

CHAPTER TWO

THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF RELIGION

In this chapter we will extend the analysis presented in the first chapter by focusing on phenomenology as a method for the study of religion. We will, therefore, be able to penetrate more deeply into some of the methodological problems presented to us in the history and phenomenology of religion. This will be done in three parts. The first part will briefly outline what the phenomenology of religion is all about. This approach to religion is often located in the phenomenological movement which began with Husserl. Part two, therefore, will describe Husserl's phenomenological project. Part three will critically apply Husserl's phenomenology to well-known assertions by phenomenologists of religion.

I am fully aware of the fact that not one well-known anthology or history of the phenomenological movement includes an essay on the phenomenology of religion. The two volume study of the movement by Herbert Spiegelberg refers to G. van der Leeuw's use of philosophical phenomenology as an afterthought to the possibility of a phenomenology of religion. ¹ Despite this conclusion, scholars of religion have persisted in identifying not only van der Leeuw but also Otto and Eliade as influenced by the phenomenological movement, especially by Husserl. Thus, Willard Oxtoby writes in the recently published Encyclopedia of Religion that "One of the principal options in the study of religion in the mid-twentieth century has been termed the 'phenomenology' of religion.. Understood strictly, the phenomenology of religion is supposed to be a precise application to religion of insights from the European philosophical movement known as phenomenology, launched by Edmund Husserl. "²

Douglas Allen is more direct. He places Otto, van der Leeuw and Eliade, "the three most influential" scholars of religion, directly in the