

phenomenological movement and states that they "have used a phenomenological method and have been influenced, at least partially, by phenomenological philosophy." The first bibliographical reference to this article is the two volume work by Herbert Spiegelberg. Allen repeats this assertion in another article he wrote on Husserl, "Husserl's influence can be seen in the phenomenological works of Max Scheler, Gerardus van der Leeuw, Paul Ricoeur and many others."<sup>3</sup> The task in this chapter is to demonstrate that the influence of Husserl on what has become known as "phenomenology of religion" is at best a folk tale and that the history and phenomenology of religion as we know it today could reasonably be described as Christian theology carried on by other means. In order to carry out this demonstration we will proceed with a description of phenomenology of religion and then give a brief synopsis of Husserl's work on phenomenology.

### 1. The Phenomenology of Religion

The term "phenomenology" is used in many ways. It is often used in the title of a book to indicate that the work is a "pure" description of a particular subject. What the phenomenologist does is simply describe the phenomena as it appeared in an experiment, field work, or historical research. Of course, it is not quite so simple. We must learn to become suspicious of any work that is presented as a pure description unencumbered by theory. Descriptions are always theory laden. However, I see no compelling reasons that would argue against the use of phenomenology to indicate that what we are doing is primarily descriptive (always within the framework of some theory) rather than theoretical research.

The phenomenology of religion is different. It has flourished primarily in theological faculties and divinity schools. We are repeatedly told by its practitioners that the phenomenology of religion is a distinct methodology for the understanding of religion that should not be confused with history, sociology, anthropology or theology. When we inquire about the distinctive characteristics of this methodology, we are given the reply that it involves taking The Sacred, the "essence" of religion, seriously.

Anyone familiar with the phenomenology of religion will recall that most practitioners of this method make the following claims: 1. Religion is a sui generis reality, and, therefore, the study of religion requires its own unique methodology. But, the essence of religion never manifests itself in a naked and unaccommodated form. 2. Because of the unique nature of religion all "reductions" must be avoided. 3. The ultimate aim of a phenomenology of religion is the formulation of the essence of religion. 4. Phenomenology of religion is free from value judgments; it is an objective account of religion. It can teach us to recognize what is genuine and what is spurious in religion. 5. By using Husserl's notion of the "epoche," phenomenologists of religion are able to suspend the question of the truth of religion. 6. Guided by the principle of "epoche" the phenomenologist of religion does not use the term "revelation" but substitutes the concept of "hierophany" in its place.<sup>4</sup>

The father of the phenomenology of religion put it this way: 1. The phenomenology of religion "is the systematic discussion of what appears (rede über das Sich-zeigende). Religion however, is an ultimate experience, a revelation which in its very essence is, and remains concealed." 2. The phenomenology of religion is not, "history of religions," "psychology of religion," or "philosophy" of "theology" since the latter two "claim to search for truth, which phenomenology, in this respect, exercises the intellectual suspense of the epoche."<sup>5</sup> At this point, van der Leeuw refers to Husserl's use of the term epoche as implying that "no judgement is expressed concerning the objective world, which is thus placed 'between brackets,' as it were., All phenomena, therefore, are considered solely as they are presented to the mind, without any further aspects such as their real existence, or their value being taken into account." 3. The observer thus adopts "the attitude of complete intellectual suspense or of abstention from judgement, regarding these controversial topics."<sup>6</sup>

More recently we are informed that "one of the principal options in the study of religion in the mid-twentieth century has been termed the 'phenomenology' of religion." This option is then described as "a precise application to religion of the insights from the European philosophical movement known as phenomenology, launched by Edmund Husserl."<sup>7</sup>