

Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religion



Religion and Reason 27

Method and Theory

in the Study and Interpretation of Religion

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Contents

Preface	v
1. Introduction: The Contrast between the Classical and Con- temporary Periods in the Study of Religion	1
Frank Whaling (Edinburgh, U.K.)	
2. Historical and Phenomenological Approaches	29
Ursula King (Leeds, U.K.)	
3. Comparative Approaches	165
Frank Whaling	
4. Myths and Other Religious Texts	297
Kees Bolle (Los Angeles, U.S.A.)	
5. The Scientific Study of Religion in its Plurality	365
Ninian Smart (Lancaster, U.K. and Santa Barbara, U.S.A.)	
An Additional Note on the Philosophy of Science and the Study of Religion	379
Frank Whaling	
6. The Study of Religion in a Global Context	391
Frank Whaling	

Preface

The two volumes of *contemporary approaches to the study of religion* were conceived as a sequel to Jacques Waardenburg's *classical approaches to the study of religion* published in 1973. Waardenburg had told the story of the development of the study of religion as an academic enterprise from its beginnings in the nineteenth century until the time of the Second World War. The aim of the present volumes is to bring the story up to date from 1945 to the present day.

It became evident that this was a mammoth task that called for the energies and abilities of more than one person and the space of more than one book. A team evolved to write two books, and these two volumes are essentially the product of a team. The team is excitingly international including as it does two scholars from Germany, one from New Zealand, three from Great Britain, two from the United States, two from Holland, and for good measure one who divides his time between Britain and the United States. Although lacking the presence of a non-western scholar, with this qualification the team is cosmopolitan and representative.

After it had been decided that this project was to be a team effort, the question remained of how recent developments in the study of religion were to be described and analysed. One possibility was to proceed historically: to begin at 1945 and to show year by year how methods and ideas had evolved. Although not impossible, this approach would have been difficult even for one person to attempt. It would, of necessity, have involved a good deal of repetition, and the likelihood of repetition would certainly have been increased through the presence of a team.

In place of a historical narrative, an alternative procedure has been adopted. Each member of the team has summarised the developments in the study of religion since 1945 in the area of his or her own expertise. In volume one, Ursula King analyses historical and phenomenological approaches, Frank Whaling looks at comparative approaches, Kees Bolle sums up studies of myths and other religious texts, Ninian Smart

grapples with the scientific study of religion in its plurality, and Frank Whaling places the study of religion in its global context and looks at the relationship of the philosophy of science to the study of religion. In volume two, David Wulff investigates psychological approaches, Michael Hill, Günter Kehrner and Bert Hardin share the task of interpreting sociological approaches, Tony Jackson deals with social anthropological approaches, Jarich Oosten looks at cultural anthropological approaches, and Wouter van Beek reflects on cultural anthropology and the many functions of religion. In this way, a breadth and depth of expertise is brought to bear upon this important topic.

This does not mean that there is never any overlap of subject matter. Names such as Lévi-Strauss, Pettazzoni, Eliade, Dumézil, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, and so on, inevitably crop up in more places than one, and this is to the benefit of the whole. Our practice has been to include a bibliography after each chapter, even though some of the books appear more than once. The only exception applies to Ninian Smart's typically perspicacious small chapter. Insofar as the books on that bibliography are all found elsewhere, it has simply been left out.

Whether our age contains academic giants such as Müller, Weber, Durkheim, Jung, and the like, who loomed large in Waardenburg's work is debatable. The five modern scholars mentioned above, supplemented by others such as Widengren, Zaehner, Parrinder, Berger, Smart, Panikkar, Wach, Brandon and Nasr, to name but a few, are hardly negligible. However a feature of our age is the rapid development of varied currents in the study of religion, some of which are small yet not unimportant. It is to the credit of the members of our team that they have dealt with both the smaller and the larger streams within the wider river of their own approach, and that, while doing justice to their own area, they have not lost sight of the total field of religious studies.

I am grateful to my colleagues for their endeavour. They have brought to this project a plurality of nationalities, a plurality of methods, and a plurality of insights. This means that these two volumes are not wedded to the approach of any particular school in the study of religion, they take an overview of them all; it means that the scholars involved are flexible enough to enhance the work of a team.

The coordination of a team so talented and yet so scattered has

inevitably led to delays, and I am grateful to my colleagues for their patience. Thanks are due also to Lamin Sanneh and John Carman of the Harvard Center for the Study of World Religions for advice and hospitality during the editing of this project. Above all I am happy to pay tribute to the unfailing help and encouragement of the General Editor of the *religion and reason* series Professor Jacques Waardenburg, whose original book inspired this series of two volumes on *contemporary approaches to the study of religion*, and whose advice has accompanied everything that has been done.

Introduction: The Contrast between the Classical and Contemporary Periods in the Study of Religion

FRANK WHALING

Edinburgh

This introduction, although it relates mainly to the issues raised in the first volume of this series *contemporary approaches to the study of religion: THE HUMANITIES*, is intended also to introduce the reader to the outstanding issues raised in the second volume *contemporary approaches to the study of religion: the social sciences*.

As was mentioned in the Preface, the two volumes of *Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religion* are conceived partly as a sequel to Jacques Waardenburg's *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion* (1973). However the format of the two projects is different, and this difference in format illustrates the contrast between the classical and contemporary approaches to the study of religion. It would be virtually impossible to repeat in these volumes the exercise undertaken by Waardenburg because the study of religion in the age he was dealing with—from Max Müller to World War II—grappled with materials, methods, techniques, and problems of a less complex nature than those that dominate the study of religion today. This is not to say that there is no continuity between the so-called classical and contemporary periods. Nevertheless, to give a framework to our introduction, we shall

highlight the differences between the era of the classical approaches and that of today.

Waardenburg, in his book, gives a succinct history of the development of the study of religion from the time of Müller to about 1945, and then he includes an anthology of extracts on method and theory of research from the work of over forty scholars who were pioneers, indeed giants, in the field. It was possible to employ this stratagem in regard to the classical period because specialisation and diversification were less rampant than they are today, scholarly disciplines and academic knowledge generally were less developed, and the world itself was a less complex place. Today, as we shall see, there is an extraordinary ramification within the study of religion, a vast growth of academic knowledge of all kinds, a springing up of new seeds within the field, and a complexification and globalisation of the context wherein religion is studied that make easy generalisations, reliance upon a select anthology, and a one-person treatment difficult if not impossible. These volumes, therefore, are not an anthology, and they are not by one person. They are the work of a team who aim to summarise, insofar as they are able within the covers of one work, the contemporary approaches to the study of religion. This summary is not a compilation of select passages of key authors (the bibliographies contain not far short of two thousand entries and such a selection would, of necessity, have omitted much relevant material); it does not attempt to impose a particular viewpoint (the authors were born in a number of different countries and now work in different universities in three different continents); it is a narrative of the main developments and discussions since World War II in the fields of history and phenomenology of religion, comparative religion, the study of myths and other religious texts, anthropology of religion, sociology of religion, psychology of religion, the scientific study of religion in its plurality, and the study of religion in a global context. However although an account is given of a vast corpus of material gathered from varied parts of this complex area of study—a more ambitious account than has been attempted before—an endeavour is also made to give an integrated overview of the whole field. Indeed when the project was first conceived it was hoped that it would be possible so to summarise the mass of developments since 1945

that an integral and acceptable way forward would be opened up for the *whole* study of religion. It must be admitted that this grandiose aim has not been completely fulfilled. Such a stage has not yet been reached; an overall philosophy of the study of religion has not yet been fully conceptualised; a single paradigm is not yet in sight. Nevertheless, in the course of this work, a number of suggestions are made as to how, on the basis of past research and present directions, future programmes may proceed. While the authors are under no illusions that they have achieved a complete breakthrough, they are hopeful that the comprehensive nature of their account and the breadth and depth of their narrative will not be without significance for the future. Quite apart from any contributions of method or content made by these two books, the very fact that scholars from Tübingen in Germany (Günter Kehrher and Bert Hardin), Edinburgh in Scotland (Tony Jackson and Frank Whaling), Wheaton, Massachusetts in the United States (David Wulff), Wellington in New Zealand (Michael Hill), Leeds in England (Ursula King), Los Angeles in the United States (Kees Bolle), Lancaster (UK) and Santa Barbara (USA) (Ninian Smart), Utrecht in Holland (Wouter van Beek and Jacques Waardenburg—general editor of the series), and Leiden in Holland (Jarich Oosten) have banded together to produce this work may represent in itself a portent for the study of religion of an interdisciplinary, international, and interlinked future.

Before we focus upon the differences between the modern period and the classical period dealt with by Waardenburg, there are three points that need to be made. Firstly, there is *some* continuity between this volume and that of Waardenburg. Some of the great names of the past mentioned by Waardenburg inevitably figure in the present work. Moreover, although our purpose is to tell the story of the development of the study of religion after 1945, some of the chapters go back before that date in order to put their account of the later developments into a wider focus. There are no rigid breaks within the web of history. Any particular date, even a dramatic date such as 1945 which marks the end of the Second World War, must inevitably be arbitrary. Nevertheless periodisations, however arbitrary, are useful and in the case of this work the basic cut-off point is 1945 and the limits set by Waardenburg's work.

Our second point is that, like Waardenburg, we do not aim to cover

all aspects of the study of religion. This would be both impossible and (even if possible) undesirable. Our purpose is not to summarise the *content* of the various religious traditions of the world. This is done with reasonable adequacy by bibliographical reference volumes such as Charles Adams's *A Reader's Guide to the Great Religions* (1977, 2nd ed.), and other encyclopaedic volumes in different fields of study and specialised disciplines. Indeed one of the basic problems in the whole field of religious studies is the sheer volume of information that is being amassed. As early as 1905 Louis Henry Jordan was writing in *Comparative Religion: Its Genesis and Growth*, (1905: 163):

The accumulation of information, indeed, has never slackened for a moment; and the special embarrassment of today is the overwhelming mass of detail, still rapidly increasing, which confronts every earnest investigator.

This accumulation of data has not lessened since 1905, and after 1945 the whole process has been exacerbated by the fact of quicker communication, both in transport and electronics. At a basic descriptive level, the history and anthropology of religion continue to supply scholars with a plethora of data of many different varieties. The volume of data grows yearly, if not daily, and it provides the raw material for hypotheses or theories in the study of religion. Wider studies must continue to depend upon the basic researches of the historians and anthropologists of religion. However, endless description is not an end in itself; to give it control and direction there is the need for methodological sophistication and wider categories of interpretation. Such a need was recognised as early as the last century in methodological prophecies such as that of Burnouf (1872, 2nd ed., *La Science des Religions*, trans., p. 1):

This present century will not come to an end without having seen the establishment of a unified science whose elements are still dispersed, a science which the preceding centuries did not have, which is not yet defined, and which, perhaps for the first time, will be named science of religion.

Such an optimistic forecast can now be seen to be naive, yet the need for methodological clarification remains as urgent as ever. In this book,

there will be some reference to content, for method and content can (and should) never fully be separated, but our main concern is for methods and theories rather than for content per se. We will deal with contemporary approaches to the study of religion rather than the contemporary content of the study of religion which is generally 'taken as read.'

Our third point is that, insofar as these works are written in English, the references and quotations from books in all languages are mostly given in English, and reference to the original works is made elsewhere, usually in the bibliographies of the end of the chapters. This does not detract from the international coverage. As we have stated before, these books are written by an authentically international team and our only slight regret is that it has not been possible to include a non-western scholar in the team.

(1) *Increasing diversification in contemporary approaches*

An obvious difference between the classical and contemporary approaches to the study of religion is the increasing diversification of methodological discussion in our own time. Not only has the mass of accumulated religious data multiplied, so also has the variety of methodological reflection upon those data. It is not merely the case that the number of methodological approaches with a serious interest in religious data has increased, there has also been an intensification of discussion about religion *within* each approach. Growing specialisation within each approach has resulted in a growing ramification of discussions about religion and, in addition to this, new 'seeds' have sprung up ranging from the 'ecology of religion' to the 'academic dialogue of religions.' The pity is that some of this discussion is virtually unknown. The temptation is for scholars of one nationality or language group to know only each other's work, or for the scholars of one discipline to be acquainted solely with the research in their own discipline (or part of their discipline). These books are an attempt to gather together and to put into some sort of order the diverse discussions about method and theory since 1945. Thus each author summarises the main trends within

his or her own area: Ursula King writes on the history and phenomenology of religion; Frank Whaling on comparative approaches to the study of religion; Kees Bolle on the study of myths and other religious texts; Tony Jackson, Wouter van Beek and Jarich Oosten on anthropological approaches to the study of religion; Michael Hill, Günter Kehr, and Bert Hardin on sociological approaches to the study of religion; David Wulff on the psychology of religion; Ninian Smart on the scientific study of religion in its plurality; and Frank Whaling on the global context of the study of religion. Within each section certain basic questions are addressed either implicitly or explicitly, and to help focus the discussion. In each approach the basic method involved is described, and questions are raised as to what the method is attempting to do in the study of religion, whether or not it is complementary to other methods, and whether it is centred outside the study of religion or is basic to it. The basic position implied within the approach concerned is also investigated: is it one of neutrality or are truth claims implied, and if so are those truth claims related to a particular discipline, to religion in general, or to a particular religion? The question of definition is also raised: what definition(s), if any, is (are) implied in the approach concerned? A further area of interest relates to the scope and nature of the data used in a particular approach: are they first or second hand, do they arise out of primal religion, historical religions, or the major religions, are they concentrated more upon the study of one particular religion and if so which one? The main part of each section focusses upon a description and discussion of the major trends within the approach concerned. Attention is also given to the future prospects envisaged for each area. Clearly the above concerns: method, standpoint, definition, nature of the data, trends, and future prospects, are interrelated. Some of the implications arising out of the elucidation of these concerns will be dealt with later in the introduction. We are content, for the moment, with pointing out the complex nature of the discussion of theory and method within each of the above-mentioned approaches, and with outlining the criteria whereby we have sought to bring order to each section and potential integration to the whole.

It is important to stress at this point that although each chapter of these books necessarily contains a large amount of bibliographical

material—and to this extent they are equivalent in the sphere of theory and method to Adams's *A Reader's Guide to the Great Religions*—they transcend mere bibliographical description and are cast in the form of narrative. It is our hope that scholars with particular interests in history and phenomenology of religion, comparative religion, myths and texts, anthropology of religion, sociology of religion, psychology of religion, scientific study of religion in itself, and the global context of religious studies, after they have read the summaries of their own area and their own volume will read the other volume so that they can obtain an overview of the wider discussion. Although our work is significant in that it brings together and orders a vast amount of material within *each* approach, its more important function is to summarise the general field of method and theory in the study of religion in a way that has never been so fully attempted before. There is an urgent need for scholars of religion to supplement their areas of specialisation with a total view of the field as a whole, and a major aim of these volumes is to contribute to this end.

(2) *Greater research involvement of social and humane sciences*

Another major difference between the classical and contemporary approaches to the study of religion is the increasingly complex relationship between the humane sciences, and especially the social sciences, and this sphere of research. Durkheim, Weber, Freud, Jung, and James may have departed from the scene, but it is possible to submit that, in the contemporary situation, any theory or method of investigation in any of the social (and humane) sciences is or may be applied to the study of specific sets of religious data. In order to do justice to the range of involvement in the study of religion by the contemporary social sciences, we have put into the second volume chapters which deal with the anthropology, sociology, and psychology of religion. However, the overall perspective is by no means confined to the social sciences. Indeed the five chapters of volume one, although concentrating upon a particular approach, are more wide-ranging. Ursula King's brief, namely history and phenomenology of religion, takes her (after a comprehen-

sive survey of the detailed trends within those areas) into a wider investigation of hermeneutical and integrally scientific approaches arising out of or implied in history and phenomenology of religion. Frank Whaling, although limiting his discussion of comparative religion to the actual classification and comparison of religion, points out that systematic comparisons of religion(s) have been attempted by phenomenological typologists, depth psychologists, social and structural anthropologists, sociologists, and (more widely) historians and (less appositely) theologians of religion, and therefore comparative religion (although not a synonym for the total study of religion) involves within itself a range of approaches and calls forth an overview within the circumscribed area of comparison. Kees Bolle, in a detailed review of the study of myths and religious texts, ranges over a number of approaches relating to these themes including the historical, structural, and phenomenological. Within the total structure of the book, therefore, the first three chapters of volume one, by King, Whaling, and Bolle, are more wide-ranging in that their subject matter carries them beyond one particular methodological perspective, and the six chapters of volume-two concentrate upon particular social scientific approaches. The final two chapters of volume one revert to a more wide-ranging treatment: Ninian Smart reviews the plurality of methodological approaches within the 'scientific' study of religion, and Frank Whaling examines, under the heading of the global context of the study of religion, the work of some key non-western scholars, the implications for the study of religion of recent developments within the philosophy of science, and the influence of the global environment itself upon our notions of the place of the study of religion within the wider academic context. Within the overall planning of the volumes, a balance has therefore been struck between the six chapters related to the social sciences that concentrate upon the methodological findings of particular disciplines, and the five chapters related more implicitly to the humanities where the treatment is geared as much to themes as to disciplines. It is our hope that this way of dealing with the material illustrates the sheer variety of contemporary approaches, the complexity of treatment within and between different approaches, and a balance between the minutiae of detail and wider connecting themes.

The structure of the books outlined above allows for a certain amount of, but not too much, overlap between the sections. The six chapters dealing with the social scientific approaches complement each other and contain comparatively little repetition. The five wider-ranging chapters deal occasionally with overlapping names or themes but when this happens the difference of perspective brought to the name or theme in question both extends the discussion and contributes to a potentially more integrated overview. Some names inevitably recur. A glance at the index and the various bibliographies will guide the reader in this respect. The bibliographies are placed at the end of each chapter (with the exception of Ninian Smart's whose entries are all available elsewhere) and, in order to save space and prevent undue repetition, and in contrast to Waardenburg, (1973), there is no composite or separate bibliography.

(3) Importance of improved communications for the study of religion

Another factor that played only a minor role in the period of the 'classical approaches' but is more important in contemporary studies is the fact of quicker communication. A new prophet arising in Africa, a new religious movement arising in some part of the West, a new indigenous expression appearing in the third or fourth worlds can now be investigated on the spot by anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, or historians taking a airplane out of Heathrow or Kennedy airport or going by train or car to the area concerned. The present-day scholar has access not only to books written by travellers or scholars, as was the case in former days, but also to tape-recordings, films and so on, that record in sight and sound the formerly barely accessible data of various religious groups ranging from nomads and peasants to syncretistic sects. The relationship of scholars of religion with present-day religious phenomena is already, by the fact of improved communications media, very different from that which pre-1945 scholars had with the religious phenomena existing in their time. Quite apart from questions of 'pure' methodology, theory, philosophy, ideology and so on, the sheer development of the technical and other devices of the communications media has made religious data accessible in a way undreamt of by scholars before World War II. The influence of the media is also

potentially important with regard to the exchange of information and documentation between scholars in the field, the rise of bibliographies, and the eventual need for the storage of increasingly computerised information. It raises the possibility that the 'flavour' of religious studies may change with ever-increasing card-indexes, standardised reporting systems, quantificatory analyses, and the like. We are at the very beginning of reflection on these matters, and they are not dealt with at length or in depth in this book. These 'communication issues' do, however, exercise a subtle influence upon three questions referred to in this volume. In the first place, there is a discernible shift of attention in religious studies generally away from a more obvious involvement in the history of past religions to a greater interest in present developments. This shift is aided and abetted by other factors we will have cause to consider later in the introduction, but if it continues it will represent an important change. Thus the focus of all the chapters of this book, including the one on phenomenology and history of religion, although not neglectful of the past, is geared more obviously to present religious developments than would have been the case before 1945. Second, the social scientific approaches of volume two, notably the chapters by David Wulff and Michael Hill, bring out the increasing use of quantificatory data in religious research. The balanced nature of the presentations of Wulff and Hill masks the extent to which sheer statistics and quantificatory data are becoming dominant in some of the social scientific investigations of religion. This leads us to our third point. Insofar as the silicon chip is already beginning to affect scholarship, and computers have become part of the apparatus of much research, there is the need for reflection upon the consequences of this trend for the study of religion. What kind of data can computers store? According to what criteria should the ordering of these data be organised? Is computer information exhaustive, or complementary to other kinds of information? Although this work does not deal with this question directly in a specific chapter, it deals with it indirectly by its investigation of the complementarity of different approaches, the complementarity of different methods within each approach, and the relevance for the study of religion of the different views of science and scientific information built into the modern philosophy of science.

(4) Implications of the western nature of much religious research

A fourth factor that is assuming more importance within the contemporary study of religion in contrast with the situation that pertained at the time of the classical approaches is an increasing concern for the implications of the fact of the western nature of much past research. This book brings out clearly, in several places, the various strands within 'western' scholarship. For example, Whaling chooses three American scholars, three British scholars, and four continental European scholars (two French, one Italian, one Scandinavian) for special mention as comparativists; Bolle reviews the work of American, British, Dutch, German, French, Italian, and Scandinavian scholars of myths and religious texts; Smart implies a similar international range in his piece; and King likewise gives a comprehensive survey of the contributions to the history and phenomenology of religion of American, British, German, Dutch, French, Italian, and Scandinavian scholars. Ursula King mentions, but does not follow, Waardenburg's primary distinction between three main geographical areas in the study of religion: the developing countries of the third world, socialist countries of marxist inspiration, and western countries and his secondary fourfold subdivision of European countries according to language groups and cultural traditions into the Latin areas of France, Italy, and Spain, the Protestant areas of Britain, Scandinavia, and Holland, the Germanic areas of Germany, Austria, and North Switzerland, and the Slavonic areas of Eastern Europe. It would appear that Waardenburg's divisions, although suggestive, are too linguistically and geographically based and that, to give but two qualificatory examples, Dutch and German scholars have inclined towards a more phenomenological approach, and Swedish and Italian scholars have inclined towards a more historical approach, in spite of their geographical differences.

However, in his larger divisions, Waardenburg is right. Although this book traces in detail the contributions of scholars of different western nationalities to different approaches—and this in itself is salutary because past surveys have tended to proceed consciously or unconsciously according to national categories—the wider question that is emerging is whether the study of religion has not been too much dominated by

western categories. What is the significance of the fact that religions outside the West have been studied in a western way and, to a lesser extent, that religions outside Christianity have been studied in a Christianity-centred way? To what extent has this pre-1945 attitude of often unconscious superiority been superseded in the contemporary situation? To what extent have western scholars of religion subsumed the whole spiritual creation of mankind under one interpretation of religion and then absolutised it? To what degree, in spite of the concern for *epoché* and *Einfühlung* fostered by the phenomenological approach, do western scholars feel that it is *they* who must research and interpret the religion of others for these latter? Can and should scholars from other cultures study western religions in the West, can and should western and non-western scholars study western and non-western texts together, can and should western anthropologists interpolate the views of the people of primal tribes into their academic investigations? One suspects that we are only just beginning to reflect seriously upon these matters. In this volume, they are touched on by Ursula King who intimates the problem, by Kees Bolle who stresses that explanations of a myth must be capable of being presented to the narrators of the myth and not just to western colleagues, and by Frank Whaling who in the final chapter reflects upon the global context of the study of religion.

(5) *Greater involvement of marxism, interreligious dialogue and non-western scholarship*

Related to the last paragraph, a further factor differentiating the contemporary from the classical period is the greater awareness of the involvement of what may loosely be termed 'ideologies' in the contemporary study of religion. In the post-1945 era we can spot the influence of 'ideologies' upon the interpretation and the concrete study of religion and religions. This involvement can take at least three forms. First, there are forthcoming more marxist studies of religion in relation to ethnographic studies, studies of Africa and Asia, the theory of scientific atheism and dialectical materialism, discussions of institutionalised religion, and searchings for the roots of religion in terms of

social conflict, escape, or projection. Second, there is the rise of inter-faith dialogue and understanding, especially between Christianity and other religions, which has had an impact upon the interpretation of present-day religious expressions, and in the light of which encounters of religious attitudes and systems are seen to be basically peaceful and constructive. Third, there is the immense interest which scholars from independent countries take in their religious and cultural tradition, which leads to a rediscovery in terms of their own culture of their own religious heritage, but also to scholarly selections and evaluations which can be explained by reference to the present-day spiritual, social, and psychological needs of the traditions concerned. The word 'ideology' with its emotive overtones does not perhaps convey the correct resonance to do justice to the contribution that is being made by marxist, interfaith dialogue, and renascent non-western religious scholarship. This is especially the case as the notion is arising in some quarters that western positivistic science or phenomenology can also operate as an 'ideology,' and this leads us back to some of the points made in the last paragraph. However, the question remains as to whether the study of religion is destined to become an arena for competing 'ideologies,' whether there is a bedrock and substratum of data and theories to which our 'ideologies' can contribute and which they can amend constructively without producing a cacophony, or whether the study of religion itself has an ideology-critical function. This range of issues is addressed directly in the final chapters by Ninian Smart and Frank Whaling. Smart attempts to draw the boundary lines that demarcate the study of religion from unduly 'ideological' approaches, and Whaling analyses the contribution made to the study of religion by a number of noted non-western scholars.

(6) *Truth-claims, philosophy, and theology*

Our next contrast relates to the status of truth claims, philosophy, and theology in regard to the study of religion and this, of course, is not a post-1945 development but a variation within a graph of relationship that has been a source of debate since the last century. This area of

discussion has been, and remains, an exceedingly complex one. Within the confines of this book, it is discussed implicitly or explicitly in three different ways. In the first place, it is pointed out in various places that 'truth claims' are not necessarily confined to philosophy and theology, and that much depends upon what we mean by 'truth claims'—are they methodological or ontological, general or specific, 'first-order' or 'second-order?' For example, Kees Bolle points out that myths lay claim to veracity, and that scholars of mythology have been wont to distinguish *mythos* from *logos*, the 'true' word from the conceptual endeavour of man. According to this notion, theological 'truth' which has the status of *logos* is at a lower level than mythological 'truth' although the latter is pluralistic rather than monolithic. It is clear that greater specificity as to the different levels and motivations of views of 'truth' is required; after all any respectable discipline, method or approach would hardly disclaim all concern for 'truth' of some kind. Different chapters allude to this problem in their own way.

The second sphere of interest relates to the search for a general philosophy of religion. When this work was planned originally it was hoped to include a chapter on the philosophical approach to the study of religion. However, this did not prove to be possible because, in the present state of affairs, any such chapter would be too specific. What we are seeking for and have not yet found is a philosophy of religion that is universal in application, that can deal responsibly with religious diversity, and that can moderate over (rather than isolate itself from or dominate) the other approaches to the study of religion. This book, although it lacks a chapter on the philosophy of religion as such, conducts such a search implicitly in a number of places. Ursula King's sections on hermeneutics and the search for an integral science of religion form one such attempt, Frank Whaling's pieces on the philosophical emphases of non-western religious scholarship and on the implications for the study of religion of the philosophy of science form another attempt, and the whole of Ninian Smart's chapter implies a general philosophical approach to the study of religion. Although they are not completely in agreement, together with the more specialist chapters, they indicate the parameters within which the search for a universally applicable philosophy of religion may continue.

The third sphere of interest is that of theology of religion. The contributors are in agreement that theology as traditionally conceived is separate from the study of religion in the sense that, although it provides data for such study, its categories do not and cannot dominate it. They agree also that institutional considerations have tended to accentuate the differences between the two educational domains. They agree too that insofar as theology operates from within particular religious traditions and focusses upon the *nature* of transcendent reality, its concerns are different from those of the study of religion. The situation is further complicated by the fact that theology is often equated with Christian theology or the theology of a particular religious tradition other than Christianity, although this need not necessarily be the case. At certain places in this volume, some unease is expressed at the confrontational attitudes sometimes implied between monolithic views of theology and the study of religion. In various sections some of the following points are made: theology need not be confined to Christian theology, it need not be confined to any particular religious community, and it can be conceived in universal rather than particular categories; it can be viewed broadly as synonymous with the whole data of religious tradition (when its meaning is so confined) or narrowly as relating to knowledge of God or transcendence; even when viewed as *parti pris*, some of the issues raised (for example historical criticism in Christian theology) are directly relevant, and most of the data mentioned are also relevant; some of the matters that are supposedly the prerogative of theology, namely commitment and dialogue, may be seen to be wider in that the commitment of believers may be a necessary interest of phenomenological *Einfühlung* and dialogue may be an academic category related to the study as well as the practice of religion; the so-called 'exclusion of the transcendent' that has been a feature of much social scientific investigation whereby the social scientist leaves aside all judgements about the existence of religion's transcendent objects, neither affirming nor denying their reality, remains a useful working methodological tool but, as David Wulff comments, it is a negative rather than a positive injunction and leaves out of account the possible significance of the transcendent in the fundamental structure of religious consciousness; and finally, although religious sociology, anthropology, psychology, history, phenome-

nology, comparison and so on viewed as handmaids of theology or any particular religious community are ruled out, nevertheless the suggestion is made, especially by King, that any truly integral science of religion can hardly exclude any reference to theology of some sort. Intricate questions are involved in this discussion, notably whether any reference to transcendent categories should be declared out of court in the study of religion (as a number of social scientists have suggested), whether reference to the transcendent as experienced by the believer or tradition being studied is legitimate, and indeed required, as suggested by Ninian Smart, or whether ultimacy as such must be brought into the methodological discussion (as tends to happen in practice, rather than by methodological fiat, in the work of many non-western scholars and in the work of a number of western scholars of non-western religions). In this volume, Ninian Smart argues for the exclusion of traditional theology and the transcendent as a permanent and ultimate category from the study of religion in favour of concentration upon the transcendent as experienced, Frank Whaling attempts a longer and more intricate exercise of demarcation between the study of religion and theology more narrowly defined, Ursula King seeks ways to reconceptualise the role of theology within a more integral study of religion, while Kees Bolle refers to the theme more indirectly.

(7) *Definitions of religion*

Our seventh contrast, which like the discussion of truth-claims, philosophy and theology is a continuing rather than a new one, is bound up with some of the issues we have already considered, and concerns the vexed question of definitions. In the course of these two volumes countless definitions of religion are mentioned or assumed, and to summarise them here would be unnecessarily to lengthen the size of this introduction. Perhaps one of the reasons why western philosophy of religion has found it difficult to grapple with the study of religion is because that study has not been amenable to agreement on any one definition of religion. Conversely, one of the probable reasons why the study of religion has not become even more important than it is lies in

the fact that it has not been content to settle upon an agreed set of given data which would constitute it as a rigid discipline wherein a particular definition would be universally appropriate. Thus the question of 'definitions' is necessarily part of our wider discussion of methods and theories.

It raises deeper questions as to whether the different approaches to the study of religion with their various implied definitions are complementary or opposed, as to what is meant by the term 'science' in the science of religion, as to whether the study of religion is a discipline or a field of studies, and as to whether the seeming impossibility of settling upon an overall definition of religion can be circumvented without opting for the approach of one school at the expense of others. Our volume does not solve the problem of definition although it does pose it, and it does open up the various definitional alternatives, in a more comprehensive way than is usually the case. However, there is another sense in which this book performs a more restricted and yet equally valuable task in the sphere of definitions. Attention is paid in various places to the need for a more exact definition of certain terms that are important in the study of religion. Thus Bolle argues for a more sophisticated definition and analysis of myth; Whaling makes a case for a tighter analysis of what we mean by comparative religion, theology, history of religion, anthropology of religion, dialogue, and faith; King investigates closely the meaning of history, phenomenology, science, hermeneutics, understanding, and interpretation; and implied in Smart's piece is the need for conceptual analysis of terms. Clarification of terms and concepts within these more limited areas is important; the advances resulting from such clarifications may contribute to the emergence of a more general view of what is meant by 'religion.'

(8) Scope and nature of the data

Another difference between the classical period of the study of religion and the contemporary situation lies in the contrast between the scope and nature of the data considered worthy of study. In the classical period, there was relatively greater stress put upon the data of primal

religion, archaic religion, religions of antiquity, and the classical forms of the major living religions. Anthropologists such as Tylor and Frazer, sociologists such as Durkheim, and psychologists such as Freud theorised on the basis of the data of primal religion. When they ventured into comment upon the major religions, the likelihood was that their data would be taken from their own Judaeo-Christian tradition. At the present time, the situation is different. Not only has there been an explosion of knowledge in regard to *all* the religious traditions of mankind, the greatest relative accumulation of data has encompassed the major living traditions. There are a number of reasons for this relative switch of interest, and an analysis of them leads to some interesting conclusions.

(a) One reason is the relatively less prominent position of anthropology in the contemporary study of religion. During the classical period, the data of the primal religions provided the jumping-off point for some of the formative early theories of religion. Part of the motivation for this was the notion that study of primal religions could provide knowledge by means of which one could trace the origins of living religions, above all the Judaeo-Christian tradition. The origins theory is no longer viable, and with the exception of the work of Lévi-Strauss, anthropology is less significant in theory-formation.

(b) Another reason lies in the change of emphasis within sociology of religion. Durkheim's famous definition: (*The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 1915: 62)

A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them

was erected, in the main, on the basis of research into primal religion with a more static flavour. Present-day sociology of religion has a greater interest in contemporary religion and change. To give but one example, the important recent debate about secularisation focusses upon the nature and definition of religion, and the decline or otherwise of

religion in the contemporary situation. As we saw earlier, the increasing importance of modern communications systems also tends to rivet attention more prominently upon the modern religious situation.

(c) A third reason lies in the rediscovery of autochthonous religious traditions in a number of recently independent nations. As we saw earlier, the focus of religious attention and study inevitably falls upon the major religious traditions that are the basis of religious life in those nations. In his study of seven major non-Christian or non-western scholars, Coomaraswamy, Radhakrishnan, Suzuki, Buber, Nasr, Mbiti, and Chan, Whaling shows how their interest is centred upon both the past and present development for their own tradition.

(d) Another reason lies in the increasing western interest in major non-western religions. Factors lying outside the academic study of religion have contributed to this growth of interest: the immigration of Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and Sikhs into the West, the stimulus of south and east Asia upon commonwealth and north American troops who were in these regions during the Second World War, the steady trickle of western converts to eastern religions, the effects especially upon North America of political events in Korea and Vietnam, the aftermath of empire in Britain, the continuing spread of eastern sects into the West, the interest in Islam generated by the oil crisis and events in the Middle East. Before World War II, there were relatively few members of eastern religious traditions living in the West or even visiting the West, and there was not the same urgency to become acquainted with other religions in order to understand current affairs. The effect of the above-mentioned quasipolitical developments has been to focus more attention upon the major religious traditions in their contemporary as well as classical forms.

(e) A further reason lies in the fact that, especially since World War II, religions are in a sort of permanent change everywhere in the world. In addition to eastern religions entering the West, eastern religions in the East and western religions in the West find themselves in increasingly dynamic flux. The pre-1945 situation of more static and stabilised

systems is no longer with us and 'religious change' is the order of the day. New religions are multiplying in Japan, numerous indigenous African Churches are springing up yearly, new sects are sprouting in different parts of the West. How to interpret religious change may have been viewed originally as a problem for the social scientists of religion, but it has since become a vital problem for historians and all students of religion, especially if attention is focussed not only on changes in institutional religion but also on religious interests themselves. The awareness is growing that such interests may appear and disappear much more rapidly than was realised before World War II. The general effect of the obvious presence of religious change around the world is to create a greater relative interest in the contemporary religious scene and in the major living religions.

(f) A sixth reason lies in the apparent concern for the present state of western culture and religion among scholars of religion in both East and West. Whether that concern be for the seeming weakness of Christianity in the West, for the growing materialism of western civilisation, for the possible help that eastern religions can give to the West, or for the possible danger that eastern cultures face from the West, the inclination once again is to focus upon the present context and upon the major religions. Even a scholar such as Eliade, who involves himself mainly in the data of primal and Indian religions, is motivated to alter the mindset of contemporary western culture and religion through providing the West with creative contact with these other worldviews. Eliade's grappling with past religious forms is motivated therefore by a concern to help the present situation. The past for its own sake is no longer an end in itself.

(g) A final reason lies in the growing interest since World War II in religious education in schools, especially in Britain and the United States. The American constitution had banned the teaching of denominational or dogmatic religion in state schools, but this ban did not apply to the non-evaluative teaching of other world religions or the descriptive teaching about Christianity. Since 1945 such teaching has gradually become far more important in American schools. In Britain, the pre-war

stress upon Christian education as a nurturing or even proselytising process has been replaced by a greater emphasis upon the teaching of world religions and a less theological emphasis upon the teaching of Christianity. Within both America and Britain therefore recent trends in religious education have highlighted the importance of the teaching of the living major world religions in schools. This is a natural development in that for curriculum and educational reasons it would have been much less feasible to teach primal or archaic religion to children. However, there is inevitably some interaction between the teaching in schools and the teaching in higher educational institutions within the same lands. Yet again we see the pendulum swinging in the direction of the contemporary living major religions away from the archaic or primal religions.

Consequences of increasing interest in major religions

There are at least two important consequences for the study of religion arising from this increasing interest in the major living religions in their contemporary as well as classical forms. In the first place, there is a correlation between the data used by scholars and the approach they adopt towards their studies. Had Wilfred Cantwell Smith not begun his career in Islamic studies, had Eliade not gone to India or used the data of primal religions, had Dumézil not immersed himself in Indo-European studies, it is likely that their theoretical approach to the study of religion would have taken a different course. Data and theory are interlinked. A change in the type of data used is therefore likely to be reflected in changing patterns of theory emerging from the switch in data. An increasing number of present-day scholars make predominant use of the data of the major living religions in their contemporary as well as classical forms. The increasing use of the data of the major living religions, and the increase of theorising on the basis of those data, constitute a contemporary development that is little remarked but is of obvious long-term significance. It is intimated at various places within the pages of this volume.

The second consequence relates to the seeming difference within

western scholarship in relation to the types of data that are used. We have seen how continental European scholars are more likely to make greater use of the data of the religions of antiquity, the classical forms of the major religions, and (to a lesser extent) primal religions, whereas Anglo-Saxon scholars are more likely to use the data of the major living religions in their contemporary as well as classical forms. This is, of course, by no means a water-tight division. European scholars have done some fine work upon the major religions in their contemporary as well as classical forms, and Anglo-Saxon scholars have done some noted work upon the religions of antiquity, the classical as well as contemporary forms of the major religions, and primal religions. However the fact that this seeming division of interest is more than a mere rule of thumb is illustrated by the heated methodological debates, described by Dr. King, that characterised the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) and its conferences during the 1960s and have rumbled on quietly ever since. This discussion is not merely a debate as to whether the study of religion is more scientific, historical, empirical, and academic rather than more philosophical, theological, hermeneutical, and dialogical in tone, it is also a debate over data. European scholars are not only more likely to emphasise the historical-philological approach as the royal road along which the study of religion must march, they are also more likely to employ that method upon archaic or classical data. Lying behind this preference there are causes rooted in the academic background of the study of religion in Europe that are clearly important. Other causes too are brought out or implied in this book: the general lack of an imperial background on the continent to make the study of eastern religions more urgent, the smaller presence of immigrants belonging to eastern religions, the lesser presence and impact of eastern religious sects, a greater ignorance of continental European languages among noted non-western scholars who generally wrote and thought in English, a lesser interest in developing new forms of religious education involving world religions in southern European countries influenced by Roman Catholic norms of Christian education or in northern European countries with relatively little contact with world religions, a concern for the state of their own religion that was apt to arouse more concern in theological

than religious studies circles, and relatively less contact with religious change in the wider sense either at home or abroad. In short, differences of approach are not unrelated to the use of certain types of data, and the reasons for the use of certain types of data may have both academic and non-academic roots within certain cultures and language groups. To put it another way, the selection of religious data by scholars and their study of religion 'abroad' are related to some extent to the cultural and religious consciousness 'at home.' We are not aware that this point has been made so forcibly before, and we hope it will lead to a deeper realisation of some of the non-academic reasons for differences in approach that appear to be totally academic in character. It is perhaps significant that the Netherlands, which was an imperial nation, and which makes constant as opposed to peripheral use of the English language, forms a kind of bridge between the continental and Anglo-Saxon proclivities, employing as it does an umbrella of approaches (as Kees Oosten, van Beek and Bolle illustrate) arising out of a varied set of data.

(9) *The study of religion: A discipline or field of studies?*

Our ninth point of contrast between the classical and contemporary periods in the study of religion concerns the question as to whether the study of religion is a discipline or a field of studies, whether it is a science or an art, and whether the elements that compose it are complementary or opposed. This is probably the key question of all. After all, the study of religion, as we have summarised it, straddles a number of disciplines; the 1980 IAHR congress at Winnipeg held twenty sections on topics ranging from African Religion to Women in Religion. Through these various disciplines, through these different sections at IAHR and other conferences, 'messages' are passed from one mind to another. But what is it, if anything, that these disciplines, these approaches, these conference sections, these 'messages' have in common? Compared with this extraordinarily complex state of the field, the study of religion before 1945 looks like another world.

And yet perhaps the difference between the two periods, although grounded in fact, is more one of perception. A perusal of histories of the

study of religion such as those of Waardenburg and Sharpe shows that, although the accumulation of data and the volume of writing on theory and method were less, the work done on the study of religion by the 'giants' of the earlier period was varied. The question is whether the scholars and movements included by Waardenburg and Sharpe as being engaged in the study of religion in the pre-1945 period considered *themselves* to be engaged in the study of religion, or in the study of something else. To some extent the same question remains today and is raised throughout this volume: are sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, historians, phenomenologists, comparativists, and other scholars of religion primarily scholars of religion, primarily scholars of the discipline concerned, or both? Part of the reason for the growing interest in phenomenology of religion that arose out of the work of Kristensen and van der Leeuw and that grew to a peak in the earlier post-World War II period was the feeling that the component of 'religion,' however viewed, had been underemphasised in the pre-war period when, it was felt, the so-called study of religion had often been divided into discretely separate sections that focussed upon different oriental languages and literatures per se or upon history, sociology, psychology, theology, and other disciplines as such which, from the standpoint of the study of religion, were often viewed in a covertly exclusivistic or reductionistic fashion. The corollary of this attempt by phenomenologists to give a greater integration to the study of religion and to emphasise that 'religion' was at the heart of this study was the tendency on the part of some phenomenologists to downplay contributions from those methods which saw the study of 'religion' as part of a greater whole rather than as an end in itself. The ambience of the present discussion has therefore shifted by comparison with the pre-war period.

Within the pages of these books, this area of concern is considered at different levels within different chapters, sometimes explicitly and at other times implicitly. Complete agreement is not reached as to a single paradigm, but some tentative general principles do emerge.

(a) In the first place, the study of religion has to do with the study of all religious traditions and all methods of studying religion. No religions are excluded from the study of religion whether they be ancient or

modern, primal or major, living or dead. Contemporary fashions may veer towards a preference for the study of certain kinds of data, but no principle of exclusion can be applied to any data that are part of the history of religion. The same principle of non-exclusion applies to the various methods of studying religion. No methods are excluded whether they centre exclusively upon religion or not, whether they belong to the social sciences or the humanities, whether their approach is inductive or hermeneutic, whether they focus upon data or persons. The only exception applies to the type of method that centres upon one religion and explicitly applies its categories to others as tends to happen within theology and to a lesser extent within philosophy. Even then the data rather than the truth-claims involved remain relevant. To the extent that different methods, disciplines, and approaches feed into the study of religion, it does appear to be a field of studies rather than a discipline in the normal sense of the term.

(b) There is also implied within these books the need for a complementarity of approaches. Although each section focusses upon a particular approach and in this respect advances its claims, this does not imply that other approaches are inappropriate or that any one approach should dominate the field. However, in spite of the variety of materials, issues, theories and angles thereby introduced into the study of religion, the stance of complementarity does not obviate the need for overall integration within the field.

(c) Furthermore, although it is agreed that the study of religion must be founded upon a bedrock of data provided by empirical studies especially within the history and anthropology of religion, there is also a virtual consensus that it is naive to view such studies positivistically or exclusivistically. The axioms of such positivism: that there is an external world of religious data, objectively present, observable by induction, that can be dispassionately described by empirical language as a series of propositions corresponding to objective facts—are no longer seen to be inductively self-authenticating but dependent upon prior theory. Hermeneutics of a heuristic type are therefore found to be necessary even within the social scientific approaches. Moreover the accumulation of

data is not enough. Interpretative categories and other approaches are necessary that transcend positivism in the attempt to bring order to the overall study of religion.

(d) In the fourth place, although doubts are raised as to the present direction and future viability of phenomenology of religion as a 'discipline,' there is tacit agreement that the phenomenological categories of *epoché* (suspending judgement in order to understand) and *Einfühlung* (empathy with the [religious] position of others) are generally helpful within the total study of religion.

(e) It is also agreed that the study of religion is different from natural science insofar as it deals with data that involve persons rather than data that centre upon objects in nature. The study of data involving persons relates the study of religion to the humanities as well as to the social sciences, to the arts as well as to the sciences. When religion is perceived as a religion of persons it can be seen in terms of the religion of groups of persons (sociology and anthropology of religion), the religion of individuals (psychology of religion), the faith and intentionality of persons (phenomenology and hermeneutics), the myths and texts of persons (the study of myths and texts), and so on. This involvement of religious data with persons, their social groupings, their individual religious experiences, their conscious commitment, their unconscious moulding by heredity or environment, their history, means that the study of religion has to do centrally with man.

(f) In the sixth place, there is a reasonable, although not total, agreement that the study of religion should have wide rather than narrow limits. Ninian Smart is willing to contemplate that communism, humanism, and nationalism, should be within the same species as religion. More importantly there is reasonable agreement that, whether the limits of the study be drawn wider or not, there should be a wider integration within the whole field. This task is attempted in different ways by Ursula King, Frank Whaling, Kees Bolle, and Ninian Smart. They are not in full agreement about the minutiae of any proposed solution, but they do agree that the task is important. Frank Whaling makes the point that,

although widely differing methods and data are fed into the comparative approach to the study of religion, comparative religion remains a recognisable and important endeavour. It is supportive of, but not subordinate to, the approaches that feed into it; it is neither superior nor inferior to them; it is not reduced to any of the methods that service it, whether they be strongly hermeneutical or empirical; its function is to coordinate and direct the overall comparative enterprise as a means to the end of understanding religious traditions and religious man. Within the restricted sphere of comparison, it provides a possible model for the role of the study of religion in relation to the various approaches that feed into it. Ninian Smart's chapter deals directly with the way in which a whole set of disciplines in interplay make up the study of religion. He analyses the roles of structured empathy, phenomenological typology, sociology of religion, anthropology of religion, psychology of religion, history of religions and iconography within the study of religion, and he points out that there is an overlap between the scientific study of religion based upon the aforementioned disciplines and five other enterprises which, because they are expressive, proclamatory and philosophical rather than descriptive and value-free, are not inherently part of the study of religion, namely: constructive traditionalism, philosophical theology, theological positivism, pluralistic theology, and dialogue. Ursula King, in her discussion of the possibility of an integral science of religion, glances at various proposals that have recently been made to combine the multiple perspectives and questions of the study of religion in a more integral manner. She emphasises in particular the work of Georg Schmid, *Principles of Integral Science of Religion* (1979), as being illustrative of a new desire on the part of scholars of religion to reflect on the *whole* field of religion (including its transcendent reality), on the *role* of the study of religion, and on the premises and methods whereby that role can be fulfilled. In short, while maintaining a wide view of the complex nature of the contemporary situation, this book also offers significant clues as to how future integration may be achieved.

Lastly, it is also agreed that, in spite of the search for integration, and the possible complementarity of approaches, there remain a number of different, but flourishing approaches within the study of religion which provide helpful, alternative methods and levels of interpretation. In a

later chapter, Frank Whaling analyses how the different approaches to science intimated by the philosophy of science have their counterparts in the different approaches to the study of religion, and how methodological reflection within the study of religion can be aided by recent work done in the philosophy of science.

(10) *Relevance of the contemporary global context*

Our final and brief contrast between the classical and contemporary approaches touches upon the relevance of the present-day global context for the study of religion. Global events since 1945 have drawn together the peoples of the planet into a closer unity of shared danger, opportunity, and reflection on their future. This situation is vastly different from that which pertained before World War II. Part of the final chapter glances briefly at the relationship between the study of religion and wider scholarship, and at the opportunity afforded to the study of religion to play a creative role in the contemporary situation. One of its main tasks is to study world religions which are global in setting, and it straddles a number of disciplines and interests which have as their areas of concern the study of cosmic matters, namely nature, man, and transcendence. As Ninian Smart comments, the fact that so often the wider study of religion has been suspected from the side of faith and neglected from the side of reason has contributed to the lopsidedness of the human sciences. That the study of religion should play a creative role in contemporary scholarship is important not only for the study of religion but also for the world of learning in general.

We hope that readers will find out two volumes a worthy successor to Jacques Waardenburg's *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion*. We hope also that they will be read widely and commented upon at length. May the constructive comment that must be forthcoming when people wrestle with the issues contained in a book of this immense scope serve creatively to advance the cause of the study of religion. Our purpose has been so to summarise the contemporary approaches to the study of religion that momentum may be given to such an advance at an interdisciplinary, intercultural, and interhuman level.

Historical and Phenomenological Approaches to the Study of Religion

Some major developments and issues under debate
since 1950

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If one examines the major developments in the history and phenomenology of religion over the last thirty years, there can be no doubt that there has been a considerable growth of activities. This is apparent from the number of publications, the frequency of conferences and the range of issues under debate. A lively discussion by an increasing number of scholars around the world is taking place as to the very nature of the subject. The year 1950 does not mark a completely new beginning but it provides a convenient watershed for a survey of recent developments. The middle of the twentieth century saw the emergence of a new era when in the wake of the Second World War a post-colonial world was born. It saw the birth of numerous new nations as well as the growth of a new kind of internationalism, not to mention the many new problems linked to quickly expanding populations and an equally quickly shrinking globe, developments which were not without significance for the study of religion.

1950 is also the year when the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) was formed, soon to be followed by the

foundation of new national sections, the establishment of new journals as well as the renaming of old ones, the launching of new bibliographical ventures and the concern for greater international cooperation. Another reason for starting at this date is the fact that the major developments in the study of religion have been described up to 1950 by Jacques Waardenburg in his *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion* (1973: 2 vols.; see especially 'View of a Hundred Years' Study of Religion,' I, 1-73). A general survey for the years following that period has not been undertaken so far although several excellent studies exist which analyse specific developments and arguments in greater detail than is possible here. Articles apart, the most up-to-date survey in book form is found in the concluding chapter of Eric Sharpe, *Comparative Religion. A History* (1975: 267-93, 'Twenty Years of International Debate, 1950-1970').

When Professor C.J. Bleeker, in his capacity as general secretary of the IAHR, addressed the XIIth International Congress at Stockholm in 1970, he explicitly stated that 'It would be a great source of satisfaction if we could get to know the results the history of religions has reached in the past twenty years, in which direction the study is moving, and whether there has been progress in the discipline. Unfortunately, we have no systematic surveys of the whole field of research.' It would be a challenging task indeed for a group of scholars to collaborate in such a venture for, as Bleeker went on to say, 'the type of scholar who is capable of surveying the total field of the history of religions, or at least great parts of it, seems to be slowly dying out. This is why it is impossible at present to satisfy the desire which we all feel to know what has happened in this branch of scholarship during the past twenty years' (Bleeker 1975b: 27).

However, it is perhaps less the case that such a type of scholar is dying out than the fact that the material available for surveying has become so voluminous that it is impossible for any single individual to provide a comprehensive summary on his or her own. The study of religion, as presently conceived and pursued by many scholars around the world, is much wider than 'the total field of the history of religions' of which Bleeker spoke. It represents an increasingly international and multi-disciplinary as well as an interdisciplinary field of studies and research. It would be presumptuous for any one scholar to claim that such rich and

varied developments could be adequately surveyed in any other way than by close international collaboration and the intensive team-work of specialists in the various disciplines which have a bearing on the study of religion. The present article is offered as a modest attempt to survey recent literature within the given constraints of space and time, and to ask how far current publications implicitly demonstrate or explicitly contribute to the major issues in the methodological debate of the contemporary history and phenomenology of religion.

There has been much discussion over recent years as to what constitutes the proper subject area and the specific method(s) of the history and phenomenology of religion and whether these two approaches to the study of religion are separate, interrelated or even identical or, on the contrary, opposed to and exclusive of each other. This debate has gained enormous momentum, especially over the last ten years or so, as is evident from a large number of publications and also from several conferences which have expressed an explicitly methodological concern. Although the size of the debate is considerable, the area of common agreement is perhaps less large than one might hope for. There is a growing trend towards greater methodological self-awareness and closer analysis of the presuppositions of one's research among many scholars today, yet much further clarification is still needed in this area.

What is available to anyone surveying the scholarly harvest in the history and phenomenology of religion during the last thirty years? In other words, what research results have been produced in the form of books, articles and conference proceedings? What are the major concerns of the scholars of religion belonging to the present generation and where is the discipline going in the future? Important too, what are the organisational developments which have affected the production of scholarly works, facilitated intellectual exchange and stimulated the debate on methods?

Given these questions, the approach adopted here will of necessity be synoptic; it may occasionally involve critical comparisons and will attempt an analysis of some of the conceptual tools currently used in the history and phenomenology of religion. It must be emphatically stated that this chapter can neither reflect all the discussions and developments which have taken place around the world nor can it provide a complete

bibliography of relevant publications in all major languages. The emphasis lies primarily on the analysis of the recent practice and discussion of methods found in the history and phenomenology of religion. The aim is not to give a survey of developments country by country (for this see *Religion*, Special Issue, August 1975) nor to discuss publications in this field in a strictly chronological order. The need for this is adequately filled by such indispensable bibliographical reference works as the *International Bibliography of the History of Religions*, published by the IAHR from 1954–80, now replaced by *Science of Religion—Abstracts and Index of Recent Articles* (before 1980: *Science of Religion Bulletin*) published by the Free University of Amsterdam, the quarterly issues of the *Bulletin Signalétique: Sciences Religieuses*, published by the Centre National de Recherche Scientifique in Paris and the *Religious Studies Review*, published by the Canadian Council on the study of Religion. In fact, the most recent publications will be drawn on rather more frequently as they are less well known than earlier studies; they possess the additional advantage of incorporating discussions about preceding works.

The present survey will mainly, but not exclusively, focus on a third-level analysis of the data provided by research in the history and phenomenology of religion over recent years. At the first level, many specialised studies and monographs exist which cannot be directly taken into account here. At the second level, various reference works have been produced which bring together and, in certain cases, integrate a host of individual data into an overall framework. These works often, but not always, include analytical reflections and discussions of the methods underlying such attempts at integration. At the third level, an analysis of the materials and methods found in such reference works and in many other sources can be undertaken in order to map out the common core of the history and phenomenology of religion and to explore their fluid boundaries. It should be clear by now that this survey will mainly be concerned with works which have attempted an integration of subject-matter or have made a significant contribution to the current debate about methods in the two fields under review here. In actual practice this means that most examples will be taken from post-1960 publications for it is only after that date that the methodological debate came in a new way fully into its own.

To counter any possible criticism at the outset, it must be mentioned that only a limited range of arguments can be examined here. Thus, this chapter is far from exhaustive nor can it be as truly international as it should be. I am painfully aware of the diverse constraints working against a fully international conception of the science of religion as a scholarly discipline. Although international in scope and intention, the study of religion is not always approached from such a wide and integral perspective in the works of all scholars. There is the obvious built-in defect that individual scholars only have access to limited data, not merely because of their chosen field of specialisation but even more because some major modern languages are not easily accessible. Few can follow the latest developments in the study of religion around the world. For western scholars this is particularly true with regard to eastern languages, especially Japanese and Chinese, and also with regard to recent developments in the study of religion in Eastern European countries and the USSR. Out of necessity rather than choice the present survey refers largely to western publications. To some readers, especially eastern ones, it may thus appear unduly western-centred, a short-coming for which I apologise although I know that it is to a large extent unavoidable at present.

Even if one examines major publications in western languages, one cannot help but notice a certain duplication of work undertaken by different scholars working in different languages, often unknown to each other. In spite of growing collaboration, there is still a lack of close communication and, as a result, a lack of urgently needed clarification about the objects and methods of the discipline. A repetition of similar arguments occurs in this debate of many schools and voices; in fact, sometimes there seems to reign more of a cacophony than harmony. If we can pick out some of the main melodies, interpret the reigning leitmotifs and possibly discover a new note here and there which may stimulate further reflections on the part of the reader, then the present survey will have been amply worthwhile.

1. What are the historical and phenomenological approaches?

Towards the end of his important address on *Religionswissenschaft*, given at the inaugural meeting of the American Society for the Study of Religion in 1959, Erwin R. Goodenough pleaded that at 'the present stage of the Science of Religion, we would do well to ask small questions until we have established a methodology we can all approve and use' (Goodenough 1959: 94). But more than twenty years later have we come any nearer to this aim of a generally approved methodology? Over the last decade or so the cry for methodological clarification has repeatedly been raised; the number of papers, monographs, and conferences devoted to methodology has grown fast, previously developed methods have been criticised and found wanting, several new methods and theories about the study of religion have been proposed. There can be no doubt that a vigorous, if not always sufficiently rigorous debate about methodology has come into existence; at the same time many works are still being published which include little or no theoretical reflection at all. There is much need for a clarification of the terminology in use and for a critical examination of the objects and methods specific to the study of religion. Scholars with enough imaginative grasp and vision to reflect on the future have clearly perceived that the most urgent requirements for a further creative development of the subject are a well formulated research programme and bolder theory formation.

However, the plea for greater methodological awareness does not in itself answer the question whether the classification, analysis, and interpretation of religious data on as comprehensive a scale as possible represents basically one single discipline, a wide field of related but different studies, or whether it is a science, a craft, or possibly even an art, only to be mastered by a few extraordinarily endowed and creative scholars. All these possibilities have been suggested and one may venture the opinion that these differences of approach in handling data from the complex and multidimensional reality that is religion allow for creative tension which reflects the healthy state and vitality of the discipline, if indeed this is the right word. For although large areas of

agreement have been reached in the way scholars understand and practise their research, a general lack of consent exists as to what the study of religion is or ought to be called. The fluidity of terms given to this subject in the English-speaking world alone is baffling. Intellectual fashions of the day have repeatedly affected common usage. There are a great many names in circulation but none has become so universally accepted as to be definite. The debate about what the subject ought to be called has oscillated a great deal over the years; it is closely intertwined with the *Methodenstreit* in general, i.e., the arguments about respective methods and their problems are closely interrelated with what is perceived to be the nature of the subject (see the excellent survey article by R. Pummer 1972). Thus, the problem of definition is a matter of central concern, for the name given to a subject both reflects and in turn affects the choice of suitable objects and methods of study.

The multidisciplinary thrust and new directions taken by the study of religion in the last two decades or so has been institutionally recognized by the founding or renaming of university departments devoted to religious studies (sometimes called 'department of religion,' especially in North America). However, this term can be both a help and a hindrance as its adoption does not by itself settle the methodological debate or clarify the boundaries of the subject area. It is certain that many different orientations, not all consistent with each other, have found umbrage under this new term. However, the conception of religious studies definitely expresses a new development which does not represent a sudden, sharp break with the past but is to some extent continuous with what went on earlier in the study of religion. Yet it is also a new attempt to go beyond the mere collection, description, and empirical analysis of religious data and seek an interpretation within a wider theoretical framework which allows a more systematic perspective. This effort to develop an integral approach and a more comprehensive theory of interpretation for the study of religion may be the hallmark of what could eventually prove to be the most stimulating and promising aspect of the contemporary methodological debate.

Before the developments of recent years can be fully reviewed, an initial mapping of the territory will be of help. Anyone eager to discover the route taken by the subject in recent years can easily be confused by

the abundance of contradictory signposting and the many different roads which have been taken. Which are the ones pointing in the right direction for the study of religion not to end in a future cul-de-sac?

The contemporary study of religion covers a wide range of interests and methods which often complement each other. A special difficulty of the methodological debate is the question whether all methods are equally important, whether some are more indispensable than others, and whether any particular method is so crucial that it lays the foundation for all others. The present chapter concentrates on the historical and phenomenological approaches which, if not understood in the narrowest sense, raise many difficult issues about meaning and interpretation. History and phenomenology are here discussed together because theoretical debates about their nature and method are often closely related. To enter the debate at its simplest level, an attempt will be made to state briefly what is meant by the 'historical' and 'phenomenological' approach when protagonists argue about the respective appropriateness of these methods for the study of religion.

Both the historical-descriptive presentation as well as the systematic analysis and classification of religious data belong to the history of the study of religion. Both approaches are an integral part of the nineteenth century inheritance of the subject and both have found further refinement in subsequent theory and practice. If anything, the historical approach is easier to define; it has been better established and longer practised. It has also produced more works of scholarship. What is precisely understood by the historical approach is frequently related to the wider discussions about the nature of history as an academic discipline. The protagonists of a strictly historical approach emphasize the use of historical-critical methods, a rigorous practice of philology and other subsidiary disciplines necessary for the study of history, and insist on factual-descriptive expositions, not infrequently accompanied by a minimum of interpretation as to the meaning of the data presented.

It is necessary to stress again and again that the plurality of religions in the present world and the variety of cultures moulded by different religious traditions cannot be adequately understood without a thoroughly historical study of the origin, growth, and development of particular religions, affected by the ongoing dynamic of continuity and

change. At an earlier stage, the sharp emphasis on the knowledge of historical facts arose perhaps from the need to counteract the general ignorance of non-western religious and cultural traditions in the West. It was not only the concern for historical truth but also the need to free the study of religion from the dominance of *a priori* theological and philosophical speculation which required a strong insistence on the use of the historical method.

The historical-philological method has yielded a rich harvest for the study of religion. But it would perhaps not be incorrect to say that, in certain overworked areas at least, it has also led to a surfeit of data suffering from a lack of integration. In some cases it has had the unfortunate result of an isolationist position whereby individual scholars, through their overspecialisation in one specific aspect or period of a particular religion, have been unable to relate their knowledge to wider questions and concerns, whether those of the study of religion or of the intellectual life and scholarship of their time.

But history itself is open to a wide range of interpretations and cannot be practised without a concern for systematic reflection and theory, a point proved by the existence of very different philosophies of history. (The American serial publication *History and Theory* regularly examines different theoretical orientations affecting the study of history; see especially Beiheft 8, 1968 'On Method in the History of Religions,' edited by J.S. Helfer.) History may be understood in a very narrow or much wider sense. There exists what might be called the descriptive and the interpretative use of history. Each approach has its own adherents and means of expression. For example, the French journal *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* (founded in 1880) still carries a programmatic statement today saying that 'the review is purely historical; it excludes any work of a polemical or dogmatic character' (back cover; my translation). Many French scholars have favoured this strictly historical approach, perhaps best exemplified in the work of the *École Pratique des Hautes Etudes* (Paris) but it has well-known protagonists among other European scholars too, particularly in Scandinavia. At the other end of the spectrum lies the American journal *History of Religions* (founded 1961 and subtitled 'An International Journal for Comparative Historical Studies,' edited by M. Eliade, J. Kitagawa, and J. Smith) which since its inception 'has been

instrumental in providing materials and creating a methodology for the study of world religions' (publicity brochure). However, on closer inspection one discovers that apart from Eliade's own important statements and a few other articles on methodology, most contributions deal primarily with historical-factual data.

Another important aspect of the history of religions as practised today is the question of which period of history is most emphasized in the work of particular scholars. Is the research primarily concerned with the religions of the past or with the living religions of the present? However, such a distinction between extinct and living religions may be unjustifiable, as has been argued, because it implies wrong assumptions about historical discontinuities. But while it is legitimate to give due prominence to the formative period of a religious tradition or to the exemplary height of its development, one wonders why in many works this is accompanied by a neglect for the present, too often only considered in terms of loss and decline. Is there a marked preference for classical rather than modern materials among historians of religions in the strict sense so as to bypass the problem of meaning which grows more urgent and difficult the nearer one gets to the present? But is religion even in the far-away past not too often seen primarily in terms of ideas and institutions in isolation from the concrete context of a particular society? All these questions have been asked and, depending on the answers given, particular orientations result in the study of religion, as will be seen later. At present it is enough to be aware of their existence and realize that when the term 'history of religions' is used to describe a methodological stance, the emphasis may well lie on the factual-descriptive approach which, however, begs further questions of a theoretical and essentially philosophical kind about the nature of factual data and their explanation.

In contrast to the history of religions approach in the narrow sense some scholars understand 'history' to mean an enquiry of such magnitude that it embraces most phenomenological studies whilst others regard the phenomenological approach as clearly distinct from the historical one. Phenomenology is then primarily understood as a systematic and comparative classification of all religious phenomena whatever they are. Undertaken at its widest, this must also include the

historical development of these phenomena and this leads, from a different angle, back to the question of the relative importance and relationship of history and phenomenology. Several sides have been taken in this debate which goes back to an earlier part of this century. It is a debate beset with many philosophical thorns, few of which have been removed so far (see Sharpe 1975: 220–50; the Dutch contribution to phenomenology is discussed in Waardenburg 1972).

In contrast to the historical approach which is always diachronic, the phenomenological approach presents data in a synchronic, classificatory manner, frequently irrespective of any historical sequence. Thus, in the view of many, it appears to be too ahistorical if not to say anachronistic at times. The term ‘phenomenology of religion’ was first used by Chantepie de la Saussaye (in his *Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte*, 1887) prior to the development of Husserl’s philosophy of phenomenology. It described the attempt to investigate the essence and meaning of religious phenomena and to group phenomena in a typological manner independent from space and time. The early phenomenology of religion was thus a discipline of classification used by many different scholars. However, this early empirical phenomenology is distinct from the classical phenomenology of religion developed in the first half of the twentieth century and perhaps best known through the work of the Dutch scholar, Gerardus van der Leeuw (especially his *Religion in Essence and Manifestation: a Study in Phenomenology*, trl. 1938, 1st ed. 1933). The specific methodological principles characteristic of this classical phenomenology were initially dependent on Husserl’s influence but it must be emphasized that the subsequent developments of the phenomenology of religion remained unconnected with philosophical phenomenologies or the more recent discussions about phenomenology in the social sciences.

At its simplest, phenomenology seeks to understand the phenomenon of religion or, rather, specific phenomena of religion. The phenomenological method is summed up by the use of two distinct principles, derived from Husserl, namely the *epoché* and the eidetic vision. The *epoché* is often described as ‘bracketing’, that is to say, a suspension of judgment on the part of the investigator as to the truth, value, and in some cases also the existence of the phenomenon. The eidetic vision aims to grasp the essence of phenomena by means of empathy and intuition. Whereas

the use of the *epoché* is pursued to achieve detachment and some kind of pure objectivity, the intuitive grasp of the essentials of phenomena in their wholeness clearly introduces a large measure of subjectivity. Thus, phenomenological methodology is characterized from the outset by an inherent tension, if not to say contradiction, of its underlying principles.

Phenomenological discussions have been influenced by developments in biblical interpretation or hermeneutics and the philosophical explorations of German *Verstehensphilosophie*. Large claims have been made on behalf of the phenomenology of religion; the most significant of these was that the phenomenological approach 'provided a path to the understanding (*Verstehen*) of religion, and to a grasp of its essence (*Wesen*), by means of an as far as possible value-free examination of its manifestations (*Erscheinungen*)' (Sharpe 1975: 220).

Traditional phenomenology has been largely practised by Dutch and German scholars of an earlier generation whose work has come in for much criticism recently. In spite of the investigation of numerous religious phenomena, little theoretical advance seems to have been made and much phenomenological work lacks methodological rigour and precision. The field is characterized by an extreme fragmentation so that one can discern almost as many different phenomenologies as there are phenomenologists. More frequently than not the term 'phenomenology of religion' appears to refer to a general approach rather than a specific method. This approach emphasizes the need to distance oneself from speculative and normative *a priori* categories in the study of religious phenomena; it also pleads for an overall orientation where the scholar investigates what the believer believes himself rather than what others believe about him.

Through the use of *epoché* and the search for objectivity, phenomenology may seem to share the aims of descriptive science but on closer examination it appears, as Oxtoby has pointed out, that '*Epoché* and eidetic vision are neither critical nor objective in the commonly understood sense of critical objectivity. Just as *epoché* suspends criticism, eidetic vision suspends objectivity. There is nothing outside one's intuitive grasp of a pattern which validates that pattern . . . phenomenological expositions of religion are in fact very personal appreciations of it, akin more to certain forms of literary and aesthetic criticism than to