Chapter VI

Convergences, Divergences and Possible New Directions

We have been so far investigating into the phenomenology of religion according to Otto, Kristensen, Van der Leeuw and Eliade from the perspective of Merleau-Ponty's bodily intentionality within the lived-through-world. We began the investigation by clarifying the meaning of phenomenology of religion in relation to other approaches to the study of religion which were found wanting in more ways than one, chief among them being their proclivity towards reductionism. Phenomenology of religion, therefore, examines critically this positivistic malady of reducing all human concerns to the parameters of the natural sciences, and then asserts the validity and autonomy of man's religious experiences that do not come under the scrutiny of empirico-scientific method. It is true that the natural sciences have contributed a lot of insight insights into the material world around us, but that represents only an abstracted and, therefore, partial view of man's experience of the world. There is something very fundamental to man's experience of the world which precedes the abstracted world of science. Husserl calls it the life-world which Merleau-Ponty prefers to address as the lived-through-world.

It is the lived-through-world that man first of all encounters in his life. It is this world that forms itself as part of man's immediate concern; it is this world that he recognizes and organizes as meaningful to his existence. It is this world, more than others, that influences man's beliefs, knowledge and
actions. Religious beliefs, customs, practices and rituals form different dimensions of this lived-through-world. By examining the dynamics involved in this lived-through-world, we can gain some insight into the very structure of man’s response to the manifestations of the transcendent.

When the lived-through-world is thematized we find that it has some underlying structures. These structures form the very dynamics with which man engages himself in the world. In other words, it is the manner in which man *interrogates* his immediate world and comprehends it. In Merleau-Ponty’s scheme of things, man first of all has his perceptual encounter with the phenomenal world. Accordingly, Merleau-Ponty holds that in man’s process of knowing there is a primacy of perception. Perception is not a conscious and calibrated activity, rather it is pre-conscious and pre-reflective in character. Does it mean that consciousness plays no role in man’s process of knowing? If consciousness has no role to play then man’s knowing is not different from that of animals’ which is instinctual.

Merleau-Ponty is quite seized of this difficulty, and, therefore, he does emphasize the place and role of consciousness in man’s knowledge of the world. But it is unlike that of the idealists for whom only the consciousness matters. Merleau-Ponty is emphatic that man knows not as a disembodied conscious subjectivity but as an embodied being placed within the world. Therefore, there is a bodily way of knowing which he elaborates in his concept of bodily intentionality. Bodily intentionality, as we have already discussed above, is a *dialectical* style of knowing wherein man is chiasmatically related to the world around. To explicate this relation
Merleau-Ponty introduces the concept of \textit{flesh} which belongs neither to the subject nor to the object but it is that by which the perceiver and the perceived enter into an intertwining relation. From such an intertwining relation arises a sense which according to Merleau-Ponty, addresses itself to the whole man.

Merleau-Ponty points out that man does not just relate himself to the world but rather he inhabits it through his bodily habits. And, conversely, bodily habits are formed by inhabiting the world. Habits, in other words, are the sedimented form of man’s knowledge of and involvement in the world.\textsuperscript{1} Man forms a number of habits such as motor, physiological, psychological, social, religious and the like. His all too famous example of a typist who forms a habit of typewriting on a typewriter illustrates this point well. Once the habit is formed the repetition of it becomes easier, and it is through habits man inhabits the world.

Using this conceptual framework of Merleau-Ponty we have attempted to review the phenomenology of religion according to Otto, Kristensen, Van der Leeuw and Eliade. And, in the course of our investigation we have found that religious experience as elucidated by these phenomenologists of religion has also a similar structure subtending it. That is to say, we can decipher from these four authors’ phenomenological writings on religious experience a structure of cognition that is quite similar to what Merleau-Ponty’s advocates. However, it must be added that Merleau-Ponty does not explicitly accord a religious status to the depth dimension of reality as such. He refers to depth as a dimension of our perception. We have nevertheless
employed the concept depth to denote man's experience of meaning or significance of the phenomenal world. The meaning or significance of the world for the archaic man is synonymous with religious experience. All these four authors dwell at length on the religious experience of the archaic societies. There are, therefore, obviously some points at which the views of these authors converge. However, they also diverge, though not fundamentally, in their emphasis on various points of discussion. The following is an attempt towards highlighting these points of convergence and divergence. We shall identify two main issues around which this process of convergence and divergence occur in their writings. And, they are: the use of phenomenological method and the contents of their phenomenology of religion.

6.1. Phenomenological Method

An oft-repeated question in regard to phenomenology of religion is: does phenomenology of religion owe its origin to phenomenology as a philosophical discipline? And, a wide variety of opinions in this regard already exist in scholarly circles, some of which endorse their mutual dependence, while others, eager to maintain a specific identity of the philosophical use of phenomenology, do not approve of such an influence. Those who do not approve of the influence of philosophical phenomenology on the phenomenology of religion argue that the latter lacks theoretical justifications for the methodologies they adopt. Nevertheless, authors like George James has clearly demonstrated that the influence of the
philosophical phenomenology on the phenomenology of religion is indubitable. This becomes evident from the many terms such as "phenomena," "intentionality," "intentions," "essence," "structure," "Erlebnis," "Evidenz," "Anschauung," drawn from the philosophical use of phenomenology, forming a part of the vocabulary of phenomenology of religion.

In employing the techniques of phenomenology, among all the four authors under our consideration, it is Van der Leeuw, more than others, who has spelt them out clearly. In his use of the phenomenological techniques Van der Leeuw, first of all takes the religious phenomena from out of their historical contexts and assigns them names. He then compares phenomena of similar characteristics with a view to decipher their meanings. The phenomenologically disclosed meaning is then compared with the results of philological and archaeological research. In all these efforts Van der Leeuw insisted that the researcher should practice an intentional and methodical surrender to the believer's experience of the religious phenomena. The explicit aim of phenomenology of religion is to understand the meaning of religious phenomena as the believers understand them.

The above mentioned techniques, though not elaborately dealt with, are also found embedded in the writings of the other authors. For instance Kristensen claims that the religious phenomena belonging to different religious traditions are to be taken out of their historical contexts, bring them together, and study them in groups so as to be acquainted with the religious thought, idea or need that underlies the group of corresponding
So also Eliade draws religious phenomena from out of their historical contexts and compares them so that their underlying meaning can be better illustrated. Eliade makes it clear that his primary concern is to disentangle not the diachronic morphology of hierophanies, but rather their synchronic morphology. Although Otto does not specifically dwell on this question of disengaging the religious phenomena from out of their historical contexts, there are enough indications in his writings to suggest that his primary concern is not the historical contexts of religious phenomena as such but rather their commonly shared characteristics.

The phenomenological technique of comparing the religious phenomena found in various religious traditions is found in the writings of all four authors. However, the motive behind such comparisons, they insist, should not be one of evaluation of the religious phenomena but rather of elucidation of their significance and comprehension of their meaning. In doing so they intent to counter a tendency among a few philosophers of religion, especially of the nineteenth century, who through an evaluative comparison, sought to 'establish' the superiority of one religion (viz. Christianity) over against others. During those days the Western mindset was such that it viewed other religions of the East and other ancient cultures as conceptually less developed or even totally primitive. All the four authors, having had either direct or indirect contact with the religions and cultures other than the Western, have come to view them as valuable for a comprehensive understanding of man. Van der Leeuw and Eliade seek to develop a new anthropology based on the religious experience of ancient
societies and cultures. Eliade, however, is more vocal about this when he says that phenomenology of religion should go beyond the level of mere elucidation and comprehension of the meaning of religious phenomena; it should interpret them with a view to develop a new humanism. Phenomenology of religion, for Eliade, therefore, is a kind of hermeneutical phenomenology. Similarly, Kristensen opines that the treasures from the ancient societies and religions can serve as a catalyst in the transformation and regeneration of the modern man. Otto appeals to the religious experience of the ancient societies with a view that the numinous experience present in them corroborates with his claim that the numinous experience is the true religious experience.

Another phenomenological technique that all the four authors make use of in their study of religious phenomena is epoché. By this what they mean is that in studying religious phenomena, the researchers should keep in abeyance their presuppositions that can possibly distort the intended meaning of the phenomena for the believers. In other words, the researchers should guard themselves from falling into the error of superimposing their views upon the religious experience of believers. Religion for the ancients is not something that is relative but absolute. As Otto and Eliade hold religion for the ancients is *sui generis*; it is a category by itself and, therefore, cannot be reduced to anything else. It is to be noted here that all the four authors are strongly countering the reductionistic attempts of several disciplines in social as well as natural sciences to reduce religion and religious experience into something that can be explained from their
respective perspectives. All the four authors raise their voice against any kind of reductionistic positions for the reason that such positions miss that which is essential to religion, viz. the holy or the sacred.

In order to comprehend the significance that the believers attach to the religious phenomena, all the four authors agree that the researchers need to develop within themselves a unique quality which enables them to relive or re-experience the believers' religious experience. It is the quality of empathy (Einfühlung) by which the researchers can enter into the religious world of believers and try to understand (verstehen) the meaning of their experience. Here all the four authors, therefore, share basically two objectives: phenomenological explication of the religious experience of several ancient peoples and also to evoke and promote similar religious experience in the researchers. In fact, Otto explicitly points out that his purpose is not only to highlight the numinous experience but also evoke it in those who read him. Similarly Van der Leeuw, Eliade and Kristensen also speak of effecting a positive influence of the subject matter upon the researchers. When religion is the topic of study the researchers should be religiously oriented.

Does this demand for a religious bent of mind on the researchers when they investigate religious phenomena go in some ways contrary to the very purpose of *epoché*? The answer to the above question apparently seems to be in the affirmative, but when viewed in the overall perspective of these authors, it turns out to be in the negative. For while persuading the researchers to grow religiously, these authors do not purport to limit them
into any one specific religious perspective or another, but rather they are invited to relive the believers’ world of meaning. A sympathetic understanding is called for. Here the focus, therefore, is not on the researchers’ points of view regarding one or the other religious phenomena, rather in explicating the meaning of the religious phenomena for the believers themselves.

6.2. Placement of Phenomenology of Religion

We have already seen that there is a broad consensus among the four authors with regard to the employment of various phenomenological techniques in their phenomenology of religion. However, not all them agree on the exact scope and position of phenomenology of religion within the broader discipline of Religionswissenschaft. As for instance, Kristensen and Van der Leeuw argue that phenomenology of religion is a discipline in transition which is interposed between the history of religion and the philosophy of religion. The history of religion provides a descriptive account of religious beliefs, customs, practices and institutions in their historical contexts. But phenomenology of religion is to systematize and compare similar religious phenomena found in different religions so as to arrive at their essence and it is philosophy of religion that defines the essence of religion. Where Kristensen speaks only of bringing to the fore the latent meaning of similar religious phenomena, Van der Leeuw goes further pointing out that such systematization should also give rise to verstehen which is qualitatively different from other modes of
understanding. It (*verstehen*) seeks to understand the essence of religious phenomena in terms of their underlying structural associations.\(^9\) It is Eliade who in a sense completes the interpretative process initiated by Van der Leeuw. Eliade, while acknowledging the tension between the history of religion and phenomenology of religion, goes on to emphasize their interrelatedness, with a view that the goal of both the disciplines is *verstehen* of religious phenomena through hermeneutics.\(^10\) Otto does not explicitly dwell on this specific position and function of phenomenology of religion as such. However, it becomes evident from his writings that by drawing together similar religious phenomena he intends to explicate the numinous elements present in all of them. Otto, therefore, goes beyond mere systematization of religious phenomena; he also interprets them in order to substantiate his claim of the universality of numinous experience.

6.3. The Content of the Phenomenology of Religion

6.3.1. Focus on Ancient Societies

Having already seen the phenomenological techniques that the four authors have employed we shall now dwell on the content of their phenomenology of religion. In their attempt to elucidate religious experience in its primordial form, they all turn to the ancient or archaic societies. This preoccupation with the ancient societies seems to stem from their critique of the modern secularized or as Eliade puts it, desacralized societies that have scarcely retained the sense of the sacred. The ancient societies, however,
still believe in the sacred animating their social as well as cosmic life. By turning to the ancients' religious experience, Otto wants to recapture the originary numinous experience devoid of legalistic and moralistic elements in it. And, Kristensen endeavors to bring to light the rich and valuable religious experiences of the forgotten societies and cultures of the past for the benefit of the modern man. Similarly, Van der Leeuw and Eliade also turn to the ancient or archaic cultural and religious traditions in order that their mode of responding to the transcendent and the consequent metaphysics will be of great help for the modern man in his self-understanding. The modern man is characterized by his dwelling in the desacralized or secular world.¹¹ There is no more of the sense of the mystery or sacred left in him nor does he find it in the world around him. The modern man is completely swept away by the strong currents of scientism and historicism. According to scientism the world is an aggregate of discrete material entities that are governed by the universal laws of nature. And it is only through scientific method that man can unravel the underlying laws at work in nature. Similarly, historicism claims that life in all forms is determined by historical development, and, there are no metaphysical principles operative in it. Both these approaches to life characteristic of the Enlightenment, according to these four authors, are inimical to man's well-being in so far as they are oblivious to man's spiritual needs. The archaic societies, however, are not led by the logic of scientism or historicism; they believe in a world-order determined and governed by powers external to it, viz. the transcendent.
6.3.2. The Object of Religion

All the four authors agree on the fact that the object of religion is the transcendent which is beyond any name and form. And, man can neither comprehend it nor describe it, since it is the *ganz andere*, the totally Other.\(^{12}\) As it is the totally Other, it cannot be a phenomenon either. How can then man ever describe it? All the four authors understand that the domain of phenomenology of religion is limited to that which is considered as phenomenon. Since the transcendent, by virtue of its nature, cannot be a phenomenon, all that phenomenology of religion can deal with is man’s response to its manifestations by way of religious acts, cult, customs, etc. Otto’s phenomenology of religion, therefore, describes man’s numinous experience or the experience of the Holy, while Van der Leeuw elucidates the experience of Power and Eliade explicates the experience of the sacred. And, Kristensen expounds the experience of meaning of religious phenomena for the believers themselves. It is to be noted here that all the four authors seem to converge on this point that man’s religious experience is the consequence of his encounter with the sacred or the holy or power or meaning, and at the same time, they also pose themselves as conditions for his religious experience. In other words, there seems to be a dialectical process at work in man’s religious experience.

6.3.3. The Dialectical Process

The dialectical process at work becomes quite clear from the fact that the ancients view nature in an undifferentiated manner. There is no divide
between the sacred and the profane according to the ancients' way of comprehending and dealing with the natural world. The natural world therefore is not just an aggregate of material objects governed by a set of universal laws, but it is animated by powers that are external to it. The transcendent, however, manifests itself through nature, it is always mediated through something other than itself. Describing the hierophanies, Eliade says that the sacred manifests itself in mundane objects. But the sacred never manifests itself fully, it also conceals.¹³ That is the reason why the objects in and through which the hierophanies occur do not change their existential condition; they continue to share in the characteristics of objects found in their surrounding.

In Otto this dialectical process in man's religious experience is discussed primarily in relation to the psychological realm. Religious experience cannot be understood apart from man's psychological experience in so far as he is a composite organism. At the same time Otto labors hard to retain the distinctive identity of the two since any identification between them would result in psychological reduction which he critiques. While attempting to explicate the numinous experience, Otto keeps referring back to man's psychological experiences because it is in the latter he finds elements analogous to those in the former. Nevertheless, the elements that constitute the psychological experience do not exhaustively lend credence to the numinous experience either. For in the dialectical process, the transcendent is more than that which it transcends, and that which is transcended is never reduced to that which is the transcendent. Otto,
therefore, makes it quite clear that the elements in the psychological experience are only analogous to and not identical with the elements in the numinous experience. The manifestation of the Holy then is comprehended and responded to through the medium of the elements of the psychological experience.

Van der Leeuw and Kristensen also speak of the dialectical or mediated manner in which the transcendent manifests itself. For Van der Leeuw it is revealed through man's experience of Power inherent in natural events and material objects. Any natural event or material object that is highly exceptional and extremely impressive represents the Other, which is the source of Power. And for Kristensen it is man's encounter with the meaning or significance of the natural world that leads to the transcendent.

6.3.4. Modes of Human Response

The ancient man's description of his encounter with the transcendent comes always mediated through his experience of the natural world around. He views the natural world in an undifferentiated manner where there is no demarcation of sacred from profane. He shares a vision of reality that is holistic and cosmic. The reality for the ancient man is constituted not of opposing polarities, but of complementary aspects. That is why the ancient man, in contrast to the modern man, is capable of deciphering a meaning or significance of the world. And the experience of significance is communicated by the ancient man through myths and ideograms. In our attempts to view the phenomenology of religion of the four authors from the
perspectives of Merleau-Ponty, we have brought into relief a structure underlying their description of man’s religious experience.

6.3.4.1. The Perceptual Level

The structure that subtends man’s religious experience, first of all ‘begins’ with man’s perceptual encounter with the phenomenal world around. The phenomenal world is a real world for the ancient man. And his encounter with or to use Merleau-Ponty’s term, *interrogation* of the phenomenal world occurs not in the mode of disembodied consciousness but primarily of embodied consciousness. It is the embodied man situated in a specific time and space who encounters the world. The body knows its way around the world, that is, it perceives the world, and in its perceptual style of knowing it is pre-reflective or pre-thematic in character. Man’s response to the manifestation of the transcendent also follows a similar course. It ‘begins’ with a perceptual knowledge and experience of the world around; they serve as means for religious man to encounter the transcendent Other in its concrete manifestations. Natural events and objects that are extremely *exceptional and impressive* stir up in man feelings of awe and reverence that are analogous to the religious feelings. These feeling, however, are not the consequence of a reflective process over man’s empirical experience of the world; they are pre-eminently bodily responses to it. As for instance, when a man is caught in a hurricane, fear grips him instantaneously. It is an immediate bodily response to an empirical experience and not a conscious
response borne out of reflection. The religious man also confronts the manifestation of the Other in events and objects of nature which cause a host of feelings in him. These feelings, though not religious per se, can prompt in man very deep religious attitudes and dispositions.

Otto points out that the dread of demons in the primitive man is valuable insofar as it can spur real religious feeling of awe. Van der Leeuw suggests that man’s encounter with any event or object in nature that is extremely impressive also causes in him an experience of the manifestation of Power. Thus, big mountains and hills, large rivers and oceans, peculiar landscapes and scenic spots, special trees and shrubs, and the like have always caused in man those specific feelings associated with the experience of Power. Eliade too finds that hierophanies occur through natural objects existing in nature. Man’s encounter with the cosmic powers and biological entities is the moment and occasion for him to experience hierophany, the manifestation of the sacred. For, the dialectic of hierophany presupposes that it manifests in something other than itself, the sacred manifests in the secular, the invisible in the visible. And, man who is an embodied being in the world has access to hierophanies primarily through perception. Kristensen also views the primitive man’s perceptual encounter with the world as one stage in the pursuit of the (transcendent) other.

6.3.4.2. Reflective or Conceptual Level

Man’s perceptual experience gives him an access to the world in a pre-reflective or pre-thematic mode. It is primarily an embodied encounter with the world. The perceptual knowing is not the result of a conscious or
reflective process; it is not mere reflexive response either. The perceptual knowing is a kind of knowing where the body has a predominant role. However, man's pursuit of knowledge does not stop at the perceptual level alone, but it moves on to another level where reflection and consequent conceptualization take place. This progression, it must be kept in mind, happens not within the disembodied consciousness, as the rationalists or even Husserl would claim but, as Merleau-Ponty remarks, with in the embodied subjectivity. Cognition, in other words, is the function of whole person, an embodied consciousness. A similar position can be traced in the religious cognition of the ancient man as described by the four authors. Otto postulates a faculty in man that concerns itself with the process of divinization. It is this faculty through which man deciphers the depth dimension of his being in the world. Otto agrees that the transcendent is totally the other, the ganz andere, but he also points out that it manifests itself in something other than itself. And, man comprehends this manifestation through his faculty of divinization which has its own "categories of understanding." Otto attempts to elucidate man's response to the manifestation of the transcendent or experience of the holy by drawing analogous feelings from everyday psychological experience. However, he also carefully delineates the numinous feelings from ordinary psychological feelings. Thus, while showing a definite difference between the two kinds of feeling-responses in man, Otto also implicitly recognizes their mutual dependence. That be the case, it may not be incorrect to argue that the numinous feelings are depth dimensions of man's everyday psychological
experience. As for example, Otto holds that awefulness is an element of the numinous experience which is analogous to the psychological feeling of fear. But at the same time Otto also distinguishes the numinous element of fear from that of ordinary sense of fear since the former’s orientation is different. Though the orientation of the numinous elements is different, the fact remains that Otto turns constantly to psychological feelings in order to explicate the numinous elements. There is, therefore, a coalescing of the two and it is from this intertwining relation the true numinous elements arise.

In the case of Kristensen we find that his concern is to explicate the significance or meaning of religious phenomena for believers. In other words according to Kristensen the essence of religion is the Anschauung des Universums. The primitive man’s perceptual experience of the world around leads him to a definite attitude that is religious in character. This religious attitude and behavior of the primitive man towards the world stem from his comprehension of its depth dimension, viz. its significance or meaning. The primitive man views the world as an undifferentiated unity. He does not view himself apart from the world but in relation with it, as a part and parcel of the world. Man and the world are animated by the same Power. The Power permeates the phenomenal world and, conversely, the phenomenal world becomes a means for the Power to manifest itself. As a result, the primitive man is able to see the depth meaning or significance latent in the phenomenal world.
Van der Leeuw's attempt is to bring to light the universal structures underlying the religious phenomena. These structures exhibit the "unity of meaning" present in the stream of consciousness of the perceiver which is neither intellectually constructed nor passively received, but which is understood. This verstehen or understanding of the structures, Van der Leeuw insists, applies not only to consciousness but also to the whole of existence of the subject. And it may be noted that man's existence comprises not only of his consciousness but also of his body, i.e. man is an embodied consciousness. And it is only through this embodiment in the phenomenal world can he ever decipher its latent structures. In other words, there is an intertwining relation between man and the world from which arise structures, the unity of meaning. With these structures man organizes the otherwise chaotic aggregate of reality into a meaningful whole.

Eliade endeavors to interpret the symbolic meaning of hierophanies, the sacred manifesting itself in the phenomenal world. The sacred manifests itself in something other than itself. The secular objects in the world are means for the sacred to manifest itself. Man, who confronts these mundane objects in the world, is able to understand their depth significance. Man, according to Eliade, is homo symbolicus. And, therefore, he understands the world around him symbolically. Since man's experience of the world is symbolic there is a need for their interpretation. Phenomenology of religion, therefore, according to Eliade, should not remain at the level of classification and comparison, it should also interpret them with a view to explicate their meaning. Eliade calls his phenomenology of religion as
hermeneutic phenomenology. Eliade examines a number of hierophanies drawn from a variety of religious and cultural sources with a view to bring to fore their symbolic meanings. The symbolic meaning that Eliade wants to explicate stems not from man’s detached consciousness as such but from his embodied consciousness engaged within the phenomenal world. It is from man’s symbiotic relation with the phenomenal world, the means for hierophanies to actualize themselves and then man is able to decipher its depth significance expressed in symbols.

Eliade insists on the use of symbols in order to elucidate the meaning or significance of reality because symbols communicate better where words prove to be inadequate or even totally fail. Symbols alone capture the rich meaning of reality as a whole. While intellectual description tends to be fragmentary and therefore incomplete, symbolic representation not only surpasses them but also compasses all those elements that are integral to reality. Reality is polyvalent; it has many meanings inherent in it, and therefore symbols, more than words, are suitable to convey them adequately.

Man’s comprehension of the depth dimension of reality needs to be expressed in modes that are intersubjectively shared and understood. Merleau-Ponty opines in his phenomenology that man expresses his immanent experiences in words and gestures that are intersubjectively shared and accepted. And this tendency in man to move from one level of experience to another, according to Merleau-Ponty, is transcendence in the realm of intersubjectivity.
6.3.4.3. Transcendence Level

The primitive man, as described by all four authors, is able to decipher a depth dimension of the phenomenal world because of his undifferentiated view of it. The world and man are not opposed to each other; on the contrary, they form a continuum. And, there is only one force that operates both in man and in the world. The religious man's encounter with that transcendent force takes place in his embodied being. As an embodied being, man has various dimensions in his perception, says Merleau-Ponty. The primitive man sees the depth dimension of the phenomenal world as religious. That is why the primitive man views natural events and objects as pointers of the transcendent.

The religious man's experience of the depth dimension of reality seeks to transcend itself into modes that are external and intersubjectively shared. In other words, religious man's immanent experience of dimensionality of reality transcends into words and gestures giving rise to myths and rituals. Myths are nothing but the sedimented form of man's immanent experience of deep significance or meaning of reality. Otto holds that man expresses his experience of the holy in ideograms, while Kristensen thinks that the *Anschauung des Universums* is expressed in the religious myths. Van der Leeuw opines that the experience of Power manifested in nature is contained in myths and Eliade considers myths as description of gods' actions at the primordial time. These divine actions, however, are made clear to man through hierophanies, and therefore myths are really the 'history' of hierophanies.
The religious man’s experience of the depth dimension of reality is also contained in and expressed through rituals. To put it in another way, rituals are the sedimented form of man’s religious experience. And hence whenever man performs rituals, he recaptures their sedimented meaning and also gives rise to new signification. Rituals become religious habits in man, and through these religious habits he inhabits the world around him giving it a new meaning. The religious man inhabits a sacred place through performing religious rituals over there. And the sacred space becomes the center of the cosmos for him; it is from this sacred space that the believer orients his relation with the rest of the world. In other words for a believer, the sacred space is filled with meaning which orients his life in the phenomenal world. In a word a religious man inhabits the world religiously.

6.4. Possible New Directions

Our study of the four classical phenomenologists of religion, viz. Otto, Kristensen, Van der Leeuw and Eliade from the perspective of Merleau-Ponty has brought to focus several points of convergence and divergence. While the points of convergence have, undoubtedly, shed light on different aspects of religious phenomena as they are found in different parts of the world, their points of divergence can open new vistas of inquiry into the contemporary experiences of man.

The new vistas of inquiry into the contemporary experiences of man we speak of here do not mean that we are completely cut off from the past. On the contrary, we carry our past with us and it influences our beliefs, values, institutions and traditions. Nevertheless, we need not be totally determined
by it. There is always a possibility of understanding and interpreting the past in new and refreshing ways in today's changed context.

Religious phenomena are not an overnight development; they have taken ages to come to their present stage. And all along they have undergone the process of assimilation and integration in order to better answer the changing needs of human beings. Thus, the religious phenomena have played a pivotal role in guiding the destiny of millions of people across the world by providing them with meaning systems, codes of conduct, rituals, traditions and institutions.

However, religious phenomena, as we encounter them today, have shrunk in their range of grip on human affairs with the advance of scientific knowledge. Religion, in the ancient times, had an overarching influence on man's life and activities: his physical well being, social interaction, economic activity, political institutions, etc. were determined by it. But such an encompassing possibility of religion has given way to a more limited role it plays in human life, or in some instances, it has been counted out as insignificant.

Whether or not religion is trivialized or even negated, it must be acknowledged that man requires a meaning system to live by. And this meaning system may be constructed from out of certain political, social, economic, scientific ideologies that have emerged in human history. As for instance, the Marxian ideology gave rise to the belief that man's destiny is realized in establishing a communist society. It is certainly important to study these meaning systems that animate human life in contemporary
times, and the method of phenomenology of religion, as elucidated by the
four authors in our discussion, can be meaningfully applied to such a study.
Insofar as man constructs a meaning system for the conduct of his life, there
is a need to study its genesis, growth, impact and sustainability. And in this
attempt, the historical development of a meaning system is considered
important. The method of phenomenology of religion, as all the four authors
have shown, takes the historical account of religions into serious
consideration before classifying them into types. So also, the meaning
systems as they have evolved in history, i.e. what historical context a
particular meaning system originated in, how it is practiced by its adherents
and what traditions it has built up, etc. are to be taken into account before
their types can be determined.

The purpose of such a classification of the historical data on the meaning
systems into types and their comparison is to arrive at their essence. As for
instance, the essence of political systems may be the creation and
preservation of social power; the essence of economic systems may be
generation and utilization of wealth; the essence of education systems may
be furtherance of human knowledge, etc. Any meaning system, it is to be
noted, has a psychological aspect as it affects the human behavior; it has a
significance for man as it provides him with a point of reference; it has a
subtending structural association and it is often understood and
communicated in symbols.

In the process of arriving at the essence of a meaning system, it is important
to take its available data from out of their historical context and compare
them with other meaning systems. All the four phenomenologists of religion we discussed above have done the same in their pursuit of the essence of the religious phenomena. Only after ascertaining the essence of a meaning system can we think of interpreting it, a task assigned to the hermeneutical phenomenology.

One of the purported aims of the phenomenology of religion according to Otto, Van der Leeuw, Kristensen and Eliade is to develop a new humanism based on the ancient religious anthropology. This is necessitated because of the desacralization of modern man, he has lost the sense of the sacred. And only by reorienting him to the sacred can he regain his lost humanity. But such a solution, as envisaged by the four phenomenologists of religion under discussion, may not be much relevant in the contemporary experience of man who is, to a large extent, influenced by the tenets of science rather than of religion. Any attempt at developing a new humanism today, therefore, has to take into serious account of the emerging trends in human culture and civilization. And that has made the study of any aspects of human life more complex and at the same time challenging. But then phenomenology as a philosophical method is in the foreground exploring questions that still haunt human beings.
END NOTES - Chapter VI


7 *Vide* p. 209


11 *Vide* p. 212

12 *vide* p. 96.170
This is something very similar to Being-process advocated by Heidegger.

Vide p.170-71

vide p.182

In fact, the relationship between interpretation and explication here brings forward the notion of hermeneutic circle.

While suggesting that there is a decline in the hold of religion on man it must also be mentioned that there are signs that indicate a resurgence of religious ideology in various socio-religious movements. However, the modern religious movements are tempered, at least to some extent, by the scientific knowledge of man.