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**Templum de Tempus: Mircea Eliade's Missed Connection Between Sacred Space and Time**

The words instantly stood out to me: “In this temple / As in the hearts of the people / For whom he saved the Union / The memory of Abraham Lincoln / Is enshrined forever.” Indeed, standing before the towering marble statue of America’s sixteenth president inside the grand temple built in his memory, I truly thought that I could feel the presence of Lincoln, a man who died over a century and a half ago. Without even trying, I felt awestruck by the legacy of this great man, almost like I had personally seen his life unfold – I knew at that moment that I was experiencing something sacred. In his landmark book, *The Sacred and the Profane*, theologian and religious historian Mircea Eliade defines the sacred as that which is the most real and efficacious to a person, and portrays sacred experiences as unique and often indescribable. Eliade’s book focuses on manifestations of the sacred (hierophanies) and the many ways that the sacred is experienced by religious and non-religious people alike, particularly in “sacred time” and “sacred space.” In his book, Eliade focuses on rituals as the primary method by which sacred time can be accessed and through which people can relive cosmogonic time, the time of creation. However, in his analysis, Eliade does not make a crucial connection, one which my visit to the Lincoln Memorial illustrates: that sacred space can preserve sacred time, even without a ritual. In *The Sacred and the Profane*, Eliade describes sacred time as cyclical and reversible; specifically, Eliade says that sacred time preserves the perfection of cosmogonic time. Eliade repeatedly describes why a religious person views the time of creation as perfect: the world at that time was the gods’ direct, unaltered creation, the “supreme divine manifestation” (Eliade

80), and it is the time closest to the gods' sacred, divine power. Throughout his book, Eliade describes the "ontological obsession" (94) of a religious person, claiming that religious people inherently crave being. Specifically, he says, "The sacred is saturated with *being*... Thus it is easy to understand that religious man deeply desires *to be*" (12-13). This unquenchable "ontological obsession" of a religious person explains why they go to such lengths to seek out sacred spaces and time, which are more real and efficacious than anything else. Eliade claims that the cosmogony is the paradigm for all creation and all time that came after it. Hence, a religious person seeks to return to the *time* of the cosmogony and be reminded of its perfection and unequivocal sacrality. As Eliade puts it, a religious person has a "nostalgia for the perfection of beginnings" (92) that motivates their desire to return to the cosmogonic time, even if only for a moment. Furthermore, Eliade says that returning to sacred time has "the therapeutic purpose of...[beginning] life once again" (82). By returning to that more real, more sacred time that they crave, religious people can "rejuvenate" the profane time they live in by reminding themselves and their societies of the perfection of the gods' original creation, giving life a chance to be "recreated" as the gods intended.

Eliade claims that this return to or repetition of cosmogonic time is done through rituals which repeat or symbolize the creative acts of the gods. Eliade uses the example of a New Year's celebration: "Since the New Year is a reactualization of the cosmogony, it implies *starting time over again at its beginning*, that is, restoration of...the 'pure' time, that existed at the moment of Creation" (77-78). Later, Eliade says that these New Year's ceremonies are one of two ways that a religious person can "reactualize" sacred time, the other being "participating ritually in the end of the world and in its re-creation" (80). Eliade exclusively focuses on these two types of rituals because he believes certain unique, sacred actions – rituals – must be performed for one to access sacred time and relive the cosmogony. Importantly, Eliade also claims, "For to wish to

reintegrate the *time of origin* is also to wish to return to the *presence of the gods*, to recover the *strong, fresh, pure world*" (94). As part of a religious person's quest to experience the sacred, that which is the most real, they seek to feel as if they are contemporaries of the gods and of creation, for that time of creation was to them the purest time there has ever been. Through these unique rituals, Eliade claims that a religious person can rejuvenate the profane time they live in by momentarily becoming contemporaries with the gods and with creation itself.

However, Eliade fails to recognize another means through which sacred time can be preserved: through sacred space itself, without any sort of ritual actions. Eliade does use similar terminology in his descriptions of sacred time and sacred space, describing both as a "break" or irruption in a homogeneous profanity that provides orientation to a religious person. Of sacred space, Eliade says, "In the homogenous and infinite expanse, in which...no *orientation* can be established, the hierophany reveals an absolute fixed point, a center" (21). Similar to how a return to sacred time can rejuvenate all other time that a religious person experiences, a hierophany in profane space can provide a religious person with direction and clarity, a reminder of the power of the sacred, where it otherwise would not exist. Eliade even describes the experience of sacred space similarly to that of sacred time, saying, "where the sacred manifests itself in space, *the real unveils itself*, the world comes into existence" (63). In the same way that pure, *real* sacred time rejuvenates profane time, sacred space quenches a religious person's thirst for being by revealing a more *real* world. Yet, Eliade still does not draw any major connection between sacred space and sacred time, nor does he consider that sacred time may be accessed – that the cosmogony may be reactualized – through sacred space alone, without any ritual.

My aforementioned experience at the Lincoln Memorial this Presidents' Day highlights the need for an addition to Eliade's theory. At the Lincoln Memorial, I felt much of what Eliade identifies as the experience of being in sacred space. The towering statue of Lincoln felt like

the center of my existence while in the chamber – my attention and the gazes of everyone around me were drawn to the statue’s lifeless, yet powerful and real, expression. But the Lincoln Memorial was not just sacred space; as I stood in awe of the grand statue, surrounded by inscriptions of Lincoln’s great speeches, I also felt for a moment as if I was in the presence of the *real* Abraham Lincoln, not just honoring his legacy – I felt like I was reliving sacred time. Reading his famous Gettysburg Address and second inaugural address upon the walls of the memorial, I felt like the words were being delivered live right in front of me, and I felt a motivation to not only finish reading the addresses, but to commit myself to their missions.

Abraham Lincoln’s legacy is a cornerstone of the country I live in today; in a sense, he is a creator of modern America (which is why Presidents’ Day exists in the first place). While in his memorial, the feeling of his presence tapped into my American identity – not a religious one, but a patriotic one – and motivated me to revive the possibility of progress from Lincoln’s era. As an

American trying to make sense of the profane expanse of issues facing my country today,

Lincoln’s presence was not just a guiding center (the feeling of sacred space), but also a necessary reminder of the purity of his era and a motivation to relive it (the feeling of sacred time). I performed no ritual to experience these feelings, and I did nothing special other than visit that sacred space and bask in its power and beauty, yet I still reactualized sacred time that day.

Thus, as an addition to Mircea Eliade’s theory, I propose that sacred space – especially when crafted in the image of a person, time period, or creation itself – can inherently preserve sacred time, even without the performance of a ritual. One might argue that a trip to these temples is a ritual in and of itself, but this is an inaccurate application of Eliade’s definition. When describing rituals that reactualize sacred time, Eliade says, “their intent is religious...It is a case not of an empirical operation but of a religious act” (87-88). As Eliade puts it, rituals may contain certain regular actions, but it is ultimately the intent of the person performing the act that

determines whether or not it is a ritual. When I traveled to the Lincoln Memorial, I had no such intention. I was simply visiting the site on President's Day, and the feelings I encountered there were unexpected and unsolicited. Therefore, my trip on its own was not (by Eliade's definition) a ritual to reactualize sacred time.

Yet, I still experienced those feelings because *a temple to Lincoln inherently preserves his memory and the time in which his great legacy transpired*. If sacred space is a "break" from profanity, sacred space designed to memorialize something or someone from the past – particularly a creator or creation – will also allow the irruption of sacred time into the profane present. Moreover, while my experience at the Lincoln Memorial was not a religious one, a patriotic experience is quite similar to a religious one. I did not have the "ontological obsession" of a religious person, yet I still experienced the feeling of contemporariness with Lincoln, a "creator" of my country, and I felt the power of his legacy, a more perfect, more hopeful era of sociopolitical progress. Additionally, the profane time I live in now, one riddled with political divisions and cynicism, felt rejuvenated and motivated because of my experience. In a sense, just by being in the Lincoln Memorial, I was returned for a moment to the founding of America as I know it today, to remind myself of exactly what Lincoln created and how the modern world can be recreated in its image. If a religious person were to intentionally seek out such feelings in a sacred *religious* place, one built to honor the creation of the entire world, their "ontological obsession" would undoubtedly yield a similarly fulfilling experience. This necessary addition to Eliade's theory in *The Sacred and the Profane* makes his work more complete – his theories can encompass a broader range of religious and non-religious experiences, and they can explain how non-ritual experiences like my visit to the Lincoln Memorial can still reactualize sacred time. For I have seen, as is said in the inscription above Lincoln's statue, that in his sacred temple, a tribute to his life and legacy, the memory of Abraham Lincoln is indeed enshrined forever.

**Works Cited**

Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Translated by Willard R. Trask, Harvest, 1987.