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Significant Moments in the Historical Development of the Study of Religion and Religious Experience

INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the general historical context for this study. Specifically, we will highlight some of the significant developments in the modern notion of the sacred from select thinkers who give priority to religious-mystical experience as a methodological starting point. The theorists we address—Friedrich Schleiermacher, Rudolf Otto, Gerardus Van der Leeuw, and Mircea Eliade—can to a greater or lesser degree be grouped under the heading of phenomenologists of religion. That is, insofar as each has taken as his starting point the subject's religious horizon, specifically as it begins with religious experience. Accordingly, this chapter will review some of the significant contributions of each theorist to the modern understanding of the sacred.

Eliade's understanding of the sacred is inextricably connected to the role of the historian of religions. Therefore, before proceeding, it will be helpful to clarify what is meant by the *notion of the sacred* and *phenomenology of religion*.

First, the *notion of the sacred* in this study pertains to the divine or the transcendent, and humans' attempt to relate to that reality. While the terms *sacred* and *holy* are not synonymous, for the purposes of this study the terms are used interchangeably. In keeping with Eliade and recent currents in scholarship, I use the term *the sacred*. Other authors have clarified the different nuances in the meaning of the terms *holy* and *sacred*.¹

Secondly, in modern times many different methodologies and approaches have emerged in the study of the sacred. These include various anthropological,

sociological, psychological, historical, and phenomenological approaches. This study is limited to certain influential “phenomenologists of religion” who take the subject’s religious horizon as the starting point for their reflection. We will not be addressing, for example, the significant contributions of the sociological approach of Emile Durkheim or the psychological approach of William James.² Therefore, it is important to clarify more specifically the meaning of the term *phenomenology of religion*.

The topic of phenomenology in general is complex, and the word itself has acquired many diverse meanings. The term *phenomena*, as described by Kant, refers to a thing-as-it-appears as opposed to a thing-in-itself (*noumena*). In contrast, Hegel articulates a science of phenomenology in order to identify the essence of the manifestations of Spirit. Hegel invokes the term in an attempt to overcome the bifurcation made by Kant between the phenomena and *noumena*.³

In addition to the philosophical uses of the term *phenomenology* by Kant and Hegel, Douglas Allen cites two ways in which the term has been employed in a nonphilosophical sense: (1) in science, with the distinction between description and explanation, the term *phenomenology* refers to description rather than explanation; (2) the term *phenomenology* is used in comparative studies to refer to the method of constructing typologies for purposes of analysis.⁴ In addition, the term *phenomenon* has acquired a common-sense meaning that refers to any event that is considered out of the ordinary.

Allen also distinguishes between the use of the term *phenomenology* in a general sense and its use more specifically in various twentieth-century philosophical uses of the term. In a general sense it refers to “any descriptive study of a given subject matter or as a discipline describing observable phenomena [data].” The more specific philosophical use of the term follows:

The primary aim of philosophical phenomenology is to investigate and become directly aware of phenomena that appear in immediate experience, and thereby allow the phenomenologist to describe the essential structures of these phenomena. In doing so phenomenology attempts to free itself from unexamined presuppositions, to avoid causal and other explanations, and to utilize a method that allows it to describe that which appears and to intuit or decipher essential meanings.⁵

The diverse uses of the term *phenomenology* with respect to philosophical approaches comprise the so-called phenomenological movement.⁶ One can speak of different types of philosophical phenomenology such as “transcendental phenomenology” (i.e., Husserl) and “existential phenomenology” (i.e., Sartre, Merleau-Ponty). In addition, with Husserl there is a tendency to practice phenomenology as a recognition that both reflection on consciousness and consciousness itself are mediated by language—hence “hermeneutical phenomenology” (i.e., Heidegger, Ricoeur).⁷

The diverse philosophical assumptions and methods of phenomenology have spread in various ways to other disciplines. In particular, they have influenced the development of the phenomenology of religion as a distinct discipline.

In general, the phenomenology of religion is often viewed as a subdivision of the history of religions (*Religionswissenschaft*), and the history of religions as a subdiscipline within the larger field of religious studies.⁸ However, even as a subdivision, the phenomenology of religion has acquired a variety of meanings. Some emphasize its use as a *method* in the study of religion, while others highlight its role as an autonomous *discipline* within the field of religious studies.

In order to circumscribe more precisely the general features of the phenomenology of religion, Douglas Allen draws upon the following characteristics: (1) it attempts to describe “religious” phenomena as they appear in “immediate experience”; (2) it is opposed to any type of reductionism of religious phenomena to exhaustive interpretive schemas, either scientific or religious; (3) it retains a broad presupposition of intentionality whereby the subject’s consciousness intends an object; (4) it emphasizes some form of restrained judgment with respect to data, which may employ the practice of “bracketing” or *epoche*; and (5) it searches for patterns, essences, or structures of meaning wherein one gains insight into the essence (i.e., *eidos*) of the religious numbers.⁹

During the past century, several significant scholars have contributed to the emergence of the phenomenology of religion. Among them, Allen claims that Rudolf Otto, Gerardus Van der Leeuw, and Mircea Eliade remain the most influential.¹⁰ In addition, Friedrich Schleiermacher should be added to this list as a precursor to the development of the discipline, since his notion of *the feeling of absolute dependence* had a significant influence on Rudolf Otto’s notion of the holy. Otto, in turn, directly influenced Van der Leeuw’s and Eliade’s reflections on the topic.

1. SCHLEIERMACHER AND THE FEELING OF ABSOLUTE DEPENDENCE

The German Protestant theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) made a significant contribution to the modern approaches in the study of religion.¹¹ Specifically, his approach to understanding religion is connected to his understanding of religious-mystical experience. The scholar of religion and psychology, Antoine Vergote, claims that Schleiermacher “inaugurated the tradition of a philosophy of religious experience.”¹² The priority that Schleiermacher places on religious experience, as well as the distinction he draws between the experience itself and doctrine and beliefs, continues to influence the study of religion as well as theology.

Rudolf Otto, whom we will discuss in more detail in the next section, credits Schleiermacher with the rediscovery of the *sensus numinis*.

Schleiermacher not only rediscovered the *sensus numinis* in a vague and general way but he opened for his age a new door to old and forgotten ideas: to divine marvel instead of supernaturalistic miracle, to living revelation instead of instilled doctrine, to the manifestation of the divinely infinite in event, person, and history, and especially to a new understanding and valuation of biblical history as divine revelation.¹³

Likewise, Richard Crouter links Schleiermacher's position concerning the priority of religious experience as at least an indirect influence on Eliade:

Yet the experiential path to religious insight has a continual appeal. Its early twentieth-century champion, Rudolf Otto, acknowledged a considerable debt to the present book [*Speeches*]. Through Otto the legacy of Schleiermacher is also linked to Mircea Eliade and the study of the history of religions.¹⁴

In a recent in-depth study of certain thinkers from the years of the Eranos conferences, Steven Wasserstrom identifies the same connection:

The Schleiermacherian *Gefühl* (feeling) became, for the Historians of Religions, one of inward "experience." Following Otto and Jung, as well as many esoteric thinkers, Eliade called such experience "numinous." The experience of the "sacred," "numinous," or "holy," in short was asserted to be the foundational constituent of religion.¹⁵

Schleiermacher understands the subject's religious horizon in terms of religious feeling (*Gefühl*) or *the feeling of absolute dependence*. He explicitly formulated the notion in the introduction to his opus *The Christian Faith*.¹⁶ However, the notion is implicit earlier in his *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*.

The notion of the *feeling of absolute dependence* develops out of the context of Schleiermacher's Moravian upbringing and his early pietistic experiences.¹⁷ The Moravian ideal viewed individuals as particular manifestations of the larger divine whole. This ideal fostered a communal life in which the gifts (charisms) of individual members complement each other within the larger community. Individuals are completely devoted to an internal awareness of God's presence, or *piety*. The awareness of God's presence is often realized in revelatory experiences, which are preconceptual, prereflexive, and prepredicative. That is, this type of experience connotes an immediate experience in which one apprehends the presence of God.¹⁸ Hence, these experiences can be transformative, affecting profound changes within the subject.

The pietistic aspect of Moravian spirituality (*Herrnhuter*) had a formative influence on Schleiermacher, particularly as regards the distinction between *doctrine* and *life*. Such a distinction implies that the religious dimension cannot be simply taught as doctrine or dogma, but rather, is to be awakened in a revelatory experience.¹⁹ The distinction between doctrine and religious experience became the foundation for Schleiermacher's theology. This distinction has also been articulated as event and reflection, being and thought, experience and concept, or what has also been referred to as "disposition" versus "expression."²⁰ The main point is that religious experience occurs within a subject's concrete living and cannot be fully captured through concepts.

In his *Speeches*, Schleiermacher seeks to encapsulate the essence of religion. In doing so, he is concerned to preserve authentic religious experience from the abstract speculation of Enlightenment thinkers. He is aware that an overemphasis on doctrine and dogma can prevent one from feeling the vitality of faith that is realized in pietistic types of experience. Initially, Schleiermacher employs two terms that constitute these pietistic experiences—*intuition* and *feeling*.²¹ In his more mature work, *The Christian Faith*, he expresses these pietistic experiences more precisely in terms of the *feeling of absolute dependence*. He replaces the descriptive terms *feeling* and *intuition*, which he invoked in the *Speeches*, and articulates the notion of an "ontologically" prior feeling of "immediate self-consciousness."²²

There are two aspects of immediate self-consciousness, "a self-caused element," or a "Being," and a "non-self-caused element," or a consciousness of "Having-by-some-means-come-to-be." In other words: "In self-consciousness there are only two elements: the one expresses the existence of the subject for itself, the other its co-existence with an Other."²³ The immediate self-consciousness gives rise to the apprehension of a "Whence" that connotes the *feeling of absolute dependence*, or the mysterious presence of God.²⁴

In this sense it can indeed be said that God is given to us in feeling in an original way; and if we speak of an original revelation of God to man [sic] or in man, the meaning will always be just this, that, along with the absolute dependence which characterizes not only men but all temporal existence, there is given to men also the immediate self-consciousness of it, which becomes a consciousness of God.²⁵

The feeling of absolute dependence comprises the common element in all forms of religious experience (i.e., piety).

The common element in all howsoever diverse expressions of piety, by which these are conjointly distinguished from all other feelings, or, in other words, the self-identical essence of piety, is this: the consciousness of being absolutely dependent, or, which is the same thing, of being in relation with God.²⁶

It has been argued that Schleiermacher's formulation of the feeling of absolute dependence is essentially an attempt to describe religious experience. Thus, Robert Williams argues that Schleiermacher's theological method retains a descriptive aspect similar to that of phenomenological method:

Schleiermacher himself was already utilizing a kind of phenomenological method in his major work, *The Christian Faith*. The novelty of Schleiermacher's thought is that he seeks to describe God as the pre-given intentional correlate of religious consciousness. One of the basic axioms of his theology is that theological predication and language about God cannot be understood without a prior understanding of religious experience through which God is given to consciousness in an original way. Furthermore, I discovered that Schleiermacher, like Paul Ricoeur, was employing a two-step procedure of exposition, beginning first with a theological eidetics which brackets existence and focuses on the meaning, that is, the essential structures of religious consciousness. Second, Schleiermacher removes the brackets of the initial abstraction and considers the eidetic structures of theology as they are concretely modified and rendered determinate in actual religious experience.²⁷

In addition, it is difficult to separate Schleiermacher's interest in religious studies from his theological endeavors. Brian Gerrish emphasizes that his legacy has influenced the disciplines of both theology and religious studies.²⁸

In recent years, Schleiermacher's notion of the feeling of absolute dependence has evoked criticism from various theologians and scholars of religion. Eliade himself sought to separate the work of Rudolf Otto from any association with Schleiermacher, whom he called an "emotionalist":

In *Das Heilige [The Idea of the Holy]*, Otto insists almost exclusively on the nonrational character of religious experience. Because of the great popularity of this book, there is a tendency to regard him as an "emotionalist"—a direct descendent of Schleiermacher. But Otto's works are more complex, and it would be better to think of him as a philosopher of religion working first-hand with documents of the history of religions and of mysticism. (*QT*, 23)

Regardless of whether one accepts Schleiermacher's notion of *the feeling of absolute dependence*, the priority that he places on religious experience has established a horizon for much subsequent theological and scholarly religious reflection. That is, following Schleiermacher, the methodological starting point of various theologians and scholars of religion has been the subject's religious horizon. Finally, if Rudolf Otto is correct and Schleiermacher did rediscover the *sensus numinis*, then Otto himself succeeded in popularizing his thought in terms of the idea of the holy.

2. RUDOLF OTTO AND *THE IDEA OF THE HOLY*

Rudolf Otto's (1869–1937) reflection on religious/mystical experience has had a significant influence on the history of religions as well as on the modern notion of the sacred. His contribution is best defined by his work *Das Heilige* (*The Idea of the Holy*).²⁹ This text affected some of the brightest philosophical and theological minds of the period. Thus, Edmund Husserl wrote to Otto: "your book on the Holy has affected me more powerfully than scarcely any book in years."³⁰ Karl Barth admits to reading *The Idea of the Holy* "with considerable delight," particularly because he appreciated Otto's nonrational (i.e., nonreductionist) emphasis in his presentation of the "numinous."³¹ Likewise, Joachim Wach, praises *Das Heilige* for its "great insights" and links its genius to Otto's mystagogic personality: "Neither before nor since my meeting Otto have I known a person who impressed one more genuinely as a true mystic."³²

The Idea of the Holy has had a considerable influence on the development of the phenomenology of religion. Specifically, Douglas Allen indicates that this work makes two methodological contributions to the phenomenology of religion because it emphasizes (1) an "experiential approach, involving the description of the essential structures of religious experience" and (2) an "antireductionist approach, involving the unique numinous quality of all religious experience."³³ In turn, these two methodological contributions influenced Van der Leeuw and Eliade's methodology. Allen remarks concerning Eliade:

Otto attempted to formulate a universal phenomenological structure of religious experience in terms of which the phenomenologist could organize and analyze the specific religious manifestations. Not only will this be Eliade's purpose in formulating a phenomenological foundation of universal symbolic structures, but Eliade will adopt much of Otto's structural analysis: the transcendent ("wholly other") structure of the sacred; the "ambivalent" structure of the sacred (*mysterium tremendum* and *mysterium fascinans*).³⁴

Willard Oxtoby applies the label "phenomenologist" to Otto in a "loose sense." That is, Oxtoby understands phenomenology to mean "the type of sympathetic treatment of material from a variety of religious traditions, seeing recurring features of religion as a response to divine stimulus." In this sense, Oxtoby believes the label "phenomenologist" can be applied to Otto retroactively.³⁵

The influences on the thought of Rudolf Otto include, among others, Luther, Ritschl, Kant, and Jacob Fries. However, the most significant influence on his *Idea of the Holy* is Schleiermacher's thought as characterized in the *Speeches*. This is apparent from what Otto wrote in his publication of a centennial edition of the *Speeches* in 1899.³⁶

In the introduction to this edition, Otto acknowledges a fourfold paradigmatic significance of Schleiermacher's work: (1) he praises Schleiermacher for restoring the legitimacy of religion in an age that was hostile to belief; (2) he validates Schleiermacher's work as a premier religious apologetic that effectively addressed the *Zeitgeist* of the times; (3) he acknowledges the *Speeches* for its theological import, especially as it anticipates the later systematic treatise *The Christian Faith*, although Otto prefers the *Speeches* to *The Christian Faith*; and (4) he acknowledges the paradigmatic influence of the *Speeches* on the development of the philosophy of religion.³⁷

Yet, despite Schleiermacher's contributions, Otto believes that his thought, specifically with regard to the feeling of absolute dependence, must be developed further. Robert Davidson argues that Otto achieves such development of Schleiermacher's position. He states: by "a description of the religious consciousness primarily in terms of value rather than of feeling Otto achieves a desirable reconstruction of Schleiermacher's position without sacrificing its original insights."³⁸ Wanting to give a more precise description of the *sensus numinis*, Otto refined and developed Schleiermacher's feeling of absolute dependence in terms of *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*.

Otto criticizes Schleiermacher's use of the term *feeling of absolute dependence* because he does not believe that Schleiermacher clearly distinguishes the feeling of absolute dependence from other human emotions and analogous states of dependence. In contrast, Otto emphasizes that the feeling associated with the *sensus numinis* is of a totally different order, "a primary and elementary datum in our psychical life."³⁹ He refers to the feeling of absolute dependence as "creature consciousness" or "creature feeling": "It is the emotion of a creature, submerged and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures." One is prevented from fully articulating the experience of creature feeling, and even that term only approximates the experience.⁴⁰

The second criticism of the feeling of absolute dependence is that in his view it supposes that God's existence is derived or concluded secondarily from the subject's experience of the feeling of dependence. In contrast, Otto claims that in order for the creature feeling to arise in the subject, the object or *numen praesens* must de facto be present.⁴¹

The third criticism concerns Schleiermacher's position that the feeling of absolute dependence constitutes a "consciousness of *being conditioned* (as effect by cause)." Otto wants to be more precise by making a distinction between the "consciousness of *createdness*" and the "consciousness of *creatureness*." The former is more a product of the "rational side of the idea of God" (e.g., conceptual, scholastic theology). The latter is a more accurate description of being in the presence of the *numen*. The experience of being in the presence of the *numen* is more immediate, an existential aspect of reality that reflects the "smallness" of the human creature in the presence of the creator.⁴²

Mysterium tremendum et fascinans

Otto emphasizes the nonrational aspect of the holy, yet he does not denigrate the use of the rational. Rather, he cautions against the “overemphasis” of the rational, whereby one loses the value of religious-mystical experience. In contrast, he prefers to emphasize the religious experience of the holy or sacred as nonrational and largely ineffable by nature—he is antireductionist. That is, we can *apprehend* in a limited way the essence of religion through religious experience, and we can obtain a limited conceptual, analogous understanding of the content of the experience, but we cannot obtain an exhaustive *comprehension*.⁴³ In this way, Otto isolates the notion of the holy by intentionally invoking a term that emphasizes its immediate, specifically religious content, rather than its consequent moral connotations. For the purposes of descriptive categorization, he coins the word *numinous* from the Latin *numen*.⁴⁴ The *numen* refers to the “object” or content of the experience, as it “is thus felt as objective and outside the self.”⁴⁵

Otto develops categories that elucidate the subjective experience of a numinous encounter. Such encounters “combine a strange harmony of contrasts,” and he distinguishes the three features of this experience as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* as a way to articulate this harmony of contrasts.⁴⁶

The first primary category for interpreting an experience of the holy is *mysterium*. This refers to the objective content of the numinous experience, perceived as “wholly other” (*ganz andere*). That is, one is conscious that the object apprehended pertains to a “scheme of reality” that “belongs to an absolutely different order.”⁴⁷

The second primary category for interpreting an experience of the holy is *tremendum*. He subdivides the notion of *tremendum* in terms of its threefold elements of *awfulness*, *majesty*, and *urgency*. The numinous encounter evokes the feeling of *awfulness* in the subject, which comprises feelings of dread and terror, or causes one to “shudder” in the depths of one’s being. According to Otto, awfulness is depicted in Christian scriptures as the “Wrath of God,” but not necessarily with its moral connotations.⁴⁸ Secondly, *tremendum* is manifested as *majesty*—a sense of the “overpoweringness” that emanates from the numinous. Simultaneously, this makes the subject conscious of his or her own existential diminutiveness.⁴⁹ Third, *tremendum* is present insofar as the numinous presence evokes an intense sense of “urgency” and “energy.” The sense of urgency and energy is often expressed symbolically as “vitality, passion, emotional temper, will, force, movement, excitement, activity, impetus.”⁵⁰

Finally, along with *mysterium tremendum* a numinous encounter contains an element of *fascinans* in that its attractiveness evokes “exaltation and ecstasy” in the subject. The latter element often accounts for the mystic’s bliss, or the

“peace that surpasses all understanding.”⁵¹ From a theological perspective, conversion or transformation follows from this aspect.

With these categories, Otto was able to isolate and clarify the experience of the holy. In addition, he was able to popularize the descriptive approach to the subject’s religious horizon with respect to religious experience. His influence remains paradigmatic in the history of religions and is specifically formative of the thought of Van der Leeuw and Eliade.

3. GERARDUS VAN DER LEEUW: PHENOMENOLOGY OF RELIGION

The work of the Dutch theologian and historian of religions Gerardus Van der Leeuw, (1890–1950) *Religion in Essence in Manifestation (Phänomenologie der Religion, 1933)*, is considered a classic text in the development of the phenomenology of religion.⁵² Indeed, the historian of religions, C. J. Bleeker, refers to it as the “most outstanding” work on the subject.⁵³ Van der Leeuw’s tome offers both a methodological framework and a foundational structure for interpreting religion.

With respect to methodology, in Van der Leeuw’s own phenomenological approach to religion, he invokes much of the vocabulary of Husserl. However, it is unclear how much of his own approach is based upon Husserlian presuppositions. Moreover, Dilthey had a significant influence upon Van der Leeuw’s hermeneutics especially on the latter’s notion of *Verstehen* (understanding).⁵⁴

Phenomenology, according to Van der Leeuw, “is a systematic discussion of what appears” (*REM*, 683). Generally, this method occurs in three parts: It involves an *experience* (or encounter) in which *understanding* (or classification) is sought, which we then *testify* to (or communicate) (*REM*, 671). Moreover, insofar as our experience has to be recalled it must often be *reconstructed*. Through careful attention and description of the data, we become aware of patterns or structures in the data. At pivotal points of inquiry, connections may *dawn upon us*. The structure gives rise to distinctions, clarifications, and relations, which are often categorized as *types*. The *type* constitutes a distinctive perceptible structural relation in a given set of phenomena, which becomes the basis for comparison and analysis (*REM*, 674).

Van der Leeuw outlines seven aspects of the phenomenological method. These occur “simultaneously” rather than “successively” with respect to religious data (*REM*, 674): (1) There is an *assigning of names* to distinct manifestations or orders of manifestations of religious data (e.g., sacrifice, priest, etc.). (2) There is the involvement of the inquirer with the object in an “interpolation.” That is, the inquirer takes an intense interest (i.e., empathy, or sympathy) in the encounter with the object. (3) There is the use of *epoche* as “intel-

lectual restraint" from making premature judgments about what is described. (4) The collected observations are subject to clarification *not* through their causal relations, but through their "structural association." The inquirer also attempts "to arrange this within some yet wider whole of significance" (*REM*, 676). The "wider whole" may constitute what has been called a *horizon*. The latter enables one to view the phenomena in a larger context for the sake of broader understanding. (5) Furthermore, there is the process of understanding that seeks *not* the apprehension of the thing in itself, but the interpretation of that which is presented; that is, the manifestation from the "chaotic and obstinate 'reality.'" (6) The interpretation is "verified" and corrected with respect to other relevant disciplines. (7) The "sole" aim of phenomenology is to "testify to what has been manifested to it" (*REM*, 674–78). And, we can assume that accuracy in such a method entails a continual return to the data.

In addition to providing a method for collecting data, Van der Leeuw provides conceptual categories for approaching an understanding of religious phenomena. The foundational interpretive structure of Van der Leeuw's *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* is organized around his principal notion of religious Power, and its various manifestations of Will and Form.

Power. Van der Leeuw posits the notion of religious *power* as the fundamental basis of religion. Power is infused throughout the universe and he cites the example of Codrington and Müller's use of the term *mana* to illustrate it: "In the South Sea Islands *mana* always means a [religious] Power" (*REM*, 27).

The influence of Otto is apparent in Van der Leeuw's description of the subject's reaction to religious Power. First, there is an apprehension of *mysterium* as "wholly other" (*ganz andere*). When one encounters Power in the religious sense there is an immediate awareness that "it is a highly exceptional and extremely impressive 'Other.'" Again, the influence of Schleiermacher is implicit in that Van der Leeuw claims that the subject is aware of a "departure from all that is usual and familiar," and there is simultaneously evoked "the consciousness of absolute dependence" on this powerful Other (*REM*, 23–24). Moreover, in dramatic instances, the encounter with religious Power can have a transformative effect on the subject in terms of a conversion or rebirth. "For in conversion it is a matter not merely of a thoroughgoing reorientation of Power but also of a surrender of [our] own power in favor of one that utterly overwhelms [us] and is experienced as sacred and as "wholly other" (*REM*, 534). Secondly, "What is comprehended as 'Power' is also comprehended as *tremendum*" (*REM*, 24, n. 3). That is, Power often commands a feeling of reverence from the subject, regardless of whether its manifestation is in an object (i.e., fetish) or in a person (e.g., prophet, mystagogue, or shaman). We are compelled to treat these objects, people, spirits, or rituals with a sense of awe and respect. When we fail to do so (i.e., when

we violate a “taboo”), we are tempting the wrath of the Power (*REM*, 38). Third, there is an element of *fascinans* in the experience of Power. This can include a sense of awe as well as feelings of “amazement” (*REM*, 28).

Van der Leeuw abstracts the notion of Power from many other similar notions in other cultures. Hence, he concludes that this notion has universal applicability. He coins the term *dynamism* to refer to “the interpretation of the Universe in terms of Power” especially with respect to “primitive cultures” (*REM*, 27). Moreover, the phenomenological emphasis shifts somewhat with Van der Leeuw from a description of the subjective reaction, as exemplified by Otto and Schleiermacher, to a description of the “object” or content, at least as it can be apprehended through its manifestations. But this is not to imply that Van der Leeuw does not appreciate the relationship and union between subject and object. Power is apprehended through its manifestations of Will and Form.

Will. Power also “acquires *Will*.” That is, in some religious traditions religious power is conceived of as vague, formless, or impersonal, as in the case of *mana* or the Tao of Taoism. However, religious power can also exhibit Will—that is, direction, personality, and force. As such, Will can often be ascribed to a spirit, ghost, angel, deity, or God. According to Van der Leeuw the “primitive” views the world and nature as being endowed with Will, or many “wills.” This has been classically associated with the theory of *animism* (*REM*, 83).⁵⁵ People have often invoked these “wills” in order to bring about an abundance of something positive (or protection) or something negative as in cases of witchcraft and evil. Likewise, these “wills” can be morally neutral or ambiguous as in the case of a *trickster* figure. There is a certain sense in which Christians speak of Will in terms of the soul as distinct from the body, that is, at least insofar as the notion of the immortality of the soul is often bound up with the will and viewed as distinct from the body (form). Finally, it is difficult to conceive of Will apart from Form, as for example, in the popular depiction of ghosts as wearing sheets. In such cases, the invisible spirit (Will) is depicted with a perceptible Form.

Form. In the religious sense, Power is apprehended through its various manifestations of Form. “The sacred, then, must possess a form: it must be ‘localizable,’ spatially, temporally, visibly, audibly. Or still more simply: the sacred must ‘take place’” (*REM*, 447). Van der Leeuw emphasizes that the notion of Form he refers to constitutes the “perceptible,” visible forms:

The term “Form,” *Gestalt*, is one of the most important in the present work. It is best understood by referring to recent “Gestalt Psychology,” which maintains that every object of consciousness is a whole or a unit, and is not merely constituted by the elements that analysis may discover. . . . But it is

vitaly important to observe that, throughout this volume, all Forms are visible, or tangible, or otherwise perceptible; and thus Endowment with Form, or Form Creation, indicates the gradual crystallization of the originally formless feelings and emotions into some kind of perceptible and unified Forms. (*REM*, 87–88, n. 3)

Human beings often concretize their experience of the sacred through various forms of worship. “In worship, the form of humanity becomes defined, while that of God becomes the content of faith, and the form of their reciprocal relation experienced in action” (*REM*, 447). It is often the case that there exists what might be called subforms within more inclusive religious forms, although Van der Leeuw does not use this term. For example, the Catholic Mass is a Form, which encompasses two subforms: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Other forms (the Bible, Bread and Wine, etc.) constitute additional subforms.

Power is present throughout all forms of religious ritual. It is also present whenever the form of the ritual is transgressed, as, for example, in the feeling a believer may get when he or she drops the Eucharistic species during a Catholic Mass. In some religious belief systems, one is subject to the “wrath” of the Power when Form is violated.

According to Van der Leeuw, Power, Will, and Form constitute the “entire concept of the Object of Religion” (*REM*, 87). Yet, Van der Leeuw’s phenomenological *method* has gained wider acceptance than his phenomenological *categories* of Power, Will, and Form. For example, Douglas Allen complains that Van der Leeuw forces the rich diversity of religious expressions into the “interpretive scheme” or notion of Power.⁵⁶ Likewise, Charles Long criticizes Van der Leeuw’s use of Power because it minimizes “the specific nature and structure of the historical expressions.”⁵⁷ On the other hand, Eliade had great respect for Van der Leeuw’s tome, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*. He acknowledges Van der Leeuw as an “outstanding” historian of religions, who convened and presided over the first International Congress of the discipline after World War II. Eliade also admits that it is unfortunate that Van der Leeuw has not received adequate recognition.⁵⁸ However, Eliade is also critical of Van der Leeuw and accuses him of reducing religious phenomena to three foundational structures and neglecting the historical context:

He thought, wrongly, that he could reduce the totality of all religious phenomena to three *Grundstrukturen*: dynamism, animism, and deism. However, he was not interested in the *history* of religious structures. Here lies the most serious inadequacy of his approach, for even the most elevated religious expression (a mystical ecstasy, for example) presents itself through specific structures and cultural expressions which are historically conditioned. (*QT*, 35)⁵⁹

Whether or not Eliade is correct in his criticism of these three foundational structures, Van der Leeuw's three basic categories should be placed within the larger context of his theological endeavors. That is, while Van der Leeuw has received much praise for his *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, this work is but a single part of his larger attempt to integrate the phenomenological study of religion with his theology. Indeed, John B. Carmen has argued that making strides toward such an integration was one of Van der Leeuw's greatest achievements:

Yet I submit that no other Christian historian of religion in this century, certainly no other Protestant scholar, has dealt so thoroughly and I believe fruitfully with the problem of the mutual relation of this scholarly inquiry in "comparative religion" and Christian theology.⁶⁰

Similarly, Kees Bolle acknowledges that Van der Leeuw sought to relate the disciplines of theology and the history of religions more "intensively" than any other religious scholar. As such, he thinks that Van der Leeuw should be rediscovered for his insights concerning the relationship between the two disciplines.⁶¹

In addition, triadic distinctions appear to be common throughout Van der Leeuw's work. We have already mentioned the triadic distinction of his phenomenological method briefly summarized as *experience*, *understand*, and *testify*, and his distinction between Power, Will, and Form. Similarly, theology according to Van der Leeuw is viewed analogously in terms of a three-storied pyramid. That is, he distinguishes three divisions in theology: historical theology, phenomenological theology, and dogmatic theology (revelation). The last mentioned comprises the apex of the pyramid.⁶²

There are three layers of theological science, of which only the last and deepest is theological in the proper sense: *historical* Theology, so-called "Ereignis" (Event)-Science (*erfassend*); *phenomenological* Theology or Science of Religion (*verstehend*); *dogmatic* or systematic Theology (eschatological).⁶³

According to this pyramidal structure, phenomenological theology has a central place within the theological endeavor. Historical theology concerns itself with the constitutive events (e.g., the experience of Jesus' disciples). Phenomenological theology concerns itself with the interpretation of such events (e.g., the recognition of Jesus as the manifestation of God). Dogmatic theology concerns itself with the affirmation of such interpretations within doctrinal formulations (e.g., Incarnation). As such, phenomenological theology reaches its limit in dogmatic theology. In other words, dogmatic theology comprises the top part of the theological pyramid while there is an ascending/descending mutual relationship between all three tiers. The fundamental

dogma for Van der Leeuw that serves as the unitive principle for the whole of theology, the sciences, and culture is the Incarnation of Christ—the Word becoming flesh.⁶⁴ “Thus there is really one dogma: God became Man [sic]; all other doctrines are valid insofar as the *Theologia dogmatica* can derive them from the one.”⁶⁵

In addition, Jaques Waardenburg surmises that Van der Leeuw’s tendency to make triadic distinctions has a trinitarian basis:

In the last analysis, the basic pattern which we find in Van der Leeuw’s thought has a trinitarian basis. The theological foundation for all his thinking is given with his interpretation of the dogma of Trinity and specifically of the fields of action of its three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, respectively in the range of Creation, Re-Creation and Fulfillment.⁶⁶

If Waardenburg is correct, and there is a basic trinitarian basis throughout Van der Leeuw’s work, we must wonder to what extent his categories of Power, Will, and Form also have a trinitarian basis in his thought.

Van der Leeuw begins with the subject’s religious experience of the holy as articulated by Otto and develops an interpretive structure of religious Power and its various manifestations through Will and Form. Although his work on the phenomenology of religion remains a classic in the field, his theological writings have largely been ignored. This, despite the fact that the impetus behind his phenomenological tome, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, is ultimately the integration of theology and the study of religions. Van der Leeuw’s attempt at such integration gives his tome an added dimension. Similarly, Lonergan, who never studied Van der Leeuw, shared the latter’s desire to integrate the study of religions and theology.

4. MIRCEA ELIADE AND THE STUDY OF THE SACRED

The influence of Rudolf Otto on Eliade’s notion of the sacred is apparent in the title of Eliade’s book *The Sacred and the Profane*. Originally published in German in 1957 as *Das Heilige und das Profane*, the first lines from that text cite Otto’s *Das Heilige*.⁶⁷ In addition, in *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries*, Eliade explicitly acknowledges Otto’s influence: “From the penetrating analysis of Rudolf Otto, let us retain this observation: that the sacred always manifests itself as a power of quite another order than that of the forces of nature.”⁶⁸ In this way, Otto’s description of the holy does provide a starting point for Eliade. Bryan Rennie concurs: “There is no doubt that Eliade accepts as his starting point Otto’s concept of the sacred as *ganz andere*, the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, which is seen as the source of numinous experience.”⁶⁹

However, taking Otto's concepts as starting point, Eliade seeks to develop his own notion of the sacred in its dialectic with the profane.⁷⁰

It is by construing the sacred in terms of its dialectic with the profane that leads Bryan Rennie to claim that Eliade was more influenced "by Durkheim than by Otto in his conception of the sacred."⁷¹ However, I disagree. While I think it is impossible to determine exactly how much Eliade is indebted to either of these thinkers, there is at least enough evidence (and sufficient agreement among scholars) that Otto's *Idea of the Holy* had a substantial influence on Eliade's notion of the sacred.

In an essay on the power of hierophanies Eliade states: "From the penetrating analysis of Rudolf Otto, let us retain this observation: that the sacred always manifests itself as a power of quite another order than that of the forces of nature" (*MDM*, 124). He makes a similar statement when referencing Otto in *The Sacred and the Profane* (written at about the same time): "The sacred always manifests itself as a reality of a wholly different order from 'natural' realities" (*SP*, 10). Hence, he invokes Otto's language albeit he goes on to say that Otto's language of the holy as "irrational" is not sufficient in and of itself. Therefore, he suggests that the "first possible definition of the *sacred* is that it is *the opposite of the profane*" (*SP*, 10). In this manner, Eliade invokes the distinction of Durkheim, although he makes no direct reference to Durkheim in this regard. In fact, unlike his references to Otto, one is hard pressed to find any direct references to Durkheim whenever Eliade defines the sacred. According to Eliade, Durkheim's fundamental explanation for religion is totemism—not, as one might expect, the distinction between the sacred and the profane (see *SP*). However, we can assume that Durkheim's dialectic of the sacred at least indirectly influenced Eliade.⁷²

There are some other points to consider when assessing Eliade's indebtedness to Otto. As stated before, Eliade originally published *The Sacred and the Profane* in Germany under the title *Das Heilige und das Profane* (1957). To what extent he intentionally meant for this title to follow Otto's lead of *Das Heilige* would be difficult to determine. However, the priority that Otto places on the experience of the holy as a fundamental constituent in religion carries over into Eliade's notion of the sacred insofar as the latter emphasizes the inextricable relationship between the expression of the sacred and the experience of the sacred. As we will see in chapter 4, the experience of the sacred as construed by Eliade in terms of *coincidentia oppositorum* (a coinciding of opposites) draws inspiration from Otto's notion of *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. Moreover, Otto's antireductionism, according to Douglas Allen, would appeal to Eliade. Allen writes: "Here we have the twentieth-century, antireductionist claim made not only by Eliade but also by Rudolf Otto, Gerardus van der Leeuw, Joachim Wach, and many others; investigators of mythic and other reli-

gious phenomena must respect the irreducibly religious nature of religious phenomena.”⁷³ Durkheim was not an antireductionist.

Again, having said all of this is not to imply that Durkheim has not influenced Eliade’s notion of the sacred at all. It is quite reasonable to assume that Eliade’s addition of “the profane” to his study of the sacred is a direct influence from Durkheim. Moreover, Rennie is perhaps correct, for example, when he asserts that Eliade’s emphasis on the sacred as “real” for the *believer* is in line with Durkheim’s thinking.⁷⁴

In sum, it is quite reasonable to assume that Otto and Durkheim each influence Eliade’s notion of the sacred and it may be difficult to determine exactly to which of these thinkers Eliade is more indebted. However, I do not think that Otto can be easily dismissed and one is more hard pressed to establish Eliade’s indebtedness to Durkheim, at least directly, while the direct influence of Otto is clear.

According to Eliade, the field of research for the historian of religions is inextricably intertwined with the study of the sacred. “It could be said that the history of religions—from the most primitive to the most highly developed—is constituted by a great number of hierophanies, by manifestations of sacred realities” (*SP*, 11). As such, the data collected by historians of religions yield a plethora of information. Therefore, in order to organize and interpret this vast amount of data, the history of religions involves a search for a general hermeneutic theory for understanding the various manifestations of the sacred (hierophanies).

Eliade points out that the emergence of the history of religions has produced historical misinterpretations of religious data. However, this fact does not discourage him, because he views these misinterpretations within the larger scope of the development of ideas. That is, new discoveries naturally give rise to the tendency to overemphasize those new insights. “When a great discovery opens new perspectives to the human mind,” he states, “there is a tendency to explain everything in the light of that discovery and on its plane of reference” (*QT*, 54). One is reminded of Freud’s discovery of the unconscious. While Freud’s explanations of the human psyche were reductionistic, and, while he was antagonistic toward religion, neither of these facts detracts from his important discovery of the unconscious.

In spite of the existence of historical misinterpretations of religious data, the history of religions, according to Eliade, retains the task of searching for a “total hermeneutics,” wherein scholars are “called to decipher and explicate every kind of encounter of man with the sacred” (*QT*, 59). This can seem like an immense task. Eliade concedes that historians of religions can at best only master the knowledge of a few religions, and they should then attempt to “formulate general considerations on the religious behavior” of humanity.⁷⁵ Hence, the historian of religions “does not act as a philologist, but as a

hermeneutist” anticipating the emergence of a *general perspective*—that is, a heuristic structure for the interpretation of religious data.⁷⁶

The hermeneutics that Eliade seeks does not adhere to a rigid or strict methodology, but rather to a broader more integral method that he calls a “creative hermeneutics.” Comprehensive in scope, it anticipates a synthesis of religious knowledge, while the fruits of its interpretations promise to affect transformative changes in human beings and cultures alike.

To elaborate, the data interpreted by the history of religions can affect people, individually as well as collectively—that is, cultures. In addition, the religious data interpreted by the history of religions can affect changes in the scholar carrying out the research, as well as in the reader who engages the material. At the level of culture, the historian of religions is able to uncover data from a vast field of knowledge, which are often unknown or inaccessible to the general population. By introducing the values of other cultures to the West, for example, the historian of religions can “open up new perspectives” that affect positive changes and promote creative thought within Western culture (*QT*, 63). However, Eliade admits that in order for this to occur properly, a creative hermeneutics requires first “a new *Phenomenology of Mind*,” before an integration of the vast amount of data from the history of religions can occur (*QT*, 64). In other words, the nonexistence of an adequate cognitional theory that can provide the appropriate philosophical foundations for a creative hermeneutics prevents the emergence of this hermeneutics. This, in turn, sets the context for Lonergan’s contribution to a clarification of these issues.

Finally, Eliade suggests that the fruits of change wrought by this creative hermeneutics will promote the emergence of a “new humanism”: “It is on the basis of such knowledge that a new humanism, on a worldwide scale, could develop” (*QT*, 3).⁷⁷ He also refers to this as an emerging “*planétisation* of culture” or “universal type of culture” (*QT*, 69). However, it is unclear what becomes of the specific claims of various “theologies” of the different religions. That is, if by theology is meant the reflection upon the faith within a given tradition, will the claims of those specific traditions be adequately maintained in this new humanism? Unfortunately, Eliade does not elaborate on the specifics of this new humanism. This issue is pertinent because Lonergan, like Van der Leeuw, is interested in a collaborative integration of theology and religious studies.

CONCLUSION

We have been seeking to outline the general context for our study of the sacred in Lonergan and Eliade by reviewing some of the major contributors to the modern notion of the sacred, especially those who begin with the sub-

ject's religious horizon and invoke a phenomenological approach to religious-mystical experience. This type of reflection becomes important to Lonergan as illustrated in some of his later writings. Although Lonergan was not a phenomenologist of religion, in the latter part of his career he became interested in religious-mystical experience and the religious horizon of the human subject as a foundation. As will become clear in chapter 2, this interest led him to a serious consideration of the work of Eliade and Otto.

Eliade's call for a "phenomenology of mind" and creative hermeneutics supplies the context for Lonergan's contribution of a theory of consciousness that functions as a hermeneutic framework for interpreting religious phenomena.