

The First Discussion Paper

First, when you ask how to write an answer to the first discussion question in the Oriental Religions' course, my answer is always: "answer the question". Now, frequently the student persists and asks: "but what do you want me to write?" Again, my answer is: "answer the question because if you answer the question in terms of what I want, you can only 'think' you know 'what I want' and, even then, you are not answering the question". Now, what is the question: What relation, if any, does the literal meaning of the Latin word "religion" have to you?

Frequently students will ask: "well, I'm a Christian, so what if I apply these three basic meanings to being a Christian?"

That is a bad idea because you are still not answering the question from this Oriental Religion's syllabus perspective, but worse, it provides you, as "Christian" with a false foundation from which you are attempting to answer the question. The answer must begin at a person's bedrock, that is, as being a living, breathing human being, not as a person standing on some humanly created secondary platform.

Here is a parallel example. Suppose the question was: "what does it mean to be a human being"? and the student responds: "Oh, that is easy, since I have been married, I realize what it means to be a woman (or a man)". Really! My reactive response to such an answer is simple: "your response is phony and rootless".

If you, as a person have not faced the mirror and discovered what it means to be a human being prior to marriage, that goal of discovering who one is as a human being is impossible from the secondary platform of marriage; indeed, such a marriage will not last because being human is basic to being alive, to being married or being anything else, be that a medical doctor, a nurse, a teacher or whatever. So, if you predicate your discovery of being human on your being married, you cannot and have not discovered what being a human being means!

The question asked, whether of what it means to be a human being or what your view is toward being religious from the threefold meaning of the Latin cognate "religion" must be answered from the bedrock of what it means to be a human being. The question cannot be answered from the humanly created "noun", "religion" as we read the connotative meaning in the average dictionary. No, you must answer the question from the denominational origin of the word "religion", that is its threefold Latin root meanings: to reread, to re-choose and to rebind.

These three actions are described by Mercia Eliade within *The Sacred and the Profane* as he discovered them within the actions of all primitive peoples toward the source of being alive and the reason why the human being is called *homo religiosus*, that is, human being most religious. Such is also the reason why this book is required reading in the Oriental Religions' course.

