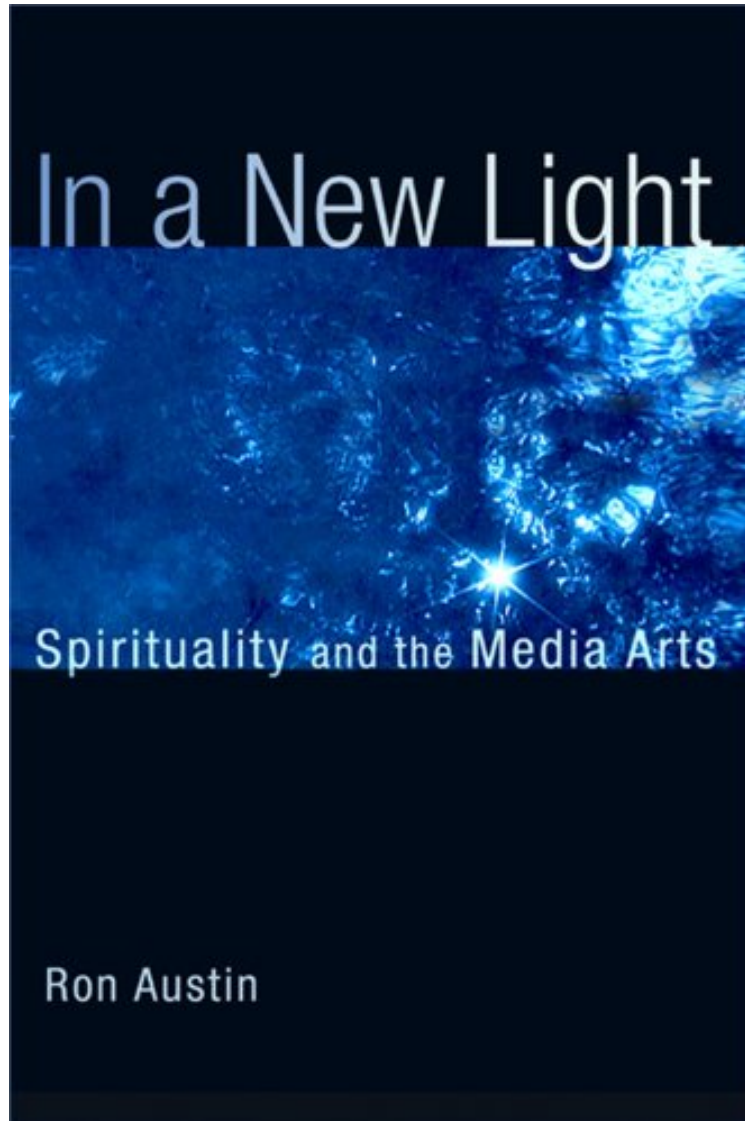


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## In a New Light: Spirituality and the Media Arts

*Ron Austin*

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**Ron Austin : In a New Light: Spirituality and the Media Arts** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised In a New Light: Spirituality and the Media Arts:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. "L.A. Loneliness" and Gambling on Transcendence - Hollywood's Past and FutureBy Thomas M. Loarie"In a New Light" author Ron Austin spent nearly a half a century in Hollywood, first as an actor, then as a writer and producer, and finally as a teacher. He notes that Hollywood was once a provincial company-town in which the privileged workers referred simply "to the industry" and outsiders as "civilians." "Now it is a banana republic ruled by interests largely foreign to its inhabitants in their dreams, and run by managers who view

the 'talent' as products on an assembly line - and as replaceable." It is a tough town that has become increasingly cold and lonely. Advances in digital technology offers the new generation of media artists - writers, directors, actors, musicians, and technicians - a new freedom, but to exercise it, they must find the courage and spiritual resources to become inspired that will move them beyond fear. This, according to Austin, requires "the emptying of oneself (to see Truth and reality)," sacrifice by serving "the Other," and "gambling on transcendence." This involves high risk, and that's why the author calls "this book an act of faith." Austin begins by establishing a spiritual foundation with the three principles common to all faith traditions - being in the present moment, affirming the mystery of the other, and transforming conflict. Writers, actors and filmmakers: \* Must empty themselves of their desires and preconceptions so they can open up their eyes to truly see. \* Make use of traditional prayers and spiritual practices which were designed to awaken us to reality, to the goodness of life, and to the illusions of desire. \* Must be grounded in a spiritual discipline. This = this far more demanding than acquiring mere artistic technique. "Being in the present moment means that all action must be based on the universal principle of self-sacrifice." As everything alive is "designed to give way, to yield itself to what is to be born." \* Must risk and suffer along with their characters to make revelation possible. \* Must treat their characters truthfully. "Are they objects to be manipulated for our own purposes or do we give them life allowing them to have depth of being?" \* Have a moral obligation to transform conflict in such a way that it forces us to delve into the fundamental sources of conflict and violence. "The objective is not to resolve or avoid conflict, but to be able to truly and fully observe and probe it. Conflict arises out of our desire to control change. Human beings both desire change and resistance: but most of all, we want to control it. Our inner conflicts only intensify as our efforts to impose our will upon the world are inevitably frustrated. These inner conflicts are then projected onto others. This is the beginning of drama." \* Must grasp evil by relating must the question of evil to our own lives and experience. (Austin, it should be noted, served as a prison chaplain at a maximum security facility and had daily encounters with evil. He provides great insights on evil.) \* Can depict evil as part of the human condition and allow it to guide us. Austin believes that this will require the artists to rediscover the sacred roots of art which is important for unity and for the film arts to move forward. \* Are morally obligated to tell the full truth about violence? What truth does violence unveil? Gil Bailie in his "Violence Unveiled" claims that the causes of the growing excesses of media violence reach back to the origins of drama itself. We will not fully appreciate what is at stake until the ancient ritual roots of the dramatic arts are exposed. Sacrifice is the religious root of drama. Ren Girard's "Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World" provides an essential insight - 'human desire is based on envy and imitation. This is the desire of two or more people for an object, person, or status, which leads to rivalry and then, inescapably to conflict and violence.' Austin continues that "the crucifixion exposes the truth about the sacrificial system that archaic myths and rituals conceal: the victim is innocent and the victimizers are intoxicated by their own violence. By revealing the truth about scapegoating, the passion of Jesus becomes the hidden foundation of contemporary drama." Once Austin establishes the spiritual foundation, he then explores unity - the search for unifying consistency and the integrity of purpose, an honesty in which an artist expresses an insight "unifying" truth and beauty. "The unity principal asserts that there is no way to separate what the film says from how it says it. Art is an unique pursuit of truth." He then goes on with his "A brief spiritual history of film" to critique the creativity and contributions of Carl Dreyer and Charles Chaplain, Jean Renoir, Vittorio De Sica and Cesare Zavattini, Federico Fellini, Eric Rohmer and Francois Truffaut, Martin Scorsese and Woody Allen, Andrei Tarkovsky and Krsysztof Kieslowksi. He shows how each responded to the spiritual needs of their time and significantly advanced the film art form. The book also includes a "Filmography" at the end of the book which lists over 100 20th century films that illustrate how the development of the cinematic art reflect the spiritual and moral concerns of their time. "In a New Light" is a short book (92 pages) that is big in content. Those interested in the history of film-making or in its future will find this invaluable. Austin feels that the agent of change is already at work as cultures and traditions converge providing a global vision, one that includes the contemporary filmmaker developing forms that render the mysterious and healing presence of God. 2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Hollywood turns its spotlights on Spirituality...By Jean-Jacques Vitrac In a New Light: Spirituality and the Media Arts (Works of Saint Augustine) Ron Austin has been a writer / producer in Hollywood for over forty years. He has worked on such TV shows as Charlie's Angels, Matlock and Mission Impossible. He is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts Sciences. First as a child actor with Charlie Chaplin, then as a screenwriter and producer, now as a professor at USC's film school, Ron Austin is a pure product of Hollywood. And yet, he wrote this book which, he says, "has been an act of Faith". "The new generation of media artists, says Ron Austin, must be prepared to "gamble on transcendence", to explore a spiritual foundation for creative work". Let's face it, this is a book about a personal conversion. This summer in San Diego, when I asked Ron Austin what his religion was all these years, he answered very simply: "Hollywood was my religion". Today, Ron Austin believes that "an authentic spirituality entails ethics - essentially, how we treat other people". His spiritual quest has allowed him to discover "inspirational figures" such as Chiara Lubich, the Italian founder of the international Catholic movement of the Focolare, and other charismatic and inspired individuals. In this book, Ron Austin explores such themes as evil, hope, imagination and redemption in the light of a deep faith. While reading this book, movie lovers will learn a great deal about the History of Cinema: Jean Renoir, Vittorio de Sica, Federico Fellini, Robert Bresson,

Ingmar Bergman, Francois Truffaut, Martin Scorsese and Woody Allen. But we also learn a lot more about Spiritual Frontiers, transcendence, modern culture, and Faith. Inspired by Chiara Lubich and her "spirituality of communion and unity", Ron Austin is writing about his personal experience and belief, his "Christian faith" which, he says, "is relevant to everything I do and write". Most of his Hollywood friends and teachers - people of honesty and integrity - considered themselves "atheists". While Ron Austin today is claiming loud and clear that whenever he is "embracing the mystery of the Other", he sense Christ's presence in his life. Yet, he knows that this is an experience not limited to people of Abrahamic faith - Christians, Muslims or Jews - but also offered to all people of good will. In that sense, his book is a "journey into Faith" which all of us can experience with Ron Austin as we read this inspiring book. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. One of the best explorations of Christianity and the arts I've ever read. By Daniel Baker One of the best explorations of Christianity and the arts I've ever read. I credit this book for a critical turn in my writing, and would recommend it to anyone who struggles to find their place in the arts.

An inside take on the intersection of film and faith Tinseltown is tarnished. Hollywood, while embracing creativity, seems to be shutting out morality and community. Can those with a Christian perspective find anything of value in such an environment or contribute anything worthwhile to it? Eying the landscape from an insider's perspective, Ron Austin answers a firm yes. Austin's *In a New Light* unpacks the spiritual principles underlying the art of film, including a historical survey of how cinematic art was shaped by the crisis of modernity. A veteran of the industry having worked nearly half a century in its environs Austin goes a step beyond the now popular course of critiquing current films from a Christian world view, espousing that the key to confronting evil in the media arts lies in the Christian attitude toward suffering. Based on several years of Austin's film making courses, *In a New Light* explores a spiritual foundation for creative film work and seeks ways to find common ground on which to build creative relationships. Austin's inside look will prove fascinating not only to students and practitioners of the media arts but to anyone interested in this aspect of popular culture. Includes 16 bw film stills.

John Furia former president, Writers Guild of America "Ron Austin, an experienced and insightful creative artist, opens a door to the wonder and the spiritual foundations essential to art, religion, and life itself." D. Michael Lindsay author of *Faith in the Halls of Power* "In a New Light opened my eyes to the rich history of cinema and the many ways art and spirituality have been linked through film over the last century. Ron Austin writes with subtlety and depth as he explores such themes as evil, transcendence, hope, sacrifice, imagination, and redemption. This is a work of broad thinking and deep faith." Gregory Wolfe editor of *Image* "Ron Austin calls himself a 'survivor' of Hollywood, but he is so much more than that. Like Melville's Ishmael floating on the vast ocean after the catastrophe, Austin has attained hard-earned wisdom and a remarkable simplicity of spirit. He calmly cuts through the incessant chatter about moviemaking and restores us to the essence of film: a loving attention to the world, including the fragile beauty of the human face, and the drama of conflict and violence being transcended by forgiveness and mercy. Just as he learned from Charlie Chaplin and Jean Renoir, so Ron Austin ought to become a guide to a whole new generation of filmmakers artists capable of making films that are more deeply spiritual precisely because they are more deeply human." Robert K. Johnson author of *Reel Spirituality* "With humanity, generosity, and a wisdom that comes from a lifetime of experience as a child actor with Charlie Chaplin himself, as a screenwriter in Hollywood, and as a professor at USC's film school Ron Austin explores the spiritual foundations of cinema. His brief spiritual history of film in this book is superb and should keep your Netflix list full for a year. Here is a small work that is anything but slight." Gil Bailie founder and president of Cornerstone Forum "As Ron Austin knows so well, the cinematic arts are capable of rescuing us from what Robert Bresson called the 'school of inattention' and reviving our capacity for deep emotion and serious reflection. Ron's marvelous meditation reminds us that the art of filmmaking remains important because we humans must be in the mood for truth and film is capable of putting us in the mood."