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### MIRCEA ELIADE

I am not a very religious person which actually ended up working to my benefit for this assignment. I was able to look at the different theorists from a very logical perspective to decide which one of their ideas made the most sense. The theorist that had the best definition of what religion really is was Mircea Eliade. Mircea Eliade believed in the sacred and the profane and the role they played in peoples lives. He also believed that people made sense of the world around them with the use of symbols and myths. In his opinion ritual was dependent on myth. His work is also centered around phenomenology, hierophany, theophany, and axis mundi.

One of the reasons that I found Eliades theory of religion so fascinating is the fact that he gives you so much detail and so many explanations as to why things are the way they are. I like to know my facts and feel like I am fully informed. The reason that Eliade goes into so much detail in his theory of religion is, because he is anti-reductionism. Reductionism is the belief that you can reduce this grand idea down to one small thing and by doing so believe you can explain it. He disagreed with that idea. For Eliade religion is a very complex thing. You can not reduce the idea of religion to one pinpoint. It has multiple origins and you must explore each and every one of them. For many people they like a simple answer “yes or no” but are you really learning all the facts and understanding why? I

like the idea that religion came not only from one thing or point, but from a combination of factors. His anti-reductionism views fit that perfectly.

One of the things Eliade is best known for is his theory on the sacred and the profane. For many the identification of the sacred and profane are easily distinguishable, although at some times the lines between the sacred and the profane begin to blur. For something to be sacred it means that it is something that you believe to be sacred because of your religion and your beliefs. Whereas the profane is considered to be things that are ordinary or things in your everyday life. I like how he says things that are sacred can also be your beliefs. Not all of your beliefs are religious ones so therefore there are some things in a person's life that can be sacred, but not be religious. He gives you so much to think about and instead of giving you these clear cut lines and rules of what can be sacred and what can be profane he allows you to actually think. This is your chance to allow your mind to wander and come to a conclusion instead of being told one and having to be ok with it. His theory allows the person more choices and not so many guidelines as other theorists. The only rule that he states in religion is the separation of the sacred from the profane. This means that each person will have a different view on what religion is, because they will each have a different idea of what separates the sacred from the profane.

Mircea Eliade was also known for his belief that without myth then rituals would not exist. Myth set the foundation for the introduction of rituals. He believed that the reason we even had myths and symbols was a way for people to make sense of the world around them. It gave them this foothold and allowed them to find something solid and real to hold

on to and focus on in the ever busy world we live in. He also thought that through the use of symbols and myths we would be able to contact with the sacred. His explanation of that makes perfect sense when you think about it. Most of the time what we believe to be sacred are how our idea of religion evolves. Many times we believe symbols or myths to be sacred. For me since I'm not the most religious person in the broad sense of the word the things that I think are sacred tend to be stories of my parents or grandparents. Some may call those myths. I also hold certain objects from my past as sacred. For me these things, these symbols and myths are my foothold in the world. When things get too busy or rough I think about what is sacred to me. Eliade believes that without myth there wouldn't be religion. I believe he is completely right. In order to have rituals you must have a pre existing knowledge of something that you can base the rituals on. For many storytelling is a ritual, but those stories are based on myths. Each theorist has a different view on this topic. It really is a "which came first the chicken or the egg" kind of a situation.

As I was learning about Mircea Eliade and his theory on religion I came across a few different words that he constantly uses. The first one is phenomenology. Phenomenology is a way of describing religion based on one's beliefs and practices. In order to find out those beliefs and your practices though you must go out in life and experience things in order to get an insiders perspective. When you really think about it this makes sense. How can you know your practices if you do not go out into the world and develop any. Also in order to figure out your beliefs you must experience things as a form of process of elimination. The next word he uses constantly is Hierophany. Hierophany means that things can appear sacred in the ordinary world. This brings us back to his idea that

there are more things sacred than just god. It is all about what you believe to be sacred. The next word that he constantly uses is theophany. Theophany is the idea that there can be the appearance of god in symbols that make them sacred. Take the cross for example. It is a symbol but you also see an appearance of god in it because of the story of how he sacrificed himself for us by being nailed to the cross. The last term that he constantly uses is axis mundi. Axis mundi is the vertical axis that links the heaven to the earth. For many this term can be confusing. The way that I have to think about it is say you are in a church there is always a tallest point on the building and most of the time that is in the center of the church where everyone gathers. That could be taken as an axis mundi.

As you can see Mircea Eliade is one of the few theorist who is anti-reductionism so therefore he goes into so much depth. He believes that you could not possibly narrow such a diverse and complicated topic as religion down to one reason or origin. He also believes in the sacred and the profane. Although he allows you to define those parameters for yourself. All he gives you is that religion is the separation of the sacred from the profane. He also talks about how without myth then there would be no rituals. He thought that those myths and symbols were a way for people to make sense of the world around them. Eliades definition of religion is the one that I find the most substantial, because he does not give you one idea at the end of his theory. You gives you multiple scenarios of what religion really is. He is one of the only ones that doesn't tell you, but instead leads you to his theory.