THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE SACRED INSIDE THE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Cristina SAVA[1]

Abstract

The paper entitled „The identification of the sacred inside the religious experience" approaches the concept of sacred from the point of view of the between the two wars. The research is not focused only on the word's etymology, but also on the subtle relationship between the different stages of the concept's development/ readjustment. Thus, for example, the idea that we plead for is that the Hermeneutics of the sacred reveals the soul's inclination towards the acknowledgment of the absolute through the hierophany of the symbol, subdued to the level of knowledge and will. The halving of the world, through an emotional reassesment, represents a significant step in the establishment of the sacred.

Keywords: **the sacred, symbolism, religious experience, numinous, hierophany.**

Introduction

Throughout this article we attempt to simply produce a radiography of the human experience in time and space, using notions or concepts that human knowledge usually operates with, in order to be able to identify the importance of a fundamental concept: „the sacred" as part of the „religious" experience. Our goal is to emphasize the importance of the conceptual „sacred" inside all stages of religious development of the man, especially in the period between the two world wars.

Along the years, trying to find an appropriate definition to the term „sacred" brought many difficulties. This happened due to the numerous researches made upon a large number of so-called „sacral elements", having a rich variety of other related concepts, such as: myths, rites, symbols, plants, animals , sacred places, consecrated people, cosmology, each category having its own morphology. Additional to these, methodological difficulties are to be mentioned, due to heterogeneity of the documents regarding the „sacred". The great number of hierophanies, the dialectics sacred-profane, the reassessment of the primary religious phenomenon, are regarded as epiphanies of profane realities, facts or fundamental acts which are inherent to archaic consciousness, enabling the human being to come closer to reality, to fully and efficiently integrate in a natural or social order. The difference between „sacred", understood as an *a priori* category of the rationality and „the sacred" as seen in religious experience that we try to demonstrate in our study, led to the well-known difference between internal and external revelation, between the general and special revelation, the latter making the relationship between reason and history to become available.

Starting from all these reasons and taking into consideration the opinions of some representative researchers of the phenomenon of the „sacred" as well as the recognition of their contribution in order to develop Philosophy, History, Religion and

[1] PhD. candidate, „Petru Maior" University of Târgu-Mureş.

BDD-A3084 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 19:55:34 UTC)

Hermeneutics, we try to emphasize from the outset the idea that " the sacred" always manifests itself as a reality of a completely different order of „natural" reality, representing the center of any hermeneutical approach, within the definition of *homo religiosus*.

Features of the concept of „sacred"

Considering its complete meaning, the word „sacred",represents a category which consists of both rational and irrational elements. Viewed from this perspective, the „sacred" is considered to be an *a priori*[2] category. Our language can only briefly play notions such as: *tremendum*, *majestas, mysterium fascinans* that circumscribe them, using terms drawn from the natural or secular spiritual life of man. Analogue terminology that is often used comes precisely from man's inability to express that Ganz Andere[3]. The identification of understanding the concept of „sacred", Roger Caillois in *Man and sacred* view that the term „sacred" is used most often in a figurative sense, which has by no means its original meaning. We usually understand it through an attribute which is synonymous with „absolute morals"[4] or the „perfect good"[5]. He believes that rational and irrational ideas are circumscribed to the „sacred", implying its objective existence and the indispensability of recognizing the truth.

German historian Rudolf Otto insisted on the importance of the etymological meaning of the „sacred, especially on the feeling of „sacred", considered to be living in all religions; he believes that it is the most intimate part of the religions. The historian states that this „alive" fact is felt inside both the Semitic and biblical religions. There, it has its own name, that of *qãdosh*, which corresponds to hagi and *sanctus* times, and more specific, *sacer*. In all three languages these words imply The Good and The Absolute Good, reached on the highest stage of its development. Present language uses the concept of „sacred". Deepening the interpretation and evaluation of this controversial concept, Rudolf Otto, in *Sacred*, recalls its complexity, drawing attention on the terminology that involves its composing elements.

> „It is a complex category and therefore bears within an element of a special distinctiveness, one that avoids the rational in the sense adopted above and remains completely inaccessible to a conceptual understanding, it is an *árrhèton*, something ineffable."[6]

In his deciphering of the „sacred" word, Rudolf Otto seeks Semitic equivalents, deriving from Latin, Greek and other ancient languages and considers that they primarily denote a surplus rather than a moral component, and he also does not refer exclusively to it. On the other hand, he tries to combine all the linguistic knowledge,

[2] Rudolf, Otto, *The Sacred*, in Romanian by Ioan Milea, (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 2002), 128.
[3] *Idem,* 11.
[4] Roger Caillois, *The Man and The Sacred*, translation from French by Dan Petrescu, (Bucharest: Nemira, 1997), 20.
[5] *Ibidem.*
[6] Rudolf Otto, *short title*, 11.

BDD-A3084 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 19:55:34 UTC)

methods, Ethnography, History of religions and Theology, Psychology and Mmysticism, Metaphysics and Aesthetics, a fact for which he was branded as an „irrational" philosopher, on contrary to the glory brought by his work, *Das Heilige*. It is worth noticing the philosopher's observation considering the fact that nowadays, linguistically, the given meaning of the „sacred" is a moral one. Thus, it is necessary to discover a different name that would designate what the "sacred" does not contain: the element of morality[7] and even that of *rationality*[8]. This research was necessary both for highlighting its special feature – on one hand - and for indicating its incipient forms and stages of development – on the other hand. The area of understanding deepens through the association with the term *numinous*[9] and *numinous category*[10] involving the interpretation and evaluation of the sacred; the *numinous mood*[11] that makes its presence known when necessary is associated with an object perceived as numinous. It involves an attempt to guidance, path analysis, to the point of the soul in human existence. Just as in the situation when any given original and fundamental aspect cannot be rigorously defined through the word, but can only be analyzed.

In his *The Nostalgia of Origins*, Mircea Eliade appreciates the subtle approach of the German philosopher regarding the concept of „sacred". Rudolf Otto is considered an „emotionalist", a genuine descendant of Schleiermacher. His works are appreciated as being complex and he deserves to be regarded as a philosopher of religion, the first to work with documents regarding the History of religions and Mmysticism[12].

In his study *The Man and The Sacred,* Roger Caillois points out that the Greek lexicography explains that hágos means „impurity", referring to the „sacrifice that clears up and removes the impurity". They also say that the term "hágios", noted in their studies, was used for decrypting the „dirty". The difference is fixed later, through the symmetrical *háges* (pure) and *enháges*, (cursed), marking by their transparent composition, the ambiguity of the original word. The Greek „a osioun" and the Latin „expiare" is etymologically explained as „bringing out the sacred element (from itself) (*ósios, pius*) that the impurity has introduced it."[13] Roger Caillois approaches a psychology of the „sacred" in order to emphasize the fundamental role of the pure and impure, categories that play an important role in the sphere of the „sacred". He also rejects the ideas of Father Lagrange from *La méthode historique,* where he disagreed with W.R. Smith. Callois' conclusion was:

> „we could be right in front of the impurity – and we know that it attacks the inner parts of the Being. The word that means *to purify* in „primitive" languages, they both could mean *to heal* and *to disenchant*; we could recognize the purity that we

[7] Rudolf Otto, *short title,* 11.
[8] *Ibidem.*
[9] Rudolf Otto, *short title,*12.
[10] *Ibidem.*
[11] *Ibidem.*.
[12] Mircea Eliade, *The Nostalgy Origins. History and Significance of Religion,* translation by Cezar Baltag, (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1994), 45.
[13] Roger Caillois, *short title,* 39.

BDD-A3084 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 19:55:34 UTC)

assimilate with health and then when we reach the sanctity with maximum of vitality, an extraordinary power, irresistible, dangerous right through its own intensity. Starting from here we obtain the other two categories: *sanctity* and *impure*, which are also contained into the *sacred* and the *profane".*[14]

Through its recitals, Roger Caillois takes into discussion the polarity of the sacred, referring to the two elements, *purity* and *impurity* . He believes that the sacred is affected by the coexistence of contraries: one that attracts and the other that rejects. Caillois believes that the dialectics of the „sacred", by their degree of complexity, arouse fear and desire to use it for ones self. On one way it is rejectable, on the other it seems to be simply fascinating.[15]

Religious experience in the approach of „the sacred"

If we refer to the „sacralization" of the world, this would be done from different directions, from multiple plans, that are reconsidered and valued through the perspective of the „sacred", meaning old representations about the afterlife, the soul, death, the sacred signs, deities. The world's sacralization through religious experience marks a specific moment of Gnoseology, of socio-historical practice. In specific conditions of social existence, humanity searched for ways of development, according to social laws, contrarily to religious influences. The mechanisms of social life become sacred springs, a mythical sociology twinned with a mythical history, where the sacred cosmos becomes a mythical geography. Philosophical knowledge of the world has contributed to a rediscovery of culture and a revival of the archetype, as critic Cornel Moraru considered, in his study of *Sacred Romanian poetry*.

Time, space, causality receive sacred dimensions and interpretations. Man and his whole system of usual practices, with his economical, judicial or moral standards are firmly incorporated in this process of „sacralization". The Universe becomes a closed system by hierophanies. At one moment the hierophany means „a specific way of knowledge and of world evaluation"[16]. In Al. Cistelecan's opinion, the critic, the word transposed from the general plan into the creativ one makes posible the manifest of sensibility as connection, „opening a perspective of the real only by ignoring a cultural-referential layer."[17] „The Sacred" starts an inverted action against its genesis way by mirroring the human facts, which turn deformed back upon human being.

In his study *The Sacred Genesis*, Pompiliu Caraioan names this hypostasis of „the sacred" a „mirror image", in which the human doesn't recognize himself anymore as a social and creating Being, but as „a strange and superior power, being able to influence in a way or another his own existence."[18] In the same *The Sacred Genesis*, Pompiliu Caraioan

[14] Roger Caillois, *short title*, 53.
[15] *Ibidem*: As an example we have "the sacred" character given to the „sacred" *hima* place present within the semitic religions. It is the most dangerous place, where you cannot reach without suffering serious consequences.. Luther learns (considerring the veneration of the holy places), that this is mixed with fear.
[16] Pompiliu Caraioan, *Genesis of The Sacred* (Bucharest: Scientific Publishing House,1967), 83.
[17] Al. Cistelecan, *Poetry and Bookish*, (Bucharest: Romanian Book, 1987), 8-9.
[18] Pompiliu Caraioan, *short title* , 80.

BDD-A3084 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 19:55:34 UTC)

considers that the duality of the world, starting from the fenocripts and from genesis of cartofons, pointing out an evaluation of the world, represents a decisive step in the genesis of „the sacred". The cryptic[19] does not represent only the result of a fantasy, it can bear real but „hidden" attributes of objects that become visible only in the process of refinement. The interior balance between fanic and cryptic breaks the moment when the cryptic becomes dominant to „the fanic". The improvement of „hidden" comes from the transfer that man accomplishes upon the cryptic, growing it rich by his experiences. We have to underline the idea that within the framework of cryptic there are two types of experiences: "ones are effective, real - as that of production, the other ones are false, simply mental, they are never so much as experiences, but just imaginations."[20] In connection with splitting „the sacred", Father Augustine advices that this could transmit hatred and love in the same time: „Et *inhorresco*, et *inardesco*", from one side, due to the consciousness of the absolute difference between the Being and the sacred, named eagerness, to the other side, due to the profound identity of the two. The theologian observes the conservation of the double aspect of divinity that distinguishes that element, as terrible as captivating, called the study by Rudolf Otto, *The Sacred*, *tremendum* and *fascinas*.

In one shape or another, the „religious" experience is played by Rudolf Otto in terms of *rational* and *irrational*. In his study he shows that the *rational* and the *irrational* elements of the complex so named „the sacred" category are *a priori* elements and their penetration into the religious sphere is on one hand, an internal necessity of their connection, and on the other, their insinuation in the moralization process of the divine[21] that becomes simply implied. German theologian resumes in its research study, the manner of spreading the action of „the sacred" across the world, taking the work of Fr. Schleiermacher as a starting point. This work talks about *religion*, includes speeches of erudite people who despise it and where is said about *divine* being as a possible faculty that knows and recognizes the truly sacred in its concrete manifestation.[22] Mircea Eliade in *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries* considered that the thesis of the German theologian are very appreciated in terms of originality of the perspective adopted, where the modalities of religious experience are examined and not the idea of God of religions. Gifted with a special and psychological distinction, having a specific knowledge as a theologian and

[19] *Ibidem*: In every historic era, the criptic became a deity, having a double character, meaning that projection of the "human" essence upon criptic. In time the specific instinctive sentiments are born; they get humanity and cover the most important public places, the balance between human relations, care and respect for the public wealth, respect for the others, the sentiment of traditions, of devotion, of personal sacrifice. In the background of these positive affective states that do not exclude others such as fear, dependence, the instinct of defense by submission gradually builds up the religious sentiment that is directly subjected by the history of religions.

[20] *Idem*, 67: It must be revealed the fact that Religion, since its beginning, has fed itself through these menthal „experiences" and this nourishment consists of the „human essence". This certifies „the hystoric essence and destiny of religion since still birth.

[21] Rudolf Otto, *short title*, 151: The inner evidence of this process represents a problem that cannot be without the assumption of an obscure, synthetic knowledge *a priori* of the necessary and essentially between these elements. Logically, this connection is not necessary at all. The signal of any *a priori* recognition is that of a firm indication of a personal conclusion, the truth of an assertion, when this assertion is clearly expressed.

[22] *Idem*, 158.

BDD-A3084 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 19:55:34 UTC)

historian of religions, he achieved to mark out the content and the specific characteristics of this experience.

Thus, while Otto treats in his *Das Heilige* the „terrifying" aspects of religious experience, Mircea Eliade, in his study of „sacred", based on Rudolf Otto's book, expresses a more complex view of method used by the German historian, with reference to the divine idea: „Divinity is always conceived under two aspects, [...] angry and gentle, ruthless and forgiving easily, terrifying and soothing"[23]. He emphasizes the concept of *coincidentia oppositorum,* in which opposites coincide, coexist without dominance of one rule and without being too high. This concept is found in most religions. The Duality of Divine, says the Romanian philosopher, can be understood through what we would call the divine activity or inactivity, which could be virtual or real, latent or demonstrative. Iulian Boldea, the critic, refering to sacred as language, in *Introducere la estetica* s*acrului*, (*Introduction to Estethics of the sacred*) stressed that the sacred is „the universal language of culture [...] and „knows te most variate metamorphosis in romanian and european literature's speech"[24].

Revelation in terms of the *irrational* allows the comprehension of things completely different of each other: pure reality opposed to the law, *empirical* to *ratio*, accidental opposed to demand, gross product opposed to by-product, psychological opposed to transcendental, what is known as *a posteriori* opposed to what can be defined *as a priori*. German theorist believes that by no means *irrational* is not yet subject to *ratio*; the world mechanism is reluctant to rationalization: in the usual sense of the word it refers to an unusual event, which- by its depth - escapes from rational explanation.[25] Otto advances a series of analogies that naturally bind the *irrational* aspects of the *numinos*, of the divine. The German theoretician believes that by no means *irrational* is subject to *ratio*; the mechanism of the world is reluctant to rationalization: in the usual sense of the word it refers to an unusual event, which- by its depth- escapes from rational explanation.[26] Otto advances a series of analogies that naturally bind the *irrational* aspects of the *numinos*, of the divine.

We need to make some considerations in order to emphasize the idea that the opposition between rationalism and religion was seen as a denial of the miracle. The miracle was considered to be a temporary interruption of the natural laws chain, caused by an irrational *Being*. The rationalists have approved and built *a priori* the possibility of the miracle, based on *the Being* that masters the real's attributes by the two known components: *summum ens – the supreme Being* and *ens common - Being in its generality*. The difference between *rationality* and *irrationality* was realized at the level of the *qualitative*,

[23] Mircea Eliade, *Reintegration Myth,* in *The Way to the Center*, anthology by Gabriel Liiceanu and Andrei Pleşu, (Bucharest: Universe Publishing 1991), 310.
[24] Iulian Boldea, in *Introduction to Estethics of the sacred* by Doina Butiurca, (Bucharest: Ars Academica, 2008), 4.
[25] Mircea Eliade, *short title*, 309-310.
[26] *Ibidem.*

BDD-A3084 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 19:55:34 UTC)

taking into consideration the mood and emotional content of faith, the latter essentially dependent on the relationship between *rational* and *irrational* in the idea of God.

Conclusions

Investigation upon the Phenomenology of the religious leads to the idea that any religion that tends to be more than just a traditional belief based on authority, as Christianity, which would give rise to some inner and personal believes, has to assume that there are some *a priori* principles of the soul, which could be recognized as true in themselves. Religion does not depend on the *telos* or the *ethos* and does not exist according to postulates. Any religious concept of the world involves a distinction between „sacred" and "profane".

The Sociology of the „sacred" refers to the human attitude towards the absolute in front of the prestigious forces he is beware of or trying to approach. Representations and rational and irrational concepts belong to religious experience, being part of the *numinos*. The spiritual experiences such as love, compassion, mercy, without referring to the religious inclination, imply the specific attitude of the soul raising towards the „sacred".

Religion as a *summum* of various manifestations of the *religious experience* strengthens the relationship between human and *divine*. The *hierophany* reveals the spirit's quality towards the appreciation of the *absolute* upon its religious nature, subordinated to the level of knowledge and volition that assures the connection with „the sacred". Religion is thus a product of history in which knowledge is growing its predilection for discovering and knowing „the sacred"; moreover, in some parts of it, it is a proper manifestation of the „sacred".

Selective bibliography:

Boldea, Iulian, in *Introduction to the Aestethics of the Sacred* by Doina Butiurca, Bucharest: Ars Academica, 2008.
Caillois, Roger, *The Man and The Sacred*, translation from French by Dan Petrescu, Bucharest: Nemira Publishing House, 1997.
Caraioan, Pompiliu, *Genesis of The Sacred*, Bucharest: Scientific Publishing House, 1967.
Cistelecan, Alexandru, *Poetry and bookish*, Bucharest: Romanian Book, 1987.
Eliade, Mircea, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, translation by Maria Ivănescu and Cezar Ivănescu, Bucharest: Encyclopedic Universe Publishing House, 2008.
Eliade, Mircea, *The Nostalgy Origins. History and Significance of Religion*, translation by Cezar Baltag, Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House, 1994.
Eliade, Mircea, *Euthanasius' Island*, in *The Way To The Center*, Anthology by Gabriel Liiceanu, Bucharest: Universitas Publishing House, 1991.

BDD-A3084 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 19:55:34 UTC)

Eliade, Mircea, *The Way To The Center*, Gabriel Liiceanu and Andrei Pleşu, Bucharest: Universe Publishing House, 1991.
Moraru, Cornel, *Real signs*, Bucharest: Eminescu Publishing, 1981.
Otto, Rudolf, *The Sacred*, in Romanian by Ioan Milea, Cluj-Napoca: Dacia Press, 2002.
Plămădeală, Antonie, *Idea of Sacred at R. Otto, Catholic and Orthodox Approach*, in Ortodoxia Magazine, nr.3/1958.

BDD-A3084 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 19:55:34 UTC)