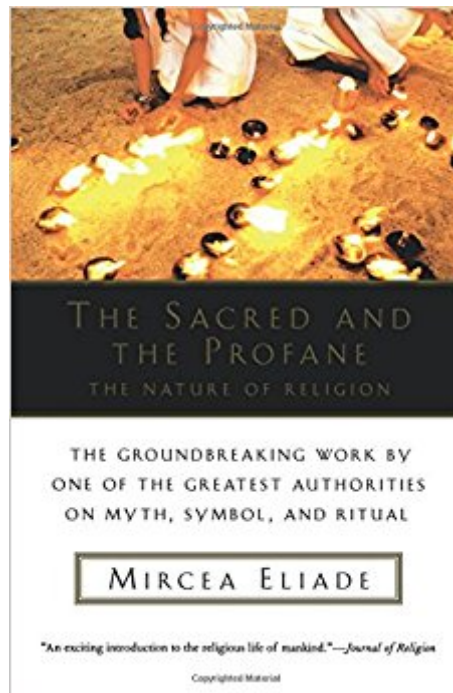




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The Sacred And The Profane: The Nature Of Religion



Synopsis

A highly original and scholarly work on spirituality by noted historian Mircea Eliade. In *The Sacred and the Profane*, Mircea Eliade observes that while contemporary people believe their world is entirely profane, or secular, they still at times find themselves connected unconsciously to the memory of something sacred. It's this premise that both drives Eliade's exhaustive exploration of the sacred as it has manifested in space, time, nature and the cosmos, and life itself; and buttresses his expansive view of the human experience.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In a book of great originality and scholarship, a noted historian of religion traces manifestations of the sacred from primitive to modern times, in terms of space, time, nature and the cosmos, and life itself. *The Sacred and the Profane* serves as an excellent introduction to the history of religion, but its perspective also encompasses philosophical anthropology, phenomenology, and psychology. It will be of concern to anyone seeking to discover the potential dimensions of human existence.

Mircea Eliade founded the modern study of the history of religions and wrote many books, including *Essential Sacred Writings from Around the World* and *The Sacred and the Profane*. Ioan P. Couliano was the professional heir to Mircea Eliade and the author of *Out of This World* and *The Tree of Gnosis*.

While modern ethnographers and cultural anthropologists will find problems with the use of the ethnographic literature, the book is important in comparative religion. As Raymond Firth noted, while his use of the ethnographic data was not good, Eliade came to the correct conclusions. The book isn't something I would recommend to everyone if for a good read on religion but for someone interested in the history of comparative religions it would fill in an important epoch of history.

This book was my first foray into Eliade's work and was it ever a powerful place to start. His insights into the delineation of sacred space and what it signifies for a community - repetition of the cosmogonic acts, the establishment of what is termed the axis mundi, or world center and point of contact between the heavens and the earth (as Delphi was viewed by the ancient Greeks, or Mount Meru by the Indians, etc...) and so on - are brief yet fully packed. He covers sacred time as well, with sections that tie in with another of his excellent books, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*. If you're interested in the study of world religions, I would highly recommend this book. In my opinion, Eliade is a standout in this area.

A classic and a must read for any student of religion. I have read this before and it is wonderful. This book went to a good home; one of my friends who studies to become a pastor received it for Christmas.

I can't seem to get through this book. I read a lot and can usually read anything. So for me, it is just okay.

The description of the book doesn't match the actual content very well. It mostly tells of how religious/spiritual people see the world, and gives examples of things they do to live more religiously. It tells of symbolism, finding and making meaning of the world, and the goal of living close to each belief system's deities, particularly by reenacting the myths of creation. I didn't find this very interesting because he seems to list things that are quite obvious. I did gain some insight, but not very much. His writing is poor and extremely repetitive. The book could easily be reduced from 213 pages (excluding the chronological survey) to less than 100 without any loss of context or information. Also, when reading, be aware that religious tends to actually mean spiritual. He speaks very little of the so-called profane life, which he overgeneralizes anyways. I still want to check out his books on shamanism, as this book contained very little regarding that.

First, I should stress that I do not entirely agree with all of Eliade's ideas. His ideas about the nature of religion strike me as interesting and probably correct in some of their outlines but also a bit dated and ethnocentric as well in some areas (a trap perhaps nobody can completely escape from). The book overall is an attempt to contrast traditional religious experience and cosmology with that of the modernist mentality. The book is generally successful in many respects though later works by other authors (works such as *Deeply into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage*, *Ritual in the Hospital: Giving Birth the American Way*, *An Article from: Special Delivery*, and others) have shown that the same isomorphisms are found in modernist thought that Eliade points out in traditionalist thought. If the modernist sees the house as a machine we live in, perhaps this is because that is how the modernist sees the universe as a whole. The body-as-machine is a well understood concept as well. But although this is not a single book which will reveal to the reader the differences between religious thinkers and secular ones, the overall thrust of the book is deeply interesting. The book covers a lot of Eliade's thoughts expressed in other works from the perspective of trying to find patterns of religious experience. If you have also read *Myth and Reality* (Religious Traditions of the World), *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History* (Bollingen), and *Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth*, you won't find a lot of new material. The same material is presented here and discussed from a slightly different perspective. On the whole the book is thought-provoking and informative. I didn't find it to be as groundbreaking as *Myth and Reality*, but it is interesting nonetheless. The focus is far more on the subjective world than these other books.... On the whole it is probably one of the best introductions to Eliade's thought that is out there.

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