Chapter II

Otto And The Experience of the Holy Through Merleau-Ponty

At the outset it must be asked if we can legitimately read Rudolf Otto's writings in phenomenology of religion from the perspective of Merleau-Ponty? This question assumes significance against the backdrop of an essential and fundamental divergence of orientation both authors manifest through their writings. Their concerns, in other words, are not immediately correlative. Merleau-Ponty explicitly states that his concern is to carry on the phenomenological task from where Husserl has left, or better left to others to develop. Merleau-Ponty's preface to *Phenomenology of Perception* is an eloquent testimony to the unfinished nature of phenomenology and to the inchoate demeanor distinctive of Edmund Husserl. In particular Merleau-Ponty wants to redescribe the Husserlian concept of "life-world," which for Husserl in his later writings came to be acknowledged as the foundation of all sciences. He takes this concept of life-world to new depths and greater clarity.

In Merleau-Ponty's investigation or "interrogation" of the life-world he primarily focuses on man's perception. In so doing he wants to "expose the body-subject of the perceptual experience, the structure of the perceived world, and the relations between them ...." It becomes clear from Merleau-Ponty's expressed intention that he follows an orientation that is ontological in nature. This ontological project, though implicit in his *Phenomenology of*
Perception, is made more explicit in his later writing, *The Visible and The Invisible*. Merleau-Ponty limits his interrogation into the real world which is the perceived world. There is, in his writings, an ontological primacy of the perceived world over other worlds, such as the 'scientific world,' 'cultural world,' 'religious world.' These different 'worlds,' constituted by mind are, however, still founded on the phenomenal world. Corroborating this ontological thesis of the primacy of the phenomenal world is his epistemological thesis of the primacy of perception which he maintained at the same time.

Given Merleau-Ponty's preoccupation with the ontological explication of the phenomena, the body-subject and the relation between the two, he does not seem to be broaching into metaphysical questions per se. He makes only infrequent references to religion in his writings. In "Indirect Language and The Voices of Silence" Merleau-Ponty draws a distinction between the traditional "vertical" and modern "horizontal" transcendence, in which he speaks against the former and in favor of the latter. If Merleau-Ponty has preferred the ontological domain to metaphysical and religious, then does our attempt to view Otto's phenomenology of religion through his perspective hold any good?

It may be the case that Merleau-Ponty is primarily an Ontologist whose domain of exploration is ontological and not metaphysical, and yet we hold that it is possible to draw some parallel lines of thoughts between him and Rudolf Otto. Otto raises questions that have metaphysical or theological nuances. This does not mean that Otto has scant regard for any ontological
issues. On the contrary he does make forays into the ontological questions which are presupposed in his analogous description of experience of the Holy. Besides, Otto has also attempted to answer in his own way the question of the meaning of Being which neither Merleau-Ponty nor Heidegger does satisfactorily. For, Otto believes that an ontology, to paraphrase Kant, without metaphysical purport is blind and a Metaphysics without the ontological moorings is empty. In his search for the purpose of religion, Otto delves deep into the foundation of religious experience, or as he prefers to call it “the experience of the Holy.” In so far as Otto is returning to the ‘sources’ of the experience of the Holy it can be said of him that he shares in the phenomenological style (in a very general sense - phenomenology is “archeology”) of going back to the “things” themselves.

For, Otto argues that the originary experience of the Holy is to be found not in rational categories as it has been handed down to us in religious traditions, but rather it is preeminently in “non-rational” or “supra-rational” elements or moments.

Merleau-Ponty also, following the phenomenological style, wants to go beyond the sphere of the constituting activity of the transcendental subjectivity as postulated by Husserl to “the founding structure that underlies our enworlded being and existential subject.” This concern is well illustrated when he says that the efforts of phenomenology should be concentrated on “reaching a direct and primitive contact with the world, and endowing that contact with a philosophical status.” A concern of this sort does not in any way amount to the total refusal to accept the existence
and importance of consciousness in man. On the contrary, Merleau-Ponty accepts the role of consciousness in the process of attaining knowledge, but views it as "embodied" or "enworlded." And, as embodied or incarnated consciousness, it is oriented towards or as Merleau-Ponty put it, "interrogates" the world. This form of access to the world is quite different from that of Husserl whose world is the consequence of the "constitution" of the transcendental Subjectivity. Philosophy for Merleau-Ponty then, "is not a passage from a confused world to a universe of closed significations. On the contrary, philosophy begins with an awareness of a world which consumes, and destroys our established significations but also renews them." 

2.1. Perceptual Level

Our awareness of the world is actualized through sense perception. It is to be noted that Kant, although insisted on the superior role of categories of understanding in imposing their structure on percepts, did acknowledge the primacy of perception in the sense that it serves as occasion for knowledge to arise. In his *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty goes beyond Kant's analysis of space and time by disclosing the link between the body and the categorial scheme of the epistemic act. He shows that the embodied human experience is both perceptually and eidetically thrown into the world. 

Our embodied human experience has certain characteristics that distinguish it from the constituting activity of the transcendental Subjectivity. If the
latter operates within the intentionality of consciousness which is ideational, clear, thematic, the former is embedded to a sensorimotor intentionality that is pragmatic, ambiguous and pre-thematic in nature. In other words it can be said that our perception is pre-reflective, in the sense that our knowledge occurs primarily not in a rational mode but pre-rational bodily manner. Merleau-Ponty says that the body has its own way of getting around the world, that means "there must be a sort of consciousness in the body which has not attained to the status of "reflective" consciousness, and this is what Merleau-Ponty means by "prereflective" consciousness." Otto contents that the originary experience of the Holy is understood not in rational but preeminently "non-rational categories." Here the non-rational, however, is not to be wrongly identified with irrationalism which can border laziness and unorganized thought. On the contrary, Otto argues that it is a genuine way of knowing the 'numinous.' He makes it quite explicit in the following terms, "I have ventured to write of that which may be called 'non-rational' or 'supra-rational' in the depths of the divine." This non-rational or supra-rational way of knowing that Otto speaks of in the numinous experience, can be compared, though in a limited way, with Merleau-Ponty's pre-reflective consciousness. It is limited because the 'content' of knowledge gained through the non-rational category and pre-reflective consciousness respectively, is essentially different in nature. For, the knowledge arrived at through non-rational category is that of the 'numinous' while that which is gained through the pre-reflective consciousness is the bodily anticipation of the reflexive knowledge.
Nevertheless, the non-rational as well as the pre-reflective consciousness coalesces on one point that they precede any rational knowledge.

That the numinous experience is non-rational is most evident from Otto’s explication of it from the point of view of Schleiermacher who isolated the “feeling of absolute dependence” as an important element of religious experience. Here Schleiermacher claims unequivocally that religious experience occurs not at the conceptual but rather on feeling level.\textsuperscript{15} He makes a distinction between religious consciousness and metaphysics and morals. Religious consciousness has to do with feelings of dependency to the infinite. It is not to do with the intellectual knowledge but wholly with feeling. The feeling that Schleiermacher refers to is not just an ordinary one, but it is equated with the immediate self. This, therefore, is not an intellectual intuition, since the intellectual intuition cannot ‘grasp’ the divine totality in full but it is an intuition that is more integral.\textsuperscript{16}

Otto furthers Schleiermacher’s view of religious experience in his explication of the numinous experience. Numinous experience for Otto is primarily non-rational; no rational category suffices to articulate it. It is perfectly \textit{sui generis} and irreducible to any other, and therefore, like every primary and elementary datum, it can only be discussed and not defined.\textsuperscript{17}

And at the primary level of man’s religious experience are his feelings which are the consequence of an encounter with the “\textit{numen praesens}.”

A question that can be raised at this point is: does the encounter with the numen take place in an unmediated manner? Otto answers that, although it
does take place in an immediate or unmediated manner, it has its analogous experiences in the natural order. They are not religious experience themselves but they form as "vestibule of religion." For he says,

It must be admitted that when religious evolution first begins sundry curious phenomena confront us, preliminary to religion proper and deeply affecting its subsequent course... They did not, perhaps, take their origin out of this common numinous element directly; they may have all exhibited a preliminary stage at which they were merely 'natural' products of the naive, rudimentary fancies of primitive times. But these things acquire a strand of a special kind, which alone gives them their character as forming the vestibule of religion....

It is to be noted here that, although these primordial experience can be termed as 'pre-religion,' it is "not in the sense that religion and the possibility of religion are explicable by their means: rather they are themselves made possible and can only be explained from a religious basic element, viz. the feeling of the numinous." By this, Otto admits on the one hand the 'triggering role' of these primordial experiences for actual numinous experience, but on the other he insists that they must be understood from the basic element of the numinous. Some of these primordial experiences shall now be focused upon as they form part of the stages of development of religious consciousness.
Otto argues along with some Anthropologists of religion that the primitive experience of religion is based on the ‘daemonic dread’ which appear crude and, at times, even present as opposite to religion, or nothing to do with it. He puts forward some reasons behind such conception in primitive communities. It is first of all due to the gradual emergence of different elements or moments of the numinous. Each one, taken discretely, may appear grotesque and remote to religion. That is why the supernatural deities they relate to also appear as phantoms. Only in a wholistic vision can the different elements form a unity. Secondly, the emotions associated with the numinous are often identified with natural feelings. Thirdly, the valuations prompted by the moments of numinous consciousness (daemonic) is attached to objects, occurrences and entities, coming as they do, within the everyday life of man. It is from here gradually the numinous elements are brought to the fore. Fourthly, crudity of religion is also due to the over enthusiasm leading to wild fanaticism of believers which may disguise itself as possession by the numen, frenzy and intoxication. And lastly, there is a deficient rationalization and moralization of the experience. In any case, it appears that this daemonic dread is the primitive emotional response to any extraordinary phenomena that merit attention. And, Otto suggests that the daemonic dread which is the antecedent stage of “awe,” is not equivalent to the natural fear of ghosts. Rather it begins with a feeling of “something uncanny,” “eerie” or “weird” and then it is objectified as gods and daemons, etc.
Another primordial experience that Otto refers to is the experience of haunting. This once again is the result of the presence of not the *numen* but rather the emotion of "eeriennes" or "uncanniness" itself. Nevertheless, this emotional experience can lead to the realm of the numinous by which the sages and seers have isolated specific locations and objects that bear the numinous mark. Otto cites an example from the Old Testament, wherein a description of such a haunting experience of Jacob is mentioned. "How dreadful is this place! This is none other than the house of Elohim." This sentence gives the impression that it is an experience that is immediate, that is before the meaning content of the feeling itself has become clear or explicit. This pre-reflective experience or as Otto calls it, "primal numinous awe" is itself enough in some cases to mark out 'holy' or 'sacred' places, and turn them into places of veneration and worship.

This prereflective experience of dread is behind even in the primitive belief in souls and spirits. For, Otto insists that these souls and spirits as primordially experienced are to be understood not as ideational objects with or without qualities. But they are first and foremost consequences of some *spectre* which arouses 'dread' or 'awe.' Similar is Otto's understanding of the worship of the dead among the primitives. It does not arise out of any animistic beliefs. It is rather from the actual experience of a dead person who exercises some spell on the minds of people. This spell is felt as 'horror' and 'shudder' and it has a compelling effect on man that he accepts it as immediately self-evident. The feeling-reaction to the dead are due to two reasons: (a) the experient feels disgust at the corpse's putrefaction.
stench and revoltingness, and (b) his own will to life is checked and disturbed, the fear of death and the startled fright comes directly from the sight of the corpse. Such responses are even noticed among animals and therefore they are prereflective experiences.

It is not only ‘daemonic dread’ that is primordial in the numinous experience but also there is an experience of ‘mysterium.’ Although this mysterium is often described as ineffable, absolute Other, incomprehensible and enigmatic, Otto says that there are analogous experiences of the natural order that can arouse the numinous consciousness.

Whatever has loomed upon the world of his ordinary concerns as something terrifying and baffling to the intellect; whatever among natural occurrences or events in the human, animal or vegetable kingdoms has set him astare in wonder and astonishment - such things have ever aroused in man, and become endued with, the ‘daemonic dread’ and ‘numinous’ feeling, so as to become ‘portents,’ ‘prodigies,’ and ‘marvels.’

Another primordial or prereflective experience of man that Otto points to is that of the experience of natural powers, such as volcanoes, mountains, sun, moon and clouds. The primitives consider them alive or animate. However, these ‘animate beings,’ says Otto, are far from being yet ‘divine’ or ‘gods,’ not even when man turns to them with petition. They have to be imbued
with the numinous qualities before they can attain the status of being
'gods.'

There is however a primordial experience of something that is mistakenly
identified with religious experience, and that is magic. Natural magic
carries with it no elements of the numinous; it is only a mode of behavior
exhibiting some simple analogy and it is carried out unreflectively. The
purpose of such magic is to "influence and regulate an event in accordance
with the wishes of the agent." Such is the case of a bowler who aims and
plays his bowl hoping it to roll straight and hit the jack. His body gestures
follow (unconsciously) the course of the bowl as though they would
"prescribe and determine" its movement. What is to be noted here is that a
player has no theoretical and reflective basis on the cause-effect relation
between the bowl and himself. His actions, therefore, are naively analogical
for attaining a particular wish. These same dynamics also are operative in
the attempts of rain-makers and those wishing to influence the course of the
sun, the moon, clouds and winds, etc. Otto casts his doubts over the use of
the term -true magic that has an element of what is called a 'supernatural
efficacy'- and suggests that it is a misnomer as it would be pretentious to
ascribe such imposing expressions on the naive mind. For to understand
what supernatural is, one has first of all to understand what is nature, that
is, it is a unified system operated by definite laws. The magical practices of
the primitives, therefore, are without any theoretical basis and as such they
are prereflecive.
So far we have been dwelling on the primordial or prereflective level of religious experience which, however, is not to be identified with religion *per se*, but rather forms a lower stage of numinous consciousness. It arises from man’s ‘first encounter’ with the visible world around, resulting in him a broad range of feeling-response towards it. Merleau-Ponty also considers the perceptual level foundational, as it is at this level the “embodied” man encounters with the phenomenal world which is the real world. And in and through this encounter there occurs a knowledge that is not reflective but prereflective. Man primarily knows the visible world around through his body which projects itself into the world and get involved in it.

2.2. Dimensionality of Perceived World

Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on the ontological primacy of the visible world in our perception does not mean that he aligns himself with the empiricists who view the world is an aggregate of individual things with determinate qualities. Nor does Merleau-Ponty agree with the idealists who constitute in their mind the meaning of the world. The visible world for Merleau-Ponty is a landscape, topography to be explored. It is an “uncultivated being” and a “wild being” that needs to “interrogated.” The visible or sensible thing is not *in* the here and *in* the now; and at the same time it is not atemporal and aspatial. It presides over a “field-being,” that is, like a direction it works across a space and presides over a system of oppositional relationships.
The visible thing, however, is not a contingent juxtaposition of particulars. But rather it is a unity of,

a certain style, a certain manner of managing the domain of space and time over which it has competency, of pronouncing, of articulating that domain, of radiating about a wholly virtual center - in short a certain manner of being, in the active sense, a certain Wesen, in the sense that, says Heidegger, this word has when it is used as a verb. 29

This visible thing is accessible primarily through our body which itself is a visible thing. Our body then is placed among the visible things in the world but it is not totally of the world. As a living body, it is uniquely located in the world in the sense that it is auto-schematizing; it has its own style and gait in movement and gestures. This generation of schemes of unity or as Merleau-Ponty puts it, "instability instituted," across time and space is accomplished by the organism itself.

A distinguishing feature of the visible thing including lived-body is that it is dimensional. The visible does not present itself as a 'closed thing' and thus opaque to the subject, but it exhibits in itself a dimensionality or depth. 30 Merleau-Ponty says, "What we call a visible is, ... a quality pregnant with a texture, the surface of a depth, a cross-section upon a massive being, a grain or corpuscle borne by a wave of Being." 31 The visible therefore presents itself as "further on," that is, the visible is not a multitude of spatio-temporal individuals that have to be combined and connected by a mind
constitutive of relations, but rather it is a "field," a "relief," a "topography" unfolding differentiations. These differentiations are, however, held together not by laws but "through the reflections, shadows, levels and horizon between things (which are not things and are not nothing, but on the contrary mark out by themselves the fields of possible variation in the same thing and in the same world)."\textsuperscript{32}

In the \textit{Phenomenology of Perception} Merleau-Ponty has already indicated an immanent logic at work in the sensible field which holds all things together in a system. This "wild logos" was a system of levels posited in the sensible field by our body in its initial position before carrying out certain tasks. As for instance, in order to differentiate color in the visual field, it is necessary to discern the spatial levels and level of illumination. Here, we do not see the light but we see a color through light. In other words these levels and dimensions, this system of lines of force are not exactly what we see; they are that \textit{with which} or \textit{according to which} we see.\textsuperscript{33}

These levels and dimensions are present in the visible in a latent manner. Our seeing of the visible is therefore geared towards "reaching the being in latency." There is prejudicative Logos present here that does not emerge into view before the eidetic insight; it always remains latent in the visible. However, it is not totally invisible either, as an object hidden behind another that would be totally unrelated to the visible. Rather "it is the invisible of this world, that which inhabits this world, sustains it, and renders it visible, its own and interior possibility, the Being of this being."\textsuperscript{34}
This dimensionality is applicable not only to material objects but also to human body in so far as it is also a visible. It is both sensible and sensed; it can both touch and be touched. There is an inherent reversibility power in the body through which we explore the world and are explored by the world. This reciprocal dimensionality of the visible is best illustrated by Merleau-Ponty through his concept “flesh” (la chair).35

This ontological term “flesh” supplants Merleau-Ponty’s terminology of lived body. Flesh belongs neither to the world nor to the subject exclusively. It is a “primal element” for which there is no name in any philosophy. 36 It connotes the un-split reality of our bodily experience. As such, it is unitary which at once transcends and merges both mind and body, both the subjective knower and the objective known. Flesh is ontologically prior to body as a physical object as well as to mind constructed as ideality. Merleau-Ponty writes, “It is the coiling over of the visible upon the seeing body, of the tangible upon the touching body, which is attested in particular when the body sees itself, touches itself seeing and touching the things.”37

Merleau-Ponty uses the term flesh not exclusively to refer to the biological realm, but it is an ontological category which connotes the nature of Being as a whole. That is why we find him speaking of “the flesh of the world,” and “flesh of things” which again is not a thing but a latency.38

The chief characteristic of the elemental notion of flesh is that it ‘establishes’ a number of “chiasmatic” or “intertwining” relations. These chiasmatic relations, according to Merleau-Ponty, serve as a matrix from which arises signification expressed in words. The significations, therefore,
are not totally invisible; they show themselves in words, and are placed not on the reverse of the visible but reside in both sides. Here Merleau-Ponty once brings to the fore the chiasmatic relations between thought and word. Thought is not independent of words, and words do not exist apart from thought, there is an overlapping of the two in actual human exchange. In other words, there is an "occult trading" of thoughts and words taking place in our linguistic practices.

Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the visible world, the lived-body with their dimensionality and their chiasmatic relation giving rise to significations serve as a backdrop against which we can view how Otto progresses in his description of the numinous experience. We have already explicated above that religious experience as understood by Otto has its 'beginnings' in the primordial experience that man has of the perceptual world. The experience of daemonic dread, fear of the natural forces, experience of haunting and other similar experiences are, in some sense, said to be precursor of true numinous experience. At the same time, Otto insists, that these experiences can only be understood in the light of the "basic element of the numinous." As primordial experiences they are at the pre-reflective level.

Otto's analysis of the numinous experience moves on from a pre-reflective or primordial level to reflective level, by thematizing it. Although Otto claims that the numinous can be understood only in non-rational categories, he does not thereby imply that we can assert nothing about it. On the contrary he argues that, "... it must be in some way or other within our
grasp, else absolutely nothing could be asserted of it."\textsuperscript{39} However, he differs from the traditional rational ways of describing or even defining the nature and characteristics of God. According to that, "The nature of God is thus thought of by analogy with our human nature of reason and personality."\textsuperscript{40} Such analogical conception of God has given rise to rational religion, and Christianity, according to Otto, has a preponderance of this rational aspect which, far from being anything negative, is a definite sign of its superiority.

Having said that Otto hastens to add that focus on rational aspect of religion alone leaves other aspects out. Otto wants to give corrective to this lacuna by emphasizing on the non-rational aspect the value of which the orthodox Christianity has "manifestly failed to recognize."\textsuperscript{41}

Otto then sets out to explore the non-rational element of religious experience. It must be remembered here that he does not view non-rational as opposed to rational, but rather as an important dimension of religion which many religions have relegated to the margins or totally left out. Against this scenario Otto examines the morphology of the term, holy as it is used in Christianity. According to him, the term holy has been derivatively used to mean the moral goodness. "We generally take 'holy' as meaning 'completely good'; it is the absolute moral attribute, denoting the consummation of moral goodness."\textsuperscript{42} Otto argues that such derivative use of the term holy has distorted its originary meaning. His whole attempt, therefore, in his work - \textit{The Idea of the Holy} - is to recapture that originary
experience implied in the term holy which for him is the numinous experience minus its moral and rational aspects.\textsuperscript{43}

The numinous experience can be understood only in non-rational categories, since it is pre-eminently a “creature-feeling,” a “feeling of dependence” of a creature on its creator. However, this creature-feeling manifests itself in and through various responses man makes to the numinous which is objective and outside the self. Otto goes on to explicate the different elements in the numinous which find their corresponding response in man - not just in the consciousness but specifically in the “embodied consciousness.”

Otto describes the fundamental element in the numinous as \textit{mysterium tremendum}. Conceptually \textit{mysterium} means that which is hidden, esoteric, unfamiliar and extraordinary. Though it conveys a negative tone, it actually means something absolutely and intensely positive. The adjective \textit{tremendum} is said to have three predominant elements: ‘awefulness,’ ‘overpoweringness’ and ‘energy’ or ‘urgency.’

In order to understand and to articulate these elements in the numinous and man’s corresponding feeling-response to them, Otto draws on the analogous psychological experience of our everyday life. An analogy, because of its similarity to something else, becomes a means to comprehend that something better, but then that is no sufficient reason to identify the two as one and the same. Such an inadvertent identification results in what is known as a category mistake. Otto makes it abundantly clear that the numinous is a \textit{sui generis} category not reducible to anything else. And, yet
the numinous experience is mediated through man’s feelings and emotions thus necessitating on his part to draw an analogous picture of the numinous in its manifestation. Man provides a unique locus where the numinous manifests itself, as he, alone among all creatures, is capable of recognizing the ‘elements’ of the numinous, analogously, through his own feelings. In other words, we can say that natural feelings in man is a necessary condition for the possibility of the numinous’ manifestation in him. That means, though distinct they are, not in degree but in kind, they still have a mutual relation in concretizing the numinous elements in man.

Given the fact that Otto indulges in the rhetoric of going back forth from man’s natural feelings and emotions to a specifically numinous, is it possible to understand the latter as a dimension of the former, albeit quite distinct, as Merleau-Ponty would speak of the significance already implicit dimensionally in perception of the “mute” thing? For Merleau-Ponty the perceptual world is already dimensionally conceptual in a silent style, and conversely, the conceptual world presupposes the perceptual. Similarly it can be said that the elements of the numinous such as “dread,” “awefulness,” “overpoweringness,” “fascination,” are depth dimensions of the natural feeling. In other words, the natural feelings are dimensionally numinous and conversely the numinous presupposes natural feelings. This becomes clear from the manner in which Otto proceeds to analyze the elements of the numinous.
2.3. Element of 'Awefulness'

'Awefulness' as an element of the numinous can be understood from an analogous experience of fear in our ordinary life. However, it is not identical with the fear ('tremor') of everyday life. In other words, 'this fear' is more than ordinary fear. The Hebrew word, *hiqdish* (hallow) is an example of this 'fear' which exhorts the people to 'keep a thing holy in the heart.' In modern English there are awe and aweful which, in a deeper sense, comes close to the characteristic of the *numen*.

Otto admits that the antecedent of this religious awe is 'daemonic dread' often time wrongly expressed in the 'dread of ghosts' in the primitive man. However, Otto thinks that as an antecedent feeling, it has some value in explicating the numinous element of 'awe.'

In this feeling which, emerging in the mind of primeval man, forms the starting-point for the entire religious development in history. 'Daemons' and 'gods' alike spring from this root, and all the products of 'mythological apperception' or 'fantasy' are nothing but different modes in which it has been objectified.

Otto does accept the positive role of primitive man's encounter with the uncanny and eerie forces of nature which served as a starting-point of religious development. And such an encounter is reflected in the daemonic dread found among the primitives. As antecedent experience, this is to be preserved, for Otto thinks that, "Its disappearance would be indeed an essential loss. The 'shudder' reappears in a form ennobled beyond measure
where the soul, held speechless, trembles inwardly to the furthest fiber of its being." If Otto is quite emphatic on the antecedent value of the daemonic dread, and the need to preserve it, as it reappears in an ennobled form, then, does it not imply that the numinous elements, however 'blurred' they may be, are already present in it? In other words, it would not be incorrect to say that Otto is pointing to what Merleau-Ponty calls the dimensionality of the pre-reflective experience that is characteristic of perception.

It is in this deeper (numinous) dimensionality of the natural feelings, the 'wrath of Yahweh' of the Old Testament and the 'wrath of God' in the New Testament of the Bible are manifested. The phrase 'wrath of God' is to be taken not literally but as an 'ideogram' representing a unique emotional moment in religious experience. Although Otto once again demarcates the qualitative difference between the elements of the numinous and natural feelings, by saying that the former retains a unique sense of 'terror' that no natural anger can stir up, the scheme of his explanation of the numinous analogously with natural fear goes to show that he cannot prove the existence of the numinous apart from appealing to natural feeling.

The experience of self-depreciation is one of the chief consequences of the experience of 'overpowringness,' coming as it does, from that Being which is the plenitude of being - the absolute Being. And in the presence of that absolute Being man experiences not so much of the 'feeling of createdness' but rather the 'feeling of creaturehood,' i.e., the consciousness of the smallness of every creature in front of that which is above all creatures.
In addition to the 'awfulness' ('tremendum') and 'majesty' ('majestas') there is yet another element which Otto calls as the 'Urgency' or 'Energy' of the numinous. This element is most evident in the 'wrath of God' expressed symbolically as vitality, passion, emotional temper, will, force, movement, etc. The philosophers of religion have generally tended to treat this description of the qualities of numen as rudiments of anthropomorphism. But in fact, according to Otto, these once again speak eloquently of the non-rational elements of the divine nature.  

2.4. Element of 'Mysterium'

The object to which the numinous consciousness is directed is the 'mysterium tremendum.' We have already seen the meaning of the adjective 'tremendum' as awe or dread of a unique quality which is the depth dimension (numinous) of the natural feelings. It is to be noted here that the adjective 'tremendum' does not exactly convey the meaning of 'mysterium' as they have quite distinct meanings. Nevertheless, it is to be admitted that reactions in consciousness that correspond to the one may flow into those that correspond to another. This passing on of feelings aroused in the element 'tremendum' to that of 'mysterium' is sometimes not as easily done as it is said.

The mental reaction peculiar to 'mysterium' is called by Otto as 'stupor.' once again used analogously. Stupor signifies "blank wonder, and astonishment that strikes us dumb, amazement absolute." The word 'mysterium' taken in its ordinary meaning points to that which is
uncomprehended and unexplained. But it is taken here as an ideogram in the religious context intending to illustrate that which is mysterious - the 'wholly other.' It is the wholly other that fills the mind with wonder and amazement which is not of the usual type. Once again here Otto states that the experience of 'amazement' (mysterium) before the 'wholly other' is to be distinguished from that which occurs in the natural realm. He goes on to add that it is not just a matter of degree between the experience of natural amazement and 'amazement' which is an element of the numinous, nor can what is natural grow into the supernatural realm. This element of 'mysterium' is an independent category in itself. The question once again is that where and how does this numinous feeling occur? From a phenomenological perspective it becomes absurd to say that a feeling exists without however pointing out its exact location and the mode of existence. All along Otto has been drawing analogies from the realm of natural feeling, since they do serve as foundation for any further understanding of numinous feelings that are distinct and yet analogous to it. It would therefore be more plausible to hold that the numinous elements are those dimensions inherent in the realm of natural feelings with a distinct quality of their own. For we cannot compartmentalize the human experience into neatly demarcated areas since all our experiences come as they do, in a complex modality.
2.5. Element of ‘Fascination’

The numinous consciousness is characterized by two important elements, *viz.* the ‘tremendum’ and ‘mysterium.’ In addition to these there is another element that is uniquely attractive and fascinating (‘fascinans’). It is true that the qualities of daunting and fascinating make strange combination. And yet it is the harmony between these two contrasting elements that form the strangest and noteworthy phenomenon in the entire history of religion.

This ‘mystery’ is for him not merely something to be wondered at but something that entrances him; and beside that in it which bewilders and confounds, he feels a something that captivates and transports him with a strange ravishment, rising often enough to the pitch of dizzy intoxication; it is the Dionysiac element in the numen.54

Otto points out that there are concepts on the rational side of the non-rational ‘fascination’ such as, love, mercy and comfort. These virtues are important in the usual conduct of life, and in the numinous consciousness they are experienced more intensely and completely. That these virtues are experienced in a more intense manner is evident from man’s various situations and moments of life. As for instance, there are many religious practices such as forms of propitiation, petition, sacrifice, thanksgiving, etc. which serve as means of the numinous consciousness to manifest itself.
2.6. Dimension of Transcendence

Having argued that the numinous elements, qualitatively distinct and unique, are depth dimensions of the natural feelings, we now need to consider how these dimensions actualize their peculiar tendency towards transcendence. It is a fact that man needs to give expression to his experience of depth dimensions (numinous) which is mediated through other dimensions of his experience. This tendency to move from one dimension of experience to another in man is what is known as transcendence in Merleau-Ponty. For him the concept of transcendence is central to his whole philosophical thinking, says, Jerry H. Gill.\textsuperscript{55}

Merleau-Ponty applies the concept of transcendence to his account of our knowledge of the world, the other persons, and ourselves. And from his description of transcendence at all these levels, certain patterns can be deciphered. First, as we interact with the things around us we realize that although we are not identical with them, we can never totally separate ourselves from them either. In other words there is a symbiotic character in our embodied perceptual relation with the physical world. Second, Merleau-Ponty uses the concept of transcendence more frequently in his discussions on “intersubjectivity” as it permeates our social existence which includes among others language, economics, art and sexuality. Focusing on sexuality, Merleau-Ponty says that a merely physical relationship is transformed into sexual one when through intersubjectivity of “flesh” we really make “contact” with another person.
In all these what Merleau-Ponty wants to emphasize is that there is a symbiotic relation between the transcendent and imminent. The transcendent does not exist independently of or go beyond that of which it is transcendent. The transcendent is "more" than that which it transcends, and yet it cannot be reduced to it. Similarly, the transcendent is never "other" than what it transcends, in the sense of existing independently. Merleau-Ponty applies the same symbiotic relational scheme to our language also. Speech emerges out of bodily interaction with the world, leading to formation of language. Language therefore, does not exist independently of human body in the sense that body is medium in and through which it takes 'birth.' This is well expressed by Merleau-Ponty in the following passage,

The meaning of the gesture is not contained in it like some physical or physiological phenomenon. The meaning of the word is not contained in the word as a sound. But the human body is defined in terms of its property of appropriating, in an indefinite series of discontinuous acts, significant cores which transcend and transfigure its natural powers. The act of transcendence is first encountered in the acquisition of a pattern of behavior, then in the mute communication of gesture: it is through the same power that the body opens itself to some new kind of conduct and makes it understood to external witness.
The words and consequently language 'born' out of bodily interaction with the world assumes an intersubjective significance through a process of "sedimentation." Sedimentation of words takes place by previously uttering them, implying a specific meaning. When the same words are used by others implying similar meaning they attain a universal status. Sedimentation occurs, however, not only at the level of language but at the level of gestures also.

The same process of transcendence can be noticed in Otto's description of the numinous experience which is, as we have already noted, a depth dimension of the natural feelings. What is transcendent (the numinous) is certainly "more" than that which it transcends (natural feelings), and yet it cannot be reduced to it. Similarly the transcendent is never "other" than what it transcends, in the sense of existing independently. This is quite clear from Otto's falling back constantly on the chiasmatic relation between the natural feelings and the numinous elements. The natural feelings are invoked each time before Otto elaborates the unique elements of the numinous, and conversely the numinous elements are contrasted against the natural feelings. It is not the case here that we want to erase all marks of difference between the natural feelings and numinous elements that Otto zealously guards; on the contrary we are pointing out the mutual dependence between the two that he implies all along.

Otto articulates the numinous experience in terms of "ideograms." These ideograms, less than a "genuine intellectual 'concept'" so used by Otto only because they point to some established meanings that are shared
intersubjectively. In other words, meanings are "sedimented" in those ideograms. These ideograms in turn refer back to the bodily experience of numinous feelings, and therefore there is once again noticed a chiasmatic relation between the bodily experience of numinous feelings and the formation of ideograms. These ideograms are found best expressed in myths and religious rituals.

The purpose of religious myths and rituals is two-fold: first, to recapture the originary numinous experience implied in them and, second, to creatively use them for developing new signification. In either case it necessitates the retelling of the myth and reenacting of the ritual, which is possible only because the sedimented meanings have formed themselves into habits in man. It is through our habits that we inhabit the world; and conversely, we form habits through our inhabiting the world, says Merleau-Ponty. We, therefore, inhabit the world of the numinous by the habit of narrating myths and performing rituals. Conversely, we form the habit of narrating myths and performing rituals by inhabiting the world of the numinous.

Inhabiting the world of the numinous experience implies that its elements are brought to being by actually narrating the myths and performing the rituals at a particular space and time. For Otto, through his writings, intents not only an explication of the numinous experience but also to evoke such an experience in the reader. In fact, he makes the numinous experience a prior condition in a scholar before he actually begins to explicate it. Otto, therefore, invites his readers to direct their minds to a deeply felt numinous experience. "Whoever cannot do this, whoever knows such moments in his
experience, is requested to read no farther...” cautions Otto. In other words, Otto presupposes that there is in everyone a possibility of the numinous experience through his inhabiting of space and time in ritualistic worship which include chanting or singing of numinous sounds narration of myths and the practice of certain gestures.

The religious rituals are usually performed at a specified space and time by designated person/s - often consecrated person/s. The specified space (for example, a church, temple, mosque, synagogue, etc.) is religiously significant because of the rituals performed over there, and conversely, rituals bear numinous elements since they are performed at a sacred space. As regards the specified time of rituals, it always coincides with the actual performance of a ritual at a specified space. There is, therefore, no such differentiation between temporal and spatial aspects to be made in the case of religious rituals, says Ron Cooper. The time of rituals is a time of numinous experience, and it is concretely achieved by a subject through his “coiling over” of a ritualistic object/s at a particular sacred place. In other words he ‘appropriates’ the object in a ritual, feels deeply one with it and allows it to affect him in a significant manner - a style of being in relation to the object of worship. As for instance, the worship of Durga, the ‘great mother’ of Bengal is expected to evoke the numinous awe in a devotee. Similarly, the stern, grim picture of the Madonna in ancient Byzantine art seems to attract more devout Catholics more than charm of the Madonnas of Raphael, since the former, more than the latter provides a better ambience for experiencing the numinous awe.
In all religious rituals it is to be noted that there exist unique gestures pregnant with meaning. They are appropriate within the context of religious worship only. Gestures, according to Merleau-Ponty, include not only somatic variations, but words also. "The spoken word is a gesture, and its meaning, a world." The whole body, just like in an action, is totally involved in articulating a word. Therefore words are true bodily gestures. When these gestures are employed in a religious ritual they transcend their strictly natural realm to what Otto calls the "supra-natural" which is the domain of the numinous. Therefore, gestures become supra-natural when they are employed within a numinous context, and conversely, a context turns out to be numinous when appropriate supra-natural gestures are made. This is what is known in religious language as efficacy of gestures. It is meant to cast a spell in man who makes such supra-natural gestures in a numinous context, that is, during religious worship. The type of spells that Otto points to here is the experience of the numinous elements of 'awe', 'dread,' 'overpoweringness,' 'energy,' 'fascination' that are experienced in and through religious rituals. That this experience does not restrict itself to the confines of consciousness, but rather it permeates the whole embodied person is quite clear from when Otto draws an analogy between the numinous experience and erotic experience. Just as erotic feelings affect not just the consciousness of a person but have their bearing on the whole person, so also the numinous experience does not limit itself to one aspect of a person but encompasses him in his entirety.
We have been so far looking at Otto's explication of the numinous experience from Merleau-Ponty's perspective of bodily intentionality as it is understood in the lived world. Religious experience, as we have noted earlier, is a lived experience at a particular time in a given context. Because of man's embodied condition, he cannot escape his facticity and perspectivism. All that he experiences then comes mediated through his bodily existence in the world. It is through his body that he perceives the world around, understands its significance, forms habits out of it, and through inhabiting actualizes the significance in the lived world. In other words, Merleau-Ponty understands reality as dimensional, and all his efforts are directed towards explicating different levels of this dimensionality. Against this backdrop we have viewed, Otto's description of the numinous experience following the same process of prereflective bodily encounter with the phenomenal world, as seen in the primitive experience of man which upon 'reflection' brings to the fore its latent dimensions, as found in the non-rational elements of the numinous, and these dimensions tend to transcend themselves into a state of sedimentation reflected in religious words and gestures that are reactivated in religious rituals and worship. What, therefore, began with man's encounter with the natural forces moves into a deeper dimension of the numinous only to return permeating his being in the world.
END NOTES - Chapter II


4 It is to be noted here that Merleau-Ponty was opposed to the duality of reality as understood by the traditional Metaphysics, and he develops a new conception of it where true Metaphysics is grounded in the primacy of perception. This is evident from the last part of his work, “Eye and Mind”, published in *The Primacy of Perception*, trans. Carleton Dallery, Northwestern University Press, 1964.


13 Otto suggests that the non-rational element is more primordial in the religious understanding. Heidegger, however, makes a distinction between the rational and non-rational. The problem with the pre-grasp of religion is evident: “To place religious phenomena in the category of the irrational, no matter how broadly one characterizes this, is to explain nothing, precisely because the contrast lives off the meaning of the “rational”, which itself goes unquestioned or unclarified.” As cited in Bruce W.Ballard, in “Heidegger, Otto & The Phenomenology of Awe” in *Philosophy Today*, Spring, 1988, p.62.


18 Ibid. p.121.

19 Ibid. p.128.

20 Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology*, op. cit. p.299, and Edward B. Taylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom*, op. cit. p.500. These two authors speak of an evolution of religious consciousness where the primitive people had only the rudimentary understanding of that which is specifically religious. However, Wilhelm Schmidt, in his Work, *The Origin and Growth of Religion: Facts and Theories*, holds the view that even in primitive societies there are evidences to suggest that monotheism was already prevalent, rather than the culmination of an evolution of religious thinking.


22 Ibid. p.13.


25 Ibid. p.66.

26 Ibid. 126.


29 Ibid. 115.


31 Ibid. 136.


34 Ibid. p.151.


36 Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and The Invisible, op. cit. pp.139,147.

37 Ibid.p.146.


40 Ibid. p. 1.
By claiming that the numinous elements are deeper dimensions of the natural feelings we do not propose to endorse the view that religious feelings can be reduced to psychological phenomena as the empirical psychology does. We have elaborated on this point while discussing on the study of religion from a psychological perspective. The point that we want to convey is that since the natural feelings are required to understand the numinous elements, there seems, phenomenologically, a strong case for relation between the two, though qualitatively different. For more details of his view on the qualitative difference between the numinous elements and natural feelings, please see, The Idea of the Holy, op. cit. Cf. foot note, no.1, p.15.

In the Old Testament there are other words which express similar ‘dread’ that belongs to the category of the ‘numinous’. As for example, Exodus xiii. 27, “I will send my fear before thee and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come.”; Job ix. 34, “let not his fear terrify me”; Job xiii. 21, “Let not thy dread make me afraid.”

In German language, however, there are no such word/s to denote a higher form of emotion. Nevertheless, the word ‘erschauern’ captures this sense to some extent. The cruder and earlier phases where terms like ‘grausen.’
'Schauer,' 'gruseln,' 'gräser' and 'grässlich' indicate more clearly the numinous element.

47 Ibid. p.15.

48 Ibid. pp.17-18. In Christian worship there are the lofty and noble words, 'holy, holy, holy' that brings this numinous emotions out well. The Hymn of Tersteegen illustrates this numinous aspect pointedly.

        God Himself is present:
        Heart, be stilled before Him:
        Prostrate inwardly, adore Him.

49 An objection that is usually raised here that 'religious perception' is no ordinary perception since 'object' of religion defies our normal perception. While taking note of this objection, it is to be admitted that even those die-hard defenders of such view concede to the fact that an encounter with the object of religion is not possible except in and through human feelings and emotions. An abstracted object of religion is equivalent to the God of philosophers and not of the believer. Phenomenology of religion deals with religion as understood by not the former but the latter.

50 Ibid. pp.21-22.

51 Ibid. p.24. In Luther's work, De Servo Arbitrio, he makes a clear reference to the omnipotent God in whom a fine synthesis of 'majesty' and 'energy' takes place. The element of 'energy' is found in Fichte's speculations on the Absolute as an active World Stress.
The word consciousness used here is not in the sense of the disembodied ego of the idealism, but in the sense of "embodied consciousness" as Merleau-Ponty holds.


Ibid. p.31.


Ibid. pp.60-62.


Ibid. p.7.

Ibid. p.9.


The word ritual is understood here in a broad sense that it encompasses not only certain sacred actions performed on materials but also activities such as prayer. fasting, etc. And by ritualistic objects, we mean that any object that is placed within the precincts of a sacred place that commands reverence and respect of the believers.