Dubai. Alcohol is no longer barred and pork and non-halal meals are eaten. It appeared to me that Dubai had sacrificed its culture and heritage for money and consumers. I thought this to be in sharp contrast with Mecca’s sacredness and holiness. (Word count = 1555)

### **Part B**

#### ***Perspectives of Mecca***

While doing this coursework I attempted to maintain a balanced look upon Hajj. The perspectives I chose were distinctly different and contrasting. For example the 3 men Robert Fisk met were soldiers who have killed people. They have broke a sacred rule of Islam irregardless of their political situation. These men represented an urgent and quasi urgent perspective. I wished to see if Islam and Mecca played such a role in their lives despite the atrocities they’ve committed. And to see what it would mean for them to go there.

In contrast to that was the perspective of Ismael Ferroukhi. The film he directed “Le Grand Voyage” is a true story about him. As youth growing in Marseille he felt out of touch with Islam. His father was a devout Muslim who arose every day at 6am to pray. The trip was a very moving and emotional one. The father and son as people were in contrast to the soldiers from Afghanistan yet they showed a unique bond in their urgency to go to Mecca. This really enthralled me.

The third perspective was a factual and historical one. Both the Encyclopaedia Britannica and Michael Waite helped to provide a basis of understanding and comprehension of Mecca. This perspective enabled me to fully understand the other perspectives and in this regard was the most crucial.

#### ***Question Time?***

One aspect of the course work I enjoyed was the amount of learning I achieved and how I still yearned to know more and learn more. I am a very curious and inquisitive person. The great thing about Mecca as my coursework was that I ended with more questions than I began with. This has made my wish to further my learning of Mecca. At the beginning my questions were factual and informative on

“Where does the Hajj date from?”, Or

“Where do the rituals come from?”

However as I learned more the question became more and more subjective and personal. They became more spiritual and ecumenical eg

“What makes Mecca so spiritual and holy?”, Or

“Will Mecca survive the consumerist transformation that Dubai has suffered?”

#### ***Most Valuable aspect to coursework***

There are 2 aspects of the coursework that were valuable. The first was what I learned about Mecca and the second was what I learned about my self.

I have learned about a new and exciting part of a major world religion, its symbolism and importance for Muslims in today’s world and back in 632 Ad when the fist pilgrimage took place. I have learnt about the various rituals associated with Mecca. How they represent various parts of the lives of Muslims, the defiance at evil, acceptance of good etc. I have learned about the history of the oldest pilgrimage existing in the world. (Word count = 464)

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## *Religious Education Support*

### *Coursework: Exploring students' work*

*The following material does not constitute a sample answer*

#### **Example 4:**

#### **The Bodhi-Tree Part A**

The Bodhi- Tree is the name that was given to the tree at Bodh Gaya. This was the tree that the Buddha sat under on the night that he attained enlightenment. Since then, the Bodhi -Tree has become a key symbol of the Buddha's presence and it is a place that many Buddhists visit to go to worship. The Bodhi-Tree is one of the most sacred symbols in Buddhism and many temples throughout the Buddhist world have Bodhi trees growing in them and their worship forms a crucial part of popular Buddhist goodness. The Bodhi-Tree is thought to be the most important of the four holy sites for Buddhists. This is the case because this was the site where Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, fasted for 6 days and nights before he found the state called Nirvana and was enlightened.

The tree is believed to be sacred because it was the tree where the Buddha gained enlightenment and he passed away below the shade of the two sal trees. The tree also offered both the Buddha and his monks' shelter from the sun and rain as they went through the various towns and villages along the Ganges Basin. The Bodhi-Tree obviously plays an important part in the Buddhist religion as it is a place where many go to meditate and many pilgrims additionally visit the place. These are my four features of which I will explore.

The story of the Buddha achieving enlightenment under the Bodhi-Tree is well-known in the Buddhist culture. The story is of a man who had put himself through six years of the most painstaking kinds of self-mortification. Then, he found himself under a Bodhi-tree at Bodh Gaya. He sat there, under the tree, determined to achieve his objective of enlightenment. During his enlightenment experience, the Buddha attained three types of knowledge. Firstly, he saw that he had died and been reborn many times. Then, he saw that all beings are reborn according to their deeds in life. For example, good actions led to happy states and bad actions led to wretched ones. Finally, the Buddha saw the nature of suffering. With this awareness came liberation on an experiential rather than solely intellectual level. After a month, the Buddha left to tell the world of his newfound knowledge. This story shows the vital part that the Bodhi- Tree played in the birth of Buddhism and it also emphasizes how this place is seen as a spiritual representation for Buddhism as many Buddhists visit the place to meditate.

The Bodhi -Tree, also known as the wisdom-tree, is a set of four distinct Buddhist meditations. Each meditation is based on an insight that the Buddha experienced more than twenty-four centuries ago. The Bodhi-Tree is a sacred symbol in Buddhism for several reasons. First of all, it represents the place of the Buddha's enlightenment, and as a result, is sacred geographically. It is also a sacred symbol because it is ancient. Many people think that it is the mythical World Tree. For that reason, it is sacred temporally. The Bodhi-ree represents growth towards freedom and liberation. Therefore, it is sacred developmentally. Also, it was said to rain blossoms, and is thus sacred aesthetically. The Bodhi-Tree is a symbolic representation of the individual's journey to infinity. As the seed which begins small and hard grows open and free, so should the mind and heart. The traditionalist may justify behaviour by Buddhist or other ethics and ritual, but will ultimately seek comfort rather than freedom. Such people should rest peacefully at the roots of the tree and never climb it. I got this information from <http://www.wisdom-tree.com/>and I found this crucial to my project as it gave me an important insight into the spirit of the tree and what it symbolizes.

I used a variety of web based sources to research my coursework. I found the site <http://buddhism.about.com/od/lifeofthebuddha/a/Bodhitree.htm> to be very helpful as it gave me an interesting insight into the story of when the Buddha first gained enlightenment under the Bodhi-Tree. I also learnt more about the history of the Bodhi-Tree by looking through this sight. The website <http://www.wisdom-tree.com/>was also very important as it gave me a better understanding of the Bodhi-Tree meditation and I found out more about the symbol of the Bodhi-Tree and its various levels of meanings. These two sites in particular were vital to my research. I also used a range of book sources for my coursework. I used World Religions by Anita Gracie and Declan JS Moloney which gave me a vital insight into the story of how the Buddha gained enlightenment. Also, I used the book Junior Certificate Religion: A Revision Guide by Declan McGrath and Introducing Buddha by Jane Hope and Borin Van Loon.

In researching this topic for my coursework, I have learnt about the story of the enlightenment and what makes the Bodhi-Tree so sacred. I have found out the spiritual meaning of the tree and why it is such an important part of the Buddhist culture.

## **Part B**

I chose to do my coursework on the Bodhi-Tree because I was eager to learn more about the Buddhist religion and I felt that by researching a sacred place of Buddhism, I would achieve my main objective. This title interested me because this was the place where the Buddha first gained enlightenment and sowed the seeds for the beginning of Buddhism. This place is considered to be one of the most sacred religious places in the world so I was undoubtedly interested in finding out the history of the Bodhi-Tree and what makes it so sacred. I felt that by researching a key place in the Buddhist religion, it would be a significant experience. I was interested in doing the Bodhi -Tree as my coursework because I studied Buddhism for Junior Cert and I wanted to explore more about the history of this fascinating religion. I chose the Bodhi-Tree because it has such a rich history.

Through doing my coursework, I have gained many personal insights.

First of all, I have gained a better understanding of the Bodhi-Tree and its place in the Buddhist religion. I discovered what an important symbol the Bodhi-ree is for Buddhists, as they believe that it represents growth towards freedom and that it is a symbolic representation of one's journey to infinity. I was able to gain these personal insights by looking at the history of the tree and what it represents for Buddhists. I was given a good insight into the story of the enlightenment, when the Buddha first gained enlightenment under the Bodhi-Tree. I found out that this is the story that makes the Bodhi-Tree so sacred, as the Buddha showed great patience in waiting before achieving his goal. I think that the most important insight I have gained on the Bodhi-Tree was finding out the true spiritual meaning of the tree because this is why Buddhists see the importance of the tree in their religion.

Doing my coursework on this title, I found some interesting perspectives on the Bodhi-Tree. For example in the book Symbols in Art and Religion: The Indian and the Comparative Perspectives by Karel Werner, he states that the Bodhi - Tree is undoubtedly the most important sacred tree of the Buddhism and that this tree can "symbolize the enlightened mind." In his opinion, the Bodhi-Tree is the definitive symbol of the Buddhist Religion. I would agree with his perspective because Siddartha Gautama was sitting under the Bodhi- Tree when he found a state called Nirvana, release from suffering and selfishness, a condition of perfect happiness, truth and peace, which I think shows how this tree can truly be a symbol of the enlightened mind.

When I began doing my coursework on this title, I was looking to answer some questions. For instance, what is the true spiritual meaning of the Bodhi- Tree? And why is it such a vital symbol for Buddhists? In particular, discovering the spiritual meaning for the tree was pivotal for me because this is what makes the tree so special and unique. After finding out the spiritual meaning of the Bodhi-Tree, I realized that its spiritual meaning and the fact that the Buddha gained enlightenment for the first time under this tree is what makes it so essential for people of the Buddhist religion. These were the main questions that arose during my study of the Bodhi - Tree and I knew that it was vital to my coursework that I found out the importance of the Bodhi- Tree.

The most valuable part about doing coursework on this title was the quality of the sources that gave me a very good insight into the history and spiritual meaning of the Bodhi-Tree and it was always going to be essential to my coursework that I had sources that could give me guidance on my project and crucially, show me the key details of the Bodhi-Tree so I could focus in on three or four important areas to examine. I have found that the experience and the skills that I have gained from undertaking this coursework will be very useful to me in the future. I have found the Bodhi-Tree to be a fascinating topic that plays an important role in modern day Buddhism as a place where people can reflect. I feel as if I have achieved what I set out to do when I began this project and that was to get a good feel of what the Bodhi- Tree really symbolizes for people.



*Religious Education Support*

*Coursework: Exploring students' work*

*The following material does not constitute a sample answer*

**Example 5:** An exploration of the features which mark a particular place as sacred (Buddhism)

**Part A:**

**The sources I used were as follows:**

- 1) Wheel of Time (film) by director Werner Herzog Viewed on : 17/11/07 in the Irish Film Institute, Dublin
  - 2) Pilgrims by Lena Herzog( Photography book which accompanied above film) - Publisher: Periplus publishing LTD.
  - 3) The Sacred and Profane by Mircea Eliade Publisher: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich
  - 4) The Elementary Forms of Spiritual life by Emile Durkheim Publisher: Oxford World Classics
  - 5)Website: [Http://www .sacredland.org/world\\_sites\\_pages/Mt Kailash. html](http://www.sacredland.org/world_sites_pages/Mt_Kailash.html)
- Date of download: 14/11/2007

**Steps and Skills of my investigation:** On receiving my prescribed titles I began to research sacred sites. I knew I had an interest in Eastern religion, in particular Buddhism and this led me to Mt Kailash. I discovered the site through the book 'Pilgrims' which I found whilst browsing a local books shop.

My next step was to begin internet research, this provided me with both the sacred lands site and essentially, the information that Wheel of time, which was the film that pilgrims was based on, was going to be played at the IF!. This film gave me a strong and clear impression of Kailash, Herzog's narration often dealt with the symbolism and importance of Kailash to Buddhists. The Mandala, their most skilled Monks sand picture of 'oneness', is meant to recreate the perfection of Kailash. This symbolism most definitely contrasted with the modern city awaiting me when I left the city.

From here I wanted a more academic and less aesthetic view of Kailash. I wanted to understand the concept of the sacred, objectively, and apply its principles to Kailash.

Thus, I went to my local library and began researching. This led me to Durkheim text and ultimately Eliade's. This would become my anchor text and a theoretical Skelton for my work. On a more personal level, I also attempted meditation and prostrations, two stalwarts of those who worship at Kailash. Although I may not have reached nirvana, I certainly gained an insight into the type of worship performed by the pilgrims who venture to that unique place.

## Summary of findings:

Mt Kailash, deep within the Himalayas, struck me as a truly mysterious place. It is sacred to four of Asia's main faiths Buddhists, Hindus and those of the Jain and Bon faiths. My research led me to the conclusion that it is, what Eliade calls, an Axis Mundi, a place where the spiritual and physical realms intersect, a centre of the world.

The first feature to suggest this is its location. Herzog describes the area surrounding it as 'vast and solitary, no trees, no vegetation',<sup>2</sup>. It is several weeks travel from any real civilisation. On this land, and from the mountain flow the four biggest rivers of the Indian subcontinent, or their tributaries. The Sutlej, Indus, Brahmaputra and even Ganges originate there. This fact adds, I feel, to the eerie fact that the mountains shape is that of four sheer faces, each matching a point on the compass. Thus it is, I believe, the mountains status as a 'geographical enigma'<sup>3</sup> which has made it a sacred for the, 'religious man' for so long.

Modern Buddhists, on the other hand" revere it for its mythical and spiritual history. There are many stories surrounding its past. It is said that roughly a thousand years ago the shamanistic monk 'Milrepa' reached enlightenment at the mountain, enabling him to ride to its peak on a ray of sunlight. In doing so he defeated the hero of the Bon religion - Naro Bon Chung. This story is essential for Buddhists as it is key moment in the religions historical development. They would thereafter incorporate many bon traditions. Roughly 200 years after that, a monastery beside Kailash was the home of the famed monk Padmasambhava, who introduced Buddhism to Tibet from India. This too is essential for any Buddhist seeking his faith's origins. The mountain is also said to be the home of the four-faced Buddha Demchog (also known as Herkuka Chakrasamvara). This is a deity of much importance who represents the union of bliss and emptiness, a central Buddhist creed. Therefore, Kailash's History has clearly been a main factor in conferring it with a sacred status.

This sacredness is both celebrated and, Eliade would say, 'consecrated' by the annual pilgrimage around the mountain. This is held yearly on the date of Siddhartha Gautama's birthday, the first full moon in May. The pilgrimage is a highly symbolic and ritualised event. On arrival, the pilgrims take down the previous year's prayer flags and replace them with new ones. Eliade, although he does not directly reference Kailash, suggests that actions like this are an attempt to tap into the spiritual realm, to make a Hierophany(a manifestation of the sacred). The pilgrims engage in religious behaviour, prostrating and meditating, before setting off. The pilgrimage itself is a 52 mile circumambulation called the Kora. On the path there are many smaller sacred sites like, for example, a cave where Milrepa was reputed to meditate. The journey is often uphill, some even prostrate the entire path. Tragically, 2 or 3 on average die, unable for the atmosphere, such is the spiritual pull of Kailash.

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The Buddha once said 'you cannot travel on the path before you have become the path it self's, Kailash, and its arduous trek, provides this path. It stands out in the Himalayas, ancient and mysterious, and has attributed to it numerous myths and legends which qualify it as sacred. When considering it, I cannot help but agree with Emile Durkheim's belief that a sacred place is simply one which is 'set apart or forbidden,<sup>6</sup> Kailash is most definitely this. As Materialist culture consumes the modern world, ominously surrounding even Tibet, its stands quietly defiant against the profane. (Word count = 952)

### **Part B - My personal reflection**

My interest in Mt. Kailash began as an interest in people. When I discovered the book 'Pilgrims' I saw the faces of real people who were nearly all poor and tired, yet, somehow they were happy. I was enthused by the fact that the course gave me a title with which I could study the mountain and those people, in more detail.

For me, seeing the film 'wheel of time' was definitely a turning point. It is a beautiful film which portrays the pilgrimage of Kailash in the detached and respectful manner it deserves.

The question undoubtedly rose in my head as the film came to a close 'how could people possess such an ardent faith in simply a mountain?' The deaths each year, too, had a poignant effect on me. Such zealoutry drew me in. I needed to make sense of it. I asked myself 'how must they feel, dying, breathless, on Kailash?' and 'could I do that, honestly?' I focused on the perspectives of three main people, to try to comprehend these pilgrims' faith.

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Herzog, the director, was the first of these. His perspective is that of a post-modern westerner. His camera, I noted, was always at a side angle, suggesting I believe, that he felt the limitation of his medium in capturing the hieroph<sub>any</sub><sup>7</sup> or 'religious experience' of those at Kailash. In his narration he accepts this is a deeply subjective experience that the Buddhist concept of 'emptiness' is in some way ineffable. For me, Herzog's position as a westerner made understanding Kailash easier.

His Holiness, the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, I felt, portrayed a more human and less aesthetic view of Kailash. He clearly sees Kailash as important to his faith 'the sacred peak has ... long been a focus of spiritual inspirations. Yet when questioned<sup>9</sup> as to whether or not Kailash is the centre of the world he gleefully laughs and responds with a content smile 'no no, Kailash is not the centre of the world, we ourselves, each of us is the centre of the world'. This perspective influenced my view of the 'sacredness' of Kailash in a hugely. It is only sacred in the spiritual value it provides for its pilgrims. The place singularly, is of no value.

This is an idea, I believe, that Mircea Eliade would have agreed with. His work does not directly reference Kailash, yet Kailash has many of the traits of what Eliade called a 'cosmic mountain'<sup>10</sup>. This is a spiritual centre, which, for 'religious man, <sup>11</sup> provides a 'relativity for profane space'. Thus he recognised many of the traits in part a as making

Kailash sacred, but vitally, its contrast with the non-spiritual, the ordinary things of life, the profane is what makes it truly sacred. This idea was vital to my exploration.

This project has been of great value to me. I have learned many new research skills and developed, I believe, my critical and analytical skills. It has exposed me to new ideas and philosophical concepts, previously alien to me. I have found a respect for the Buddhist tradition and understand why they have such deference for Kailash. Its most important effect on me, I believe, has been its effect on my world view. Our world is one with increasingly few 'sacred' sites, a quick internet search will reveal that even Kailash, in its relative isolation, is now a tourist destination. Its is perhaps not a pleasant insight to gain, but is undoubtedly one of our times. As to that ardent faith of those who undergo the Kora, that I still struggle to understand, but contemplating it at least, I feel, has its value.

- 1 Sacred and Profane
- 2 Pilgrims, introductory essay
- 3 Sacred and Profane
- 4Ibid
- 5 Pilgrim, p1
- 6 The Elementary Forms of Spiritual life by Emile Durkheim
- 7 Sacred an Profane
- 8 Sacredland.org
- 9 In Wheel of Time
- 10 Sacred and Profane
- 11 Ibid

(Word count = 651)

