

An Inquiry into the Nature of the Distinction Between the History of Religion and the Phenomenology of Religion

Arvind Sharma

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BY

ARVIND SHARMA

Cambridge, U.S.A.

I

This paper sets out to examine the basis on which the History of Religion and the Phenomenology of Religion could be distinguished from each other. These two terms, however, mean different things to different scholars and it seems desirable to clarify at the very outset the specific sense in which these two terms will be used in this paper.

The expression 'History of Religion' has been used in at least three senses: it has been used in a narrow sense, in a broader sense and in the broadest sense. In its narrow sense the expression is used to allude to "the history of individual religions, envisaged in their historical settings and chronological order".¹⁾ In its broader sense the expression 'History of Religion' includes History of Religion in its narrow sense as well as the Phenomenology of Religion; it refers to "a combination of historical studies and phenomenological studies".²⁾ In its broadest sense the English expression 'History of Religion' is used as a synonym for the German word *Religionswissenschaft* and includes "not only history properly speaking but also the comparative study of religions and religious morphology and phenomenology".³⁾

The expression 'Phenomenology of Religion' has similarly been

1) Edward J. Jurji, *The Phenomenology of Religion*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963, p. 9.

2) Frederick J. Streng, 'What does History Mean in the 'History of Religions'', *Anglican Theological Review*, 1968, p. 3.

3) Mircea Eliade, *The Quest*, University of Chicago Press, 1969, p. 1, fn. 1. Also see Joseph M. Kitagawa, 'The History of Religions in America', in Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, eds., *The History of Religions*, Chicago Press, 1959, p. 19.

used in different senses. 4) The sense in which it is more often used relates to the application of the *Epoche* and the *eidetic vision* to the study of similar phenomena in religions. 5) This may be called its narrower connotation, to distinguish it from the broader connotation it is in the process of acquiring, namely, the application of the *Epoche* and the *eidetic vision* to the study of not only similar but all religious phenomena, including the "understanding of a single phenomenon (and not necessarily comparable phenomena) within a single tradition". 6)

In this paper the expressions 'History of Religion' and 'Phenomenology of Religion' will both be used in their narrow senses (unless otherwise stated).

II

Now ever since its inception, the Phenomenology of Religion has been concerned quite self-consciously with its distinctness from such adjacent fields as the History of Religion, the Philosophy of Religion, the Psychology of Religion, etc., and these allied sciences have been similarly concerned with their distinctiveness from the Phenomenology of Religion. 7) Although scholars are not quite agreed as to what the lines of demarcation exactly are, 8) they are all agreed that the Pheno-

4) It should be noted that Phenomenology of Religion is sometimes confused with "the well-known philosophy of Husserl and his disciples which bears the same name and from which it differs totally" (see C. J. Bleeker, *The relation of the History of Religions to the kindred religious Sciences, particularly Theology, Sociology of Religion, Psychology of Religion and Phenomenology of Religion*, *Numen* I, p. 147.

5) See W. B. Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960, p. 7, 418; G. Van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, Vol. II, New York: Harper and Row, 1963, p. 671-678, etc.

6) See J. B. Carman, *Phenomenology of Religion*, *Research Bulletin for the Centre of Advanced Study in Philosophy*, Benares Hindu University, Winter 1968, p. 114.

7) See W. B. Kristensen, *op. cit.*, p. 8-10, 418, etc., and G. Van der Leeuw, *op. cit.*, p. 685-689, etc.

8) For instance, an investigation into the essence of Religion properly belongs to the domain of the Philosophy of Religion according to Kristensen who remarks: "That which is really essential is shown by philosophical investigation. Essence is a philosophical concept and it is the chief task of the Philosophy of Religion to formulate that essence" (*op. cit.*, p. 9). Mircea Eliade, on the other hand, regards this investigation into the essence as an aspect of the History of Religion, unlike Kristensen. See *The Sacred and the Profane*, *op. cit.*, p. 232. Even though in this case the differences could be verbal, at least in part, these statements indicate the kind of "border problem" Phenomenology of Religion is

menology of Religion, though related to other kinds of Study of Religion,⁹⁾ is distinct and stands by itself.¹⁰⁾

Phenomenologists and Historians of Religion have thus been concerned with this issue of the relationship of the Phenomenology of Religion with the History of Religion right from the beginning. One of the first phenomenologists of note who addressed himself to this issue is W. Brede Kristensen. Kristensen, however, seems to look at the question not so much as an issue in itself but as part of a broader pattern of relationship between the History of Religion, the Phenomenology of Religion and the Philosophy of Religion.¹¹⁾ Even

involved in. Thus Joseph M. Kitagawa points out how Joachim Wach rejected the "oft repeated misconception that the task of the historian of religion is the study of non-Christian faiths while the theologian is concerned with what one ought to believe" (Joachim Wach, *op cit.*, p. xxxviii). So here we hear the rumblings of another "border problem", this time with Theology, as there was one with philosophy earlier. And different scholars choose to demarcate the frontier differently.

Similarly, whereas Kristensen (*op. cit.*, p. 9) tends to distinguish between the History, the Phenomenology and the Philosophy of Religion on the basis of their correspondence with data-collection, data-classification and the search for the essence of data and evaluation thereof respectively (*op. cit.*, p. 418), according to Joseph M. Kitagawa, "Wach did *not* think of the new constructive solution for the study of religions as a simple division of labour among the various disciplines such as gathering and registering of facts and phenomena by the historian of religions and an evaluation by the theologian and the philosopher" (Joachim Wach, *op. cit.*, p. xlv-xlv; emphasis added). One more example of this border problem may be added. For G. Van der Leeuw theology is incompatible with phenomenology (*op cit.*, p. 687-688) but Wach (in *General Revelation and Religions of the World, Journal of Bible and Religion*, April 1954) "as a phenomenologist" distinguishes between "a genuine and a non-genuine revelatory experience" as pointed out by Joseph M. Kitagawa (Joachim Wach, *op. cit.*, p. xlv). This step, however, involving an effort to distinguish between genuine and spurious religions experience is seen as a logical development in the phenomenological context by C. J. Bleeker, who remarks that "Phenomenology must begin by accepting as proper objects of study all phenomena that are professed to be religious; subsequently may come the attempt to distinguish what is genuinely religious from the spurious" (*op. cit.*, p. 148). Whether, when one takes that step one also steps *out* of Phenomenology has to be examined too.

9) For a survey of the growth of the Study of Religion, see Jan de Vries, *The Study of Religion*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967.

10) See Raffaele Pettazzoni, *Essays on the History of Religions*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954, p. 217, *passim*; *The Supreme Being: Phenomenological Structure and Historical Development in Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa*, *op. cit.*, p. 59-66, *passim*, etc.

11) "None of the three is independent; the value and accuracy of the results of one of them depend on the value and accuracy of the results of the other two.

here he has more to say on the distinction between Phenomenology of Religion and Philosophy of Religion; ¹²⁾ and between both the History and Phenomenology of Religion on the one hand and Philosophy of Religion on the other, ¹³⁾ than between History of Religion and Phenomenology of Religion.

When Kristensen does address himself to the relationship of the History of Religion with the Phenomenology of Religion he emphasizes their mutual relation ¹⁴⁾ and the fact that Phenomenology works with data supplied by the History of Religion. ¹⁵⁾

Thus two features about Kristensen's treatment of Phenomenology of Religion vis-a-vis History of Religion attract attention: (1) that he is more concerned with their mutual dependence than with their mutual distinction and (2) the distinction which he does suggest relates to the directional flow of data rather than to a difference of method. In other words the difference rests on data flow rather than methodological analysis and even here the difference is not to be considered as significant as mutual dependence.

The place which the research of phenomenology occupies between history and philosophy makes it extraordinarily interesting and important. The particular and the universal interpenetrate again and again; Phenomenology is at once systematic History of Religion and applied Philosophy of Religion" (W. B. Kristensen, *op. cit.*, p. 9).

12) Thus Hendrik Kraemer, "Kristensen was quite conscious of the relation that exists between Phenomenology and Philosophy of Religion" (W. B. Kristensen, *op. cit.*, p. xxiii). Also see *Ibid.*, p. 418, etc.

13) "History of Religion and Phenomenology do not have as their object the formulation of our conception of the essence of religious data. This is the task of philosopher" (*Ibid.*, p. 13).

14) "The relationship between history and phenomenology thus becomes clear. The one assumes the presence of the other and vice versa." (W. B. Kristensen, *op. cit.*, p. 8). "Phenomenology of Religion and History of Religion also stand in the same mutual relation. Naturally History provides material for the research of Phenomenology but the reverse is also true." (*Ibid.*, p. 9).

15) "Phenomenology of Religion is the comparative study of the history of religion" (*Ibid.*, p. 418). According to Hendrik Kraemer, Kristensen defines Phenomenology as "the systematically pursued comparative endeavour to interpret and understand (not explain) religious phenomena of the same category (sacrifice, prayer, sacraments, etc.) appearing in different religions to get at their inner meaning" (*Ibid.*, p. xxi). Such an exercise involves classification which presupposes observation or the presence of historical data (*Ibid.*, p. 418, *passim*). Thus if historical data is like delivered mail, Phenomenology is the sorting box so to say. This sorted out material Phenomenology can *then* make available back to the History of Religion. A Phenomenology of Religion presupposes a History of Religion for Kristensen.

G. Van der Leeuw is the next major phenomenologist who can be seen as addressing himself to the question. G. Van der Leeuw accepts the mutual dependence of the two disciplines pointed out by W. B. Kristensen but is prepared, it seems, to go further than Kristensen to distinguish between the two. After recognizing their mutual dependence,¹⁶⁾ he adds: "Nevertheless the historian's task is essentially different from the phenomenologist's and pursues other aims."¹⁷⁾

Thus while Kristensen stopped with pointing out that History of Religion provides the factual inputs for the classificatory schema of Phenomenology, G. Van der Leeuw moves a little further and seeks to distinguish between the two fields on the basis of the different goals they pursue. The goal of the historian is to establish "what actually happened and in this he can never succeed unless he understands. But also, when he fails to understand, he must describe what he has found, even if he remains at the stage of mere cataloguing. But when the phenomenologist ceases to comprehend he can have no more to say."¹⁸⁾

Thus whereas Kristensen tried to see the difference between the History of Religion and the Phenomenology of Religion in terms of the direction of the flow of data, Van der Leeuw sought the distinction not only at the level of classification of facts but also at the level of comprehension of facts. And furthermore, if the Historian too cannot really describe unless he understands what actually happened,¹⁹⁾ then the distinction between the History of Religion and the Phenomenology of Religion must rather be sought not in the *fact* of comprehension²⁰⁾ (that one comprehends or understands and the other

16) "History, certainly, cannot utter one word without adopting some phenomenological viewpoint; even a translating or the editing of a text cannot be completed without hermeneutics. On the other hand, the phenomenologist can work only with historical material since he must know what documents are available and what their character is before he can undertake their interpretation. The historian and the phenomenologist, therefore, work in the closest possible association..." (G. Van der Leeuw, *op. cit.*, p. 686).

17) *Ibid.* G. Van der Leeuw indeed states categorically that "the phenomenology of religion is *not* the history of religion" (*Ibid.*, emphasis added).

18) G. Van der Leeuw, *op. cit.*, p. 686.

19) "For the historian, everything is directed first of all to what actually happened; and in this he can never succeed unless he understands" (G. Van der Leeuw, *op. cit.*, p. 686).

20) It should be noted, however, that while Van der Leeuw does regard understanding as essential for the historian's success, he does not record it as

does not) but in the differences in the *quality* of comprehension or understanding.

This survey up to this point thus leads to the conclusion that the distinction between History of Religion and Phenomenology of Religion could turn on (1) the collection, classification or flow of facts, as Kristensen suggests or (2) on the fact of their comprehension or understanding as Van der Leeuw hints or (3) rather on the *quality* of the comprehension or understanding of these facts.

The next scholar one may now turn to is Mircea Eliade. He has addressed himself to the issue involved here and what is more, he seems to identify the quality of comprehension or understanding which distinguishes the historian from the phenomenologist. We are thus enabled to carry the dialectic forward.

The type of understanding which the phenomenologist seeks is one which, according to Mircea Eliade concentrates "primarily on the characteristic *structures* of religious phenomena." It seeks to "understand the *essence of religion*." 21)

The historian of religion, on the other hand "is concerned with religio-historical facts which he seeks to understand and to make intelligible to others. He is attracted to both the *meaning* of a religious phenomenon and to its *history*; he tries to do justice to both and not to sacrifice either one of them. Of course, the historian of religion also is led to systematize the results of his findings and to reflect on the structure of the religious phenomena. *But then he completes his historical work as phenomenologist or philosopher of religion.*" 22)

Elsewhere too Mircea Eliade shows an awareness of the distinction to be drawn between the History of Religion and the Phenomenology of Religion when he remarks that under "phenomenologists" are to

essential for his task which could as well be "mere cataloguing" (*Ibid.*). Even when he points out how this understanding is essential for his success he qualifies it by saying that the *primary* concern of the historian ("first of all") is with *facts* ("what actually happened"). It is assumed, however, that G. Van der Leeuw would want a historian not just to be a historian but a good and "successful" historian, for which understanding is imperative. According to Kristensen too the "historian seeks to understand" (*op. cit.*, p. 7).

21) Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, New York; Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., 1959. p. 232.

22) Mircea Eliade, *Methodological Remarks on the Study of Religious Symbolism in Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa*, eds., *op. cit.*, p. 88, emphasis added.

be included "those scholars who pursue the study of structures and meanings" and under "history" those "who seek to understand religious phenomena in their historical context." 23) Then he adds, "Actually the divergences between these two approaches are more marked." 24)

But though an irreducible tension between these two is recognised, 25) the differences between the two are not explored further. Instead it is the inter-relatedness of the History of Religion and the Phenomenology of Religion which captures Eliade's concern. And this is so for him whether one looks at the present, 26) the recent past or the future of religious studies.

And it is this concern of Eliade's not only with the complementary nature of the two fields of the History of Religion and Phenomenology of Religion but of all the branches of the Study of Religion which has led to a semantic accretion in the term History of Religion.

Next, in Joachim Wach we find again a similar and now familiar pattern: a recognition of the distinction between History of Religion and Phenomenology of Religion, 27) an emphasis on their complementarity 28) and a tendency to subsume both of them under the general rubric History of Religion in its broader connotation. 29) Thus, Wach, like Eliade would feel shorn if pigeon-holed as a 'phenomenologist' but would gladly accede to being a Historian of Religion in the broadest sense.

III

Such is the historical background of the issue we are concerned with 30) — and the contemporary mood on the subject. 31)

23) Mircea Eliade, *The Quest*, *op. cit.*, p. 8, fn. 7.

24) *Ibid.*

25) *Ibid.*, p. 36.

26) See *The Sacred and the Profane*, *op. cit.*, p. 232; *The Quest*, *op. cit.*, p. 8, etc.

27) Joachim Wach, *The Comparative Study of Religions*, *op. cit.*, p. 24-26. "Neither history nor psychology can do the job of phenomenology" etc.

28) *Ibid.* Thus in Phenomenology "a necessary supplement to a purely historical psychological or sociological approach is provided" (*Ibid.*, p. 24).

29) Joachim Wach, *Types of Religious Experience Christian and non-Christian*. University of Chicago Press, 1957, Chapter I, *passim*.

30) In the course of the survey just completed three main approaches towards the issue were encountered. One of these relied on the direction flow of facts. The second one relied on the fact of understanding. The third one took up the question of the quality of understanding. Of these three, the last alone survives critical analysis. For facts can be gathered *either* in chronological slots *or* in

It is now proposed to carry on this engagement with the question by analyzing how the same topic or motif is treated by a Phenomenologist of Religion and a Historian of Religion.³²⁾ Such an exercise will hopefully at least serve to clarify the issues even if it does not offer a solution.

One of the topics under which data has been assembled by phenomenologists is the Saviour motif.³³⁾ And one of the scholars who has treated of this topic is G. Van der Leeuw in whom “phenomenology of religion had its first authoritative representative.”³⁴⁾ To provide the discussion with a still more specific focus let two well-known Saviour figures in the history and phenomenology of religion — Osiris and Christ³⁵⁾ — be selected to review the manner in which they are handled by a phenomenologist, and then by a historian.

topical slots, at least in the context of the present state of the Study of Religion. Thus modern scholars talk of receiving data from “history and phenomenology of religion” in the same breath (i.e., Frederick J. Streng, *Studying Religion: Possibilities and Limitations of Different Definitions*, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, June, 1972, p. 221). Similarly while it is true that history can become the charnel house of meaningless facts that is not what it sets out to be. It too tries to understand (see Sidney Hook, ed., *Philosophy and History*, New York: University Press, 1963, p. 325-336 and *passim*). Thus one is left with the third option — the difference in the quality of understanding sought — as pivotal to the distinction between the History of Religion and the Phenomenology of Religion.

31) The present mood in the Study of Religion is strongly in favour of a continued recognition of the interdependence of the History of Religion and the Phenomenology of Religion highlighted early by Kristensen and Van der Leeuw and limelighted by Eliade and Wach. Thus also C. J. Bleeker, *op. cit.*, p. 150. This paper therefore is an academic salmon swimming upstream in its concern with the *distinction* between the two fields, rather than their dependence. See Mircea Eliade, *Cultural Fashions and History of Religions*. Middletown, Conn.: Center for Advanced Studies, Wesleyan University, 1967, *passim*.

32) This change in the analytical gear provides an occasion for a somewhat lighter observation. This is a paper on the distinction between the History of Religion and the Phenomenology of Religion. Section II used the historical method in part in surveying the historical evolution of the thinking on the point. This Section III will use the phenomenological method in the sense that it will take one topic and compare two items therein — the responses of a historian and a phenomenologist.

33) G. Van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, Volume I, New York: Harper and Row, 1963, Chapter 12.

34) Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1959, p. 232.

35) G. Van der Leeuw has referred to both of these figures in his discussion of the Saviour motif (*vide op. cit.*, p. 106, 109).

In his analysis of the Saviour mythos, Van der Leeuw refers to two well-established views regarding the origin of the Saviour figures.³⁶⁾ The first view regards the Saviour figure as having the "personification of Nature's power as its basis."³⁷⁾ As the life-cycle of Osiris can be identified with the experience of the seasons, he falls into this category.³⁸⁾ This is the periodic form of the Saviour. The second view regards the Saviour figure as "derived from some historic form of a bringer of salvation."³⁹⁾ Jesus Christ falls into this category. This is the historic form of the Saviour.

Now as a phenomenologist G. Van der Leeuw first recognizes the multivalence of the Saviour figure.⁴⁰⁾ And this leads him to recognize that the mythical structure around "Osiris requires the features of a historic man"⁴¹⁾ and that "the feast of Epiphany, January 5, was already that of god Dionysus before it was connected with Jesus."⁴²⁾

36) G. Van der Leeuw, Vol. I, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

37) *Ibid.* Also see W. B. Kristensen, *op. cit.*, p. 66-67.

38) Thus Van der Leeuw describes Osiris as the "god of self-renewing vegetation" (*op. cit.*, p. 103). For more on the natural and seasonal basis of Osiris see James Henry Breasted, *Developmental of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912, p. 22-23; *The Conquest of Civilization*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1926, p. 59; Henri Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, New York: Harper and Row, 1961, p. 103 etc.

39) G. Van der Leeuw, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

40) In contrast to Kristensen who looked upon the Saviour figure as multiform, Van der Leeuw looks upon the figure rather as multivalent. Kristensen points out how a Sun-god (*op. cit.*, p. 66-67), an animal (*op. cit.*, p. 161), or a Soter (*op. cit.*, p. 266) could be a Saviour figure. Van der Leeuw rather points out that a Saviour figure combines several attributes (as contrasted to assuming several forms). Just as in the poem by Stefan George which he cites (*op. cit.*, p. 106-107) the child is looked upon as friend, as god, as spring all at once, the Saviour figure blends the salvific roles of the son, the spring, the healer etc. With Mircea Eliade the focus of interest shifts again. He recognizes the revolutionary nature of the divergence between the periodic and the historic types (Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, *op. cit.*, p. 110 and *passim*) and his analysis proceeds on quite different lines.

41) G. Van der Leeuw, *op. cit.*, p. 108. Osiris takes on not merely a historic but also a royal image. "This man was a king, or if not a king, he should have been one for he taught men agriculture, gave them laws and culture in general, as did Demeter and Triptolemus in Greece and so many more or less primitive figures of other peoples" (*Ibid.*). Osiris as a matter of fact was "the king of the dead" (Henri Frankfort, *op. cit.*, p. 103) and "the epitome of past rulers" (*Ibid.*, p. 104).

42) G. Van der Leeuw, Vol. I, *op. cit.*, p. 111. And for an association of Dionysus with the seasons see *Ibid.*, p. 107.

In other words, the periodic Saviour figure is seen as putting on a historic garb and the historic Saviour figure is seen as not free from links with vegetation and periodicity.

In other words, there is a structural convergence between the periodic form and the historic form of the Saviour and this leads G. Van der Leeuw to the recognition that the Saviour "is born when the time is 'fulfilled'. It is this fatefulness of the time of salvation that links the periodic form of the Saviour with the historic."⁴³) This is one of the ways in which G. Van der Leeuw deals with the Saviour motif.

What captures attention at this point, however, is not so much what he does as what he does *not* do.⁴⁴) G. Van der Leeuw does

43) G. Van der Leeuw, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

44) G. Van der Leeuw is concerned with form, with structure, with processes within the structure. In this case he is concerned with the structural form, and the structural processes of the Saviour myth. This is what he is concerned with and this is the concern of the phenomenologist. But it is as important here to see what he is *not* concerned with as it is to see what he is concerned with. He is not concerned with the effect the Osiris myth may have had on Christian beliefs about Christ.

Is this lack of concern, this *un-concern* with historical interaction unique to Van der Leeuw among phenomenologists? Hardly. Kristensen discusses the idea of the "son of man" at some length (*op. cit.*, p. 264-266) and pulls together material from Babylonian religion (*Ibid.*, p. 264), from Biblical literature (*Ibid.*, p. 265), and from Jewish sources (*Ibid.*, p. 266). Yet he never touches upon the question, even the possibility, of interaction among these religious traditions. Thus when he introduces Egyptian material with the remark that "Perhaps the Egyptian *sa-s* is also *related* to this idea" (*Ibid.*, p. 266, second emphasis added) the choice of the word *relation* seems significant — a relation is seen, no influence. At some places where Kristensen does consider influence it tends to be discounted (*op. cit.*, p. 496).

That this attitude to overlook "history" is not a personal penchant but an aspect of the Phenomenology of Religion is confirmed by the remarks Raffaele Pettazzoni makes while examining the phenomenological structure of the Supreme Being: "Phenomenology can ignore the historical-cultural sequences of ethnology and the general theories of the development of religious history. This development can be thought of in evolutionary (i.e. E. B. Tylor) or involutory (i.e. W. Schmidt) sense; in either case phenomenology can ignore these theories." Van der Leeuw has written that: "Von einer historischen 'Entwicklung' der Religion, weist die Phänomenologie nichts." (Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, eds., *op. cit.*, p. 65).

Similarly, a restraint in discussing "influence" and in giving it any prominence and centrality can be seen in Mircea Eliade. It should be borne in mind that Mircea Eliade is not a "pure" phenomenologist and seems to prefer being a Historian of Religion in the broadest sense. He writes: "But an understanding

not even broach, much less discuss the possibility that the Osiris myth may have influenced the Christ "myth" — that the fact that

must be reached concerning the importance to be accorded to 'history' in this type of investigation. As we have said more than once elsewhere, and we shall have occasion to show more fully in the complementary volume (in preparation) to *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, although the historical conditions are extremely important in a religious phenomenon (for every human datum is in the last analysis a historical datum), they do not wholly exhaust it. We will cite only one example here. The Altaic Shaman ritually climbs a birch tree in which a certain number of steps have been cut; the birch symbolises the World Tree, the steps representing the various heavens through which the shaman must pass on his ecstatic journey to the highest heaven; and it is extremely probable that the cosmological schema implied in this ritual is of Oriental origin. Religious ideas of the ancient Near East penetrated far into Central and North Asia and contributed considerably to giving Central Asian and Siberian shamanism their present features. This is a good example of what 'history' can teach us concerning the dissemination of religious ideologies and techniques. But, as we said above, *history* of a religious phenomenon cannot reveal *all* that this phenomenon, by the mere fact of its manifestation, seeks to show us. Nothing warrants the supposition that influences from Oriental cosmology and religion *created* the ideology and ritual of the ascent to the sky among the Altaians; similar ideologies and rituals appear all over the world and in regions where ancient Oriental influences are excluded a priori. More probably, the Oriental ideas merely *modified* the ritual formula and cosmological implications of the celestial ascent; the latter appears to be a primordial phenomenon, that is, it belongs to man as such, not to man as a historical being; witness the dreams, hallucinations and images of ascent found everywhere in the world, apart from any historical or other 'conditions'. All these dreams, myths, and nostalgias with a central theme of ascent or flight cannot be exhausted by a psychological explanation, and this indefinable, irreducible element perhaps reveals the real situation of man in cosmos, a situation that, we shall never tire of repeating, is not solely 'historical.'" (Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism*, op. cit., p. xiii-xiv). This is what the Historian of Religion in its broadest sense has to say on the issue. The divide between the historian of religion (narrow sense) and the phenomenologist can be seen in the statement that the "*history* of a religious phenomenon cannot reveal *all* that this phenomenon, by the mere fact of its manifestation seeks to show us." The language unmistakably belongs to the Phenomenology of Religion.

While it is the existential element in the above situation that rivets Eliade's attention, a traditional Historian of Religion would probably be more concerned with the fact that the word 'Shaman' is probably related to the Buddhist Sramana (*Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam & Co., 1961, p. 2086; but also see James Hastings, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. XI, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954, p. 441) and similar considerations. More illuminating, however, is the contrast between Mircea Eliade's position with that of Wilfred Cantwell Smith whose seminar at the Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University, Spring 1963, explored the thesis that "the historical interrelations among traditions have been more significant, and even decisive, at the least at certain moments, than has generally been recognised" (W. C. Smith, personal com-

in the Osirian myth Osiris revives after dying may have influenced the Christian belief in the resurrection of Christ.

But this is precisely what the historian is concerned with when parallels arise. This becomes clear when we examine what a historian, rather than a phenomenologist, does with Osiris and Christ. He sees the influence of one on the other, of Egyptian religion on Christian religion,⁴⁵) of Osiris on Christ. What the historian sees in this context has been eloquently summarized by a popular historian thus.

What distinguished this [Egyptian] religion above everything else was its emphasis on immortality. If Osiris, the Nile and all vegetation might rise again, so might man. The amazing preservation of the dead body in the dry soil of Egypt lent some encouragement to this belief which was to dominate Egyptian faith for thousands of years and to pass from it, by its own resurrection, into Christianity.⁴⁶)

munication to writer, April 7, 1973). This seminar bore the title 'Historical Interrelations among Man's Religious Traditions' and paid "special attention to mutual relations across religious boundaries at selected critical periods: the Hellenistic Age; Sasani/Manichee developments; the trilogue in medieval Spain; crystallization of Islamic, "Sikh", "Hindu" in Mughul India; the "Three Teachings" in medieval China; Ryobu Shinto; global interactions in the 19th and 20th centuries" (*The Divinity School Bulletin*, 1972-73, Vol. LXLX, Number 16, p. 72).

Thus the lack of, or the limited nature of the phenomenologist's concern with areas of influence among traditions is matched by an avidity of interest and a major concern with those issues on the part of the historian of religion.

45) He discusses not only similarities but also differences, he analyzes influence or absence thereof. Thus Henri Frankfort, *op. cit.*, p. 81 etc.

46) Will Durant, *Our Oriental Heritage*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954, p. 202. Will Durant claims to be following James Henry Breasted here. Though James Henry Breasted can be read as implying the influence of the risen Osiris on risen Christ he never says quite that in the references given by Will Durant (*op. cit.*, p. 966) who cites pages 46, 83 of *The Dawn of Conscience* (*op. cit.*). J. H. Breasted does, however, make a statement to the effect on p. 105 which runs: "That which thou thyself sowest is not quickened, except it die."

These words of Saint Paul (I Cor. 15:36) are but a late hint of the profound impression made by the annual cycle of dying and reviving vegetable life in the minds of ancient men. We recall that the Greek mysteries were saturated with the same ideas, and the Mediterranean world was everywhere keenly responsive to Oriental conceptions of this kind. Their *influence* on the New Testament is unmistakable. The *oldest* revelation of the effect of the verdure on the thoughts of men regarding death is found most fully in the sweeping triumph of the Osirian beliefs over other early Egyptian ideas of the hereafter. The *latest* manifestation of the persistent power of this earliest surviving impression of nature on the soul of man is of course modern devotion to the Easter festival" (*The Dawn of Conscience*, *op. cit.*, p. 105, first emphasis supplied).

For other elements of Egyptian influence on Christianity see James Henry Breasted, *The Dawn of Conscience*, *op. cit.*, p. 102, 113, etc. And Will Durant, *op. cit.*, p. 201, etc.

IV

The foregoing comparison of the manner in which a phenomenologist and a historian handles the same topic and the same material provides some clues for distinguishing between History of Religion and Phenomenology of Religion. When History of Religion encounters comparable data it looks for the operation of historical influences; when Phenomenology of Religion encounters comparable data it seeks out structural significances.

In order to develop this clue into a criterion, however, we need to test it out, an exercise which might be complicated by the fact that in "the majority of cases" the historian and the phenomenologist are "combined in the person of a single investigator."⁴⁷⁾ Such a test case can be made out if we cast out net on the Saviour motif a little wider to take in the Judaic and the Buddhist religious traditions as well, something not attempted by G. Van der Leeuw himself.⁴⁸⁾ The Saviour motif, indeed, is common both to the Judeo-Christian tradition and the Buddhist. One way in which the motif operates in the Judeo-Christian tradition is through the concept of the Messiah.⁴⁹⁾ One way in which it operates in Buddhism is through the figure of Maitreya⁵⁰⁾ — the Buddha to be.

The exercise can now be carried forward by considering what Richard H. Robinson has to say on this parallel between the Judeo-Christian and the Buddhist tradition. He writes:

Maitreya, unlike the Buddhas before him, is alive, so he can respond to the prayers of worshippers. Being compassionate, as his name indicates, he willingly grants help, and being a high god in his present birth, he has the power to do so. His cult thus offers its devotees the advantages of theism and Buddhism combined. India was caught up in the surge of messianic expectation which, originating probably in Iran, coursed through the Mediterranean world after 200 B.C.

Buddhism was more hospitable than Hinduism to the messianic idea because

47) G. Van der Leeuw, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 686.

48) Buddhism is poorly represented in G. Van der Leeuw's *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, *op. cit.* There are just a few references (p. 631-635, 675 etc.) and Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are not referred to in the discussion of the Saviour motif (*op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 106-115).

49) See James Hastings, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. 8, New York: Scribner's Sons, 1953, p. 570-581.

50) See Mircea Eliade, *From Primitives to Zen*, New York: Harper and Row, 1967, p. 400-403 for a comparative context; etc.

it was more open to Western influences, and because from the first it took history and pseudo-history more seriously. Accustomed to thinking of the past in terms of teacher-pupil lineages, Buddhists came in due course to anticipate the future sage, just as the Hebrews came to dream of a future anointed prophet-king after musing long on the series of prophets and kings in their ancient history... 51)

On the basis of this passage it can be said that Richard H. Robinson accounts for the parallel in three distinct though interconnected ways. The first explanation which he offers is that the cult of Maitreya shows India "caught up in the surge of messianic expectation which, originating probably in Iran, coursed through the Mediterranean world after 200 B.C." 52) Then he offers a second explanation, namely, that "Buddhism was more hospitable than Hinduism to the messianic idea because it was more open to Western influences." 53) This explanation is not a general one like the first which applied to a whole geographic region but a specific one applying to Buddhism. Then a third explanation is offered. Richard H. Robinson says that Buddhism took history and pseudo-history more seriously than Hinduism. "Accustomed to thinking of the past in terms of teacher-pupil lineage, Buddhists came in due course to anticipate the future sage, just as the Hebrews came to dream of a future anointed priest-king after musing long on the series of prophets and kings of ancient history." 54)

It is helpful to recognise at this point that whereas the first two explanations are based on historical interaction, this last one, the third one, is *not* based on historical interaction but involves a similarity of structural process. The recognition of this distinction is crucial for pinpointing the roles of the historian and the phenomenologist which Richard H. Robinson seems to combine.

The issue can now be faced squarely. Whenever a parallel between two (or more) traditions, say tradition A and tradition B (to make a pseudo-algebraic formulation) arises, it can be explained in four ways. One can say that the parallel or similarity arises because (1) tradition A was influenced by tradition B; (2) tradition B was influenced by tradition A; (3) both tradition A and tradition B were

51) Richard H. Robinson, *The Buddhist Religion*, Belmont: Dickenson Publishing Co., 1970, p. 59.

52) *Ibid.*

53) *Ibid.*

54) *Ibid.*

influenced in common by a third tradition or factor Z; and (4) the parallel is not induced by influence but is spontaneous: it is not the outcome of mutual or reciprocal historical interaction but the result of structural processes inherent within the traditions themselves or within man for that matter.

Now one can see what Richard H. Robinson was doing. He was exploring these options. He suggested first that the whole geographic region around Northwest India was in the grip of a messianic expectation. This corresponds to option no. 3 above. Then he suggested that the West influenced Buddhism. If we refer to the Western religious tradition as A and to the Buddhist tradition as B this corresponds to option no. 2 above. Richard H. Robinson did not suggest option no. 1 above, though this has been done.⁵⁵) But he did explore option no. 4 when he compared the structural dynamics of Buddhist master-disciple series with the Judaic series of prophets and kings.

V

Now we can return to our original concern: the search for a basis for distinguishing between History of Religion and Phenomenology of Religion (both the terms being used in the narrow sense). We can refer back to the four explanatory options that exist when a parallel between two traditions arises, namely that (1) A is influenced by B; (2) that B is influenced by A; (3) that both are influenced by Z; and (4) that the parallel does not arise out of the dynamics of historical interaction but arises from the similarities of structural processes.

Can it then be said that History of Religion explores the first three of these options and Phenomenology of Religion the fourth?

55) For an enthusiast's account of this possibility see Arthur Lillie, *The Influence of Buddhism on Primitive Christianity*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893; *Buddhism in Christendom*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1887. For a historian's assessment of the possibility see Hem Chandra Rai Chaudri, Buddhism in Western Asia in B. C. Law, ed., *Buddhist Studies*, Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1931, p. 636-640. For a scholar of Buddhism's assessment see Edward Couze, Buddhism: the Mahayana in R. C. Zaehner, ed., *The Concise Encyclopedia of Living Faiths*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1959, p. 296-297.