

**SEEKING THE BOUNDARIES: GERARDUS VAN DER LEEUW**  
**ON THE STUDY OF RELIGION AND THE NATURE OF THEOLOGY**

**By**

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## GERARDUS VAN DER LEEUW ON RELIGION AND THEOLOGY

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## Abstract

Relative to his significance and his contribution to the intellectual life of the twentieth century, the thought of the Dutch scholar Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890–1950) has not been much investigated. This lack of study, along with the failure to situate van der Leeuw in his Dutch context and the failure to explore the various sides of his versatile career and vast corpus, has led to much misunderstanding of his life and thought. Van der Leeuw is most often thought of by scholars as a phenomenologist of religion — the side of his work for which he became internationally famous. Little, however, is generally known about his other pursuits, especially his devotion to Christian theology. In light of this situation, this study attempts to contextualize and investigate van der Leeuw's thought by asking the question: How did van der Leeuw conceive the study of religion, the nature of theology and their relationship? It argues that although he has been widely assumed to be principally a phenomenologist of religion, van der Leeuw should be understood first and foremost as a Christian theologian, which entails paying close attention to his virtually ignored book *Inleiding tot de theologie* (*Introduction to theology*), where he most carefully articulated his conception of Christian theology



as well as his view of the integral relationship between Christian theology and the study of religion. As *both* a scholar of religion *and* a Christian theologian, moreover, van der Leeuw's conception of theology stands out — especially in terms of his view of the relationship between theology and the study of religion, which is one of the most comprehensive and sophisticated such views set forth in the twentieth century.

## Acknowledgements

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partner and an exemplary figure in his demonstration of the harmony which must exist between scholarly inquiry and human life. I shall never forget his searching gaze or his wonderful sense of humour. Professor Gérard Vallée has been more than a supervisor: he has been a source of encouragement and wisdom, a colleague, a conversation partner, a model of scholarly precision and a model of humility and humanity. I shall never forget his fairness, his kindness, his willingness to give of his time and his exemplary way of dealing with people. For technical advice and help regarding the world of computers and their capabilities, I am grateful to my brother Ed. He is truly a master of his craft. For conversations of an unusually meaningful order, I am grateful to Jeff Polet — a friend for all seasons. Finally, for more than I could ever hope to express, I am grateful to my wife Joan. Of her I can only sing with Uriel in Haydn's *Creation*:

The partner for him form'd,  
A woman, fair and graceful spouse.  
Her softly smiling, virgin looks,  
Of flow'ry spring the mirror,  
Bespeak him love, and joy and bliss.

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## Table of Abbreviations

- BC** Van der Leeuw, Gerardus. *Balans van het Christendom*. Amsterdam: H.J. Paris, 1940.
- DGHG** Sierksma, F. Prof. Dr. G. van der Leeuw. *Dienaar van God en hoogleraar te Groningen*. Amsterdam: Het Wereldvenster, 1951.
- IG** Van der Leeuw, Gerardus. *Inleiding tot de godsdienstgeschiedenis*. Haarlem: De Erven F. Bohn, 1924.
- IPG** Van der Leeuw, Gerardus. *Inleiding tot de fenomenologie van den godsdienst*. Haarlem: De Erven F. Bohn, 1948.
- IT** Van der Leeuw, Gerardus. *Inleiding tot de theologie*. 2nd ed. Amsterdam: H.J. Paris, 1948.
- MR** Van der Leeuw, Gerardus. *Der Mensch und die Religion. Anthropologischer Versuch*. Basel: Verlag Haus zum Falken, 1941.
- PMR** Van der Leeuw, Gerardus. *De primitieve mensch en de religie. Anthropologische studie*. Groningen: J.B. Wolters, 1937.
- PR** Van der Leeuw, Gerardus. *Phänomenologie der Religion*. 2nd ed. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1956.
- PRPS** Kooiman, W.J. and J.M. van Veen, ed. *Pro Regno Pro Sanctuario. Een bundel studies en bijdragen van vrienden en vereerders bij de zestigste verjaardag van Prof. Dr. G. van der Leeuw*. Nijkerk: G.F. Callenbach, 1950.
- PT** Van der Leeuw, Gerardus. *Plaats en taak van de godsdienstgeschiedenis in de theologische wetenschap*. Groningen: J.B. Wolters, 1918.
- RGG** Gunkel, Hermann and Leopold Zscharnack, ed. *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. 2nd ed. 5 vols. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1927-1931.
- SMP** Van der Leeuw, Gerardus. *La structure de la mentalité primitive*. Strasbourg: Imprimerie Alsacienne, 1928.
- ST** Van der Leeuw, Gerardus. "Strukturpsychologie und Theologie," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* N.F. IX (1928), 321-49.

**UNE** Van der Leeuw, Gerardus. "Über einige neuere Ergebnisse der psychologischen Forschung und ihre Anwendung auf die Geschichte, insbesondere die Religionsgeschichte," *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni* II (1926), 1-43.

**WG** Van der Leeuw, Gerardus. *Wegen en grenzen*. 2nd ed. Amsterdam: H.J. Paris, 1948.

Es sind die undurchschauten Vorurteile, deren Herrschaft uns gegen die in der Überlieferung sprechende Sache taub macht.

Hans-Georg Gadamer

For oblivion of eternity, or, in other words, estrangement from man's deepest desire and therewith from the primary issues, is the price which modern man had to pay, from the very beginning, for attempting to be absolutely sovereign, to become the master and owner of nature, to conquer chance.

Leo Strauss





# Foreword

The following study of the thought of the Dutch scholar Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890-1950) requires a few words of a prefatory nature. Very much in the spirit of the European Renaissance tradition, van der Leeuw was engaged in a number of pursuits simultaneously: he was a pastor, a professor of the study of religion, a professor of Christian theology, an aesthete, a liturgist and a politician. Because the details of his life and career are not well-known to English speakers, I begin this study (Chapter One) with an interpretive sketch of van der Leeuw's biography. Next, I offer an account of his work's reception and his scholarly influence. In the process, I review the present state of van der Leeuw scholarship. Following this, I outline the plan of the rest of work in some detail. As I thus note in the last part of Chapter One, the present study is an attempt to answer the question: How did van der Leeuw conceive the study of religion, the nature of Christian theology and their relationship?

The next chapter (Chapter Two) is dedicated to giving an account of van der Leeuw's view of the study of religion (Dutch *godsdienswetenschap*,

German *Religionswissenschaft*). This in itself is no small task. To make such a presentation involves study of van der Leeuw's intellectual milieu and intellectual debts. Such a presentation further involves reading almost all of van der Leeuw's extremely large corpus (in Dutch, German, French and English — in descending order of quantitative significance)<sup>1</sup> and selecting those writings which address the matter of the nature of the study of religion. Few scholars have investigated van der Leeuw's view of the study of religion in any detail; as a result, his view of it is not well known. Hence, I attempt in Chapter Two to allow van der Leeuw to speak for himself. Those who read what I have written will in all likelihood be listening to this great Dutch scholar for the first time — at least on a number of topics. Chapter Two thus has the nature of what might be called a "pointed narrative."<sup>2</sup> After a brief presentation of the views of those scholars involved in the study of religion on whose work van der Leeuw drew, I present his view of religion and his conception of the study of religion. In the course of the latter, I discuss his view of the history of the study of religion, his view of "primitive mentality," his view of the subdivisions found within the study of religion and his view of method in the study of religion — especially phenomenology of religion.

The following chapter (Chapter Three) seeks to give an account of van

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<sup>1</sup>All English translations from Dutch, German and French sources in this study are my own.

<sup>2</sup>I am indebted to Professor Gérard Vallée for this term.

der Leeuw's view of the nature of Christian theology. Again, this is no small task. Such a presentation once again involves brief investigation of van der Leeuw's intellectual milieu and intellectual debts — this time with a somewhat different focus — as well as discrimination in selecting from van der Leeuw's large and many-sided corpus those writings which address the matter of the nature of Christian theology.<sup>3</sup> Even more so than his work in the study of religion, van der Leeuw's theological views are not well known and have not been much studied. I thus once again allow van der Leeuw to speak for himself as much as possible. Especially because the majority of his theological works are not available in the major languages of Western scholarship, this is the only way for the reader to get some sense of van der Leeuw's own writing. In once again employing the strategy of a pointed narrative, then, I briefly present the views of the theological forbears important for understanding van der Leeuw's own theological work, his own comments on the nature of theology prior to his major treatise on the matter and, finally, the argument of said major treatise: *Inleiding tot de theologie* (*Introduction to theology*).

In the last chapter of this study (Chapter Four), I begin by drawing attention to the fact of religious pluralism in the twentieth century and the

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<sup>3</sup>By "nature of theology," I have the formal — and not the material — character of van der Leeuw's theology in mind. I am hence principally interested in what he took theology to be as a discipline (including the question of its method). I am less interested in the content of this or that doctrine as he conceived it.

need for Christian theology to address it. In other words, I point to the necessity of a relationship between the study of religion and Christian theology. In this light, I briefly review the conceptions of theology of three important twentieth century Protestant theologians — especially focussing on their stance *vis-à-vis* the study of religion — in order to provide a context for seeing the significance of van der Leeuw's work and for critically evaluating it. I follow this with a brief review of the work of two important historians of religion who came to see during the course of their careers that the history of religion cannot remain unconnected to theology. As in the case of the theologians just referred to, the intent of this review is to provide a context for seeing the significance of van der Leeuw's work and for critically evaluating it — this time from a different angle. Penultimately, I summarize the presentation offered in the previous chapters and restate the central theses developed in the dissertation (namely, that van der Leeuw must be interpreted as a theologian, which requires paying close attention to the aforementioned and much neglected *Inlciding tot de theologic*; and that as a theologian he sought to relate the study of religion to theology in an integral way). With all of the groundwork done, I finish the last chapter with a critical evaluation of van der Leeuw's view of the relationship of the study of religion to theology. In so doing, I draw attention to both strengths and weaknesses in van der Leeuw's position. At bottom, I conclude that van

der Leeuw's position is bold and visionary — but riddled with unresolved tensions which cast doubt over its practicability. I end the study by pleading for further investigation into the thought of this very significant and much ignored twentieth century thinker, from whom there is much to be learned.

Having had a look at the map, it is time to begin the journey by introducing the life and career of a ubiquitous twentieth century scholar: Gerardus van der Leeuw.





# Chapter 1

## Boundaries: Introduction to a Thinker and a Problem

### I. A Boundary Seeker

Faced with the prodigious task of summarizing the life and career of Gerardus van der Leeuw, it is difficult to improve upon Mircea Eliade's characterization of van der Leeuw as "a versatile genius and a prolific writer."<sup>1</sup> Theologian, historian of religion, phenomenologist of religion, aesthete, politician, organizer, leader, "servant of God and professor in Groningen,"<sup>2</sup> van der Leeuw authored some sixty books and brochures, was involved in the co-authorship of some sixty more books and brochures, wrote approximately 100 encyclopedia articles, 400 book reviews, 325 journal articles and 380 articles in dailies and weeklies.<sup>3</sup> What sort of person and life-circumstances

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<sup>1</sup>Mircea Eliade, "Preface" in Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Sacred and Profane Beauty: The Holy in Art*, trans. David E. Green (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), p. v.

<sup>2</sup>This is how van der Leeuw's student F. Sierksma sought to characterize his teacher in a short autobiographical appreciation written shortly after van der Leeuw's death. See *DGHG*.

<sup>3</sup>See the not entirely complete bibliography in *PRPS*, pp. 555-638, as well as Jacques



made such accomplishment possible?<sup>4</sup>

Gerardus van der Leeuw was the first of three children born to Gerardus van der Leeuw Senior (1861–1922) and Elisabeth Antoinette Nelck (1863–1949) in The Hague on March 18, 1890.<sup>5</sup> After attending grammar school, the young van der Leeuw enrolled in the *Stedelijk Haags Gymnasium* in 1902, where he studied until 1908. H. C. Rümke, van der Leeuw's lifelong friend, recalled after van der Leeuw's death that all that van der Leeuw came to be was essentially already there in the Gymnasium years: the excellent student, the organizer, the speaker and writer, the lover of poetry and literature, the

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Waardenburg's "overview" of van der Leeuw's corpus in *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion: Aims, Methods and Theories of Research*, Religion and Reason 4 (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), II, pp. 149–56.

<sup>4</sup>For the biographical sketch that follows, see: DGHG; Jacques Waardenburg, "Gerardus van der Leeuw as a Theologian and a Phenomenologist," in *Reflections on the Study of Religion*, Religion and Reason 15 (The Hague: Mouton, 1978), pp. 187–92; Jacques Waardenburg, "Leeuw, Gerardus van der," in *Biografisch Lexicon voor de Geschiedenis van het Nederlandse Protestantisme*, ed. D. Nauta (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1978), I, pp. 114–20. See also the following overviews of van der Leeuw's life and career: A. de Buck, "Herdenking van Gerardus van der Leeuw (18 Maart 1890 — 18 November 1950)," in *Jaarboek der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen 1951–52* (Amsterdam: N. V. Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1952), 232–44; Eva Hirschmann, "In Memoriam Gerardus van der Leeuw: 18 mars 1890 — 18 novembre 1950," *Le Monde Non-Chrétien* Nouvelle Serie 17 (1951), 27–37; H. G. Hubbeling, *Divine Presence in Ordinary Life: Gerardus van der Leeuw's Two-Fold Method in his Thinking on Art and Religion*, Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde, N. R. Deel 49, No. 1 (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Co., 1986); J. Lindeboom, "In memoriam Gerardi van der Leeuw," *De Gids* CXIV/1 (1951), 1–6; *De Nieuwe Stem* VI/2 (1951), 65–96 (Contributions by seven authors on various aspects of van der Leeuw's life and career); Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (London: Duckworth, 1975), pp. 229–35; DGHG; J. M. van Veen, "Prof. Dr. G. van der Leeuw: 18 Maart 1890 — 18 November 1950," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 5 (1950–51), 129–39; Waardenburg, "Theologian and Phenomenologist," pp. 187–247; Waardenburg, "Leeuw," *Biografisch*, pp. 114–20.

<sup>5</sup>In a recent reprint of *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, the English translation of van der Leeuw's magnum opus (*Phänomenologie der Religion*), the reader is told that van der Leeuw was born in 1863 (!). See Ninian Smart, "Foreword," in Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, trans. J. E. Turner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. ix.

lover of music and art, the Christian "gripped" by God.<sup>6</sup> Van der Leeuw himself attached great importance to these years; especially significant for him was his encounter with literature and poetry, in which he saw a naive and faithful interpretation of the religious spirit.<sup>7</sup> As he once said in a reflective moment near the end of his life:

I belong to the generation which was brought up by Goethe. I cannot imagine my development, my present way of thinking and my life in the world apart from him. His *Faust* has for years been a sort of World-Bible for me, which struggled with the Bible for precedence; and precisely through this never-ending fight, it exercised a continually stronger influence on me.<sup>8</sup>

Not only did van der Leeuw attend classes at school during his youth; in accordance with his pious and orthodox upbringing, he also attended confirmation classes in the Dutch Reformed Church under J. H. Gerretsen. Gerretsen was van der Leeuw's first and perhaps most important theological teacher. Among other things, the former exercised a formative influence on the latter's ideas about spirituality and liturgy. In a biography of his revered teacher, van der Leeuw later described Gerretsen as a man "far ahead of his time."<sup>9</sup> Gerretsen also officiated at several of the rites of passage in van der

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<sup>6</sup>See H. C. Rümke, "Ter herinnering," in *De Nieuwe Stem* VI/2 (1951), 89-91.

<sup>7</sup>See Raffaele Pettazzoni, "Gerardus van der Leeuw in Memoriam," in *Proceedings of the 7th Congress for the History of Religions: Amsterdam 4th-9th September 1950*, ed. C. J. Bleeker and others (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Co., 1951), p. 5.

<sup>8</sup>Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Goethe en de geestelijke crisis van onze tijd," in *Kroniek van kunst en kultuur* 10 (1949), 254. This quote nicely illustrates van der Leeuw's ambivalent relationship to Romanticism. Further on his relationship to Romanticism, see: Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Romantische studiën," in *Levensvormen* (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1948), pp. 161-200; Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Noralis*, 2nd ed. (Baarn: Uitgeverij en Drukkerij Hollandia [1945]).

<sup>9</sup>Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Jan Hendrik Gerretsen* (The Hague: Drukkerij C. Blom-

Leeuw's life, including his confirmation, his marriage and his installation as a pastor in the Dutch Reformed Church.

Upon completion of his Gymnasium studies in 1908, van der Leeuw attended the University of Leiden, commuting from his parents' home in The Hague. He chose to study theology with a special focus on history of religion. Under the influence of W. B. Kristensen, his mentor in the study of religion, van der Leeuw made ancient Egyptian religion his particular area of specialization. The demands of this course of study did not seem to prevent him from simultaneously undertaking traditional theological study, which he did under the tutelage of the renowned P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye.<sup>10</sup> Along with Gerretsen, his Leiden teachers Kristensen and Chantepie de la Saussaye should be seen as the most important influences on van der Leeuw in his formative years.<sup>11</sup>

His final examinations at Leiden complete, van der Leeuw set out for a year of study in Germany in the fall of 1913. He spent the winter semester in Berlin, working with the Egyptologists Adolf Erman and Kurt Sethe, the

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mendaal N. V., [1942]), pp. 10-1. As I will argue later on, this is also an apt description of the visionary van der Leeuw.

<sup>10</sup>Van der Leeuw was actively involved in the Student Christian Movement at Leiden. Because of Chantepie's influence on this group, van der Leeuw underwent his influence in more than just an academic way. See Carl F. Hallencreutz, *Kraemer Towards Tambaram: A Study in Hendrik Kraemer's Missionary Approach*, *Studia Missionalia Upsaliensia* VII (Lund: Gleerup, 1966), p. 50.

<sup>11</sup>See van der Leeuw's words of gratitude and indebtedness to his teachers in: Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Godsvoorstellingen in de Oud-Aegyptische Pyramidetexten* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1916), p. vii; *PT*, pp. 23-4; Gerardus van der Leeuw "Confession scientifique," *Numen* I (1954), 9.

latter of whom was preparing a new edition of the ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts. Besides his studies, van der Leeuw took advantage of the cultural life of the German capital. He moved on to Göttingen for the summer semester, where he studied history of religion and theology, primarily with Wilhelm Bousset. Van der Leeuw judged his year in Germany to be one "of great significance for my general theological development as well as for my Egyptological work."<sup>12</sup>

After he had returned to The Netherlands in the summer of 1914, van der Leeuw began writing his dissertation, which he completed while living at his parents' home in The Hague. He defended it on March 15, 1916 with W. B. Kristensen as his "promoter." Entitled *Godsvoorstellingen in de Oud-Aegyptische Pyramidetexten* (*Ideas of God in the Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*), this first major work from van der Leeuw's hand is significant for several reasons. First of all, he took Egyptology beyond what it for the most part was at the time: philology. Stressing the notion of impersonal power in the Pyramid Texts, one might say that there were "rumblings" here of his later phenomenological studies of religion. Secondly, van der Leeuw demonstrated acquaintance with the work of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl in his dissertation and showed himself to be concerned with the problem of primitive mentality.

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<sup>12</sup>Van der Leeuw, *Godsvoorstellingen*, p. viii. It is interesting to note that at the end of his life, van der Leeuw was entertaining thoughts of an autobiography. In telling his life-story to his friend Rümke from his sick-bed, he got as far as his year in Germany and then stopped. When asked if there was anything of significance in his life after this time, he smiled and said nothing. See Rümke, "Ter herinnering," 88-96.

Thirdly, van der Leeuw showed himself to be a fine scholar; his dissertation earned him praise and a reputation as a historian of religion of great promise. Fourthly, there are indications in the dissertation that van der Leeuw was already wrestling with the problem of the relationship between the study of religion and Christian theology.<sup>13</sup>

Six weeks after he defended his dissertation, van der Leeuw was married to Anna Catharina Snoeck Henkemans (1890-1946), a theology student in Leiden whom he had known since an early age. The van der Leeuws had three sons in the course of time. Shortly after their marriage, the young couple moved to 's Heerenberg in the southeastern part of The Netherlands, where the young theologian and historian of religion served as a pastor in the local Dutch Reformed Church. During these years, van der Leeuw also taught Hebrew to prospective theological students in the local Gymnasium. He also wrote the greater part of his second major work. Published a few years later, *Historisch Christendom* (*Historically Defined Christianity*) is a study of the relationship between faith and history. As such, it counts as van der Leeuw's first major theological work.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>See van der Leeuw, *Godsvoorstellingen*, *passim* (especially pp. 1-43, 118, and "Stellingen" XXII and XXIII appended to the end of the dissertation), and de Buck, "Herdenking," p. 233. Van der Leeuw continued his investigations into Egyptian religion throughout his life. For a bibliography of his Egyptological writings, see the compilation by M. S. H. G. Heerma van Voss entitled "Lijst der geschriften van Prof. Dr. G. van der Leeuw (18 Maart 1890 - 18 November 1950) betreffende het oude voor-Azië en Egypte," *Ex Oriente Lux* 12 (1951-1952), 126-9.

<sup>14</sup>See Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Historisch Christendom* (Utrecht: A. Oosthoek, 1919).

In 1918 van der Leeuw was called to a chair in the faculty of theology at the University of Groningen. Except for a brief period in politics, van der Leeuw remained in Groningen for the rest of his life — despite attractive calls from other universities (including Amsterdam, Utrecht, Marburg and Chicago). His teaching assignment in Groningen is a testament to his versatility. Included in it were history of religion, history of the doctrine of God, theological encyclopedia, Egyptian language and literature — and in the course of time, phenomenology of religion (which replaced history of the doctrine of God after World War II) and liturgics (after 1940).<sup>15</sup> On September 25, 1918, van der Leeuw delivered his inaugural lecture entitled: “Plaats en taak van de godsdienstgeschiedenis in de theologische wetenschap” (“The Place and Task of History of Religion in Theological Science”). This lecture can be seen as something of a blueprint for van der Leeuw’s career as a theologian and historian of religion: it contains important comments about his view of method in the study of religion as well as key ideas about the nature of theology.<sup>16</sup>

In the 1920s, as a young professor in Groningen, van der Leeuw was

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<sup>15</sup>Although van der Leeuw’s teaching assignment in Groningen was very broad, he did not have many students to teach or lectures to give, which left him much time for reading and writing. See J. M. van Veen “Prof. G. van der Leeuw, 1890 – 1950,” *Wending* 25/1 (1970), 536. This may well be one of the principal reasons why van der Leeuw never left Groningen.

<sup>16</sup>See *PT*. This text — and other texts relevant to this study like it — will be discussed in the chapters to follow. Hence, my comments about them in this brief biography are limited.

involved in more than just academic matters. Eager to serve the church "with all his might,"<sup>17</sup> he was associated with a society of Dutch Protestant theologians called the *Ethische Vereeniging*, of which he was president for some time. He was also involved with a circle of people concerned with liturgical consciousness and renewal called the *Liturgische Kring*, which he also served as president. His involvement with these groups went beyond committee work and leadership: he published several books and articles relating to these activities as well.<sup>18</sup>

At the same time, van der Leeuw was busy building his reputation as a historian of religion. In 1924, he published an introduction to the study of religion entitled *Inleiding tot de godsdienstgeschiedenis* (*Introduction to the History of Religion*). This work, which was translated into German and published the following year as *Einführung in die Phänomenologie der Religion* (*Introduction to Phenomenology of Religion*), is in a sense the first version of the much larger and famous phenomenology of religion published in 1933 under the title *Phänomenologie der Religion* (*Phenomenology of Religion*). Although he had already written several studies dealing with various detailed topics in the history of religion, the *Inleiding* showed van der Leeuw's eye for "the big picture."<sup>19</sup>

Aside from the *Inleiding*, van der Leeuw also wrote several articles about

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<sup>17</sup>See *PT*, p. 23.

<sup>18</sup>See the bibliography in *PRPS*, pp. 555-638 *passim*.

<sup>19</sup>See *IG*; *PR*; *PRPS*, pp. 555-638, *passim*.

the study of religion in the 1920s, which further bolstered his reputation. Among these, his substantial article on method in the study of religion in 1926 entitled "Ueber einige neuere Ergebnisse der psychologischen Forschung und ihre Anwendung auf die Geschichte, insonderheit die Religionsgeschichte" ("On Some Recent Research in Psychology and its Application to History, Especially History of Religion") as well as a parallel article on method in theology in 1928 entitled "Strukturpsychologie und Theologie" ("Structural Psychology and Theology") deserve to be mentioned.<sup>20</sup> Also, some fifty more articles from his hand — including several of a methodological nature — appeared in the second edition of *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* published in Germany between 1927 and 1931.<sup>21</sup>

In 1927, van der Leeuw published a study of Greek religion entitled *Goden en mensen in Hellas* (*Gods and Peoples in Ancient Greece*). Although he was an Egyptologist by professional training, ancient Greece was van der Leeuw's true love in the history of religion (i.e., outside Christianity). As he himself put it: "We have received so much from the bewildering wealth of the Greeks that we can never immerse ourselves enough in their spirit."<sup>22</sup> Following his own advice, van der Leeuw was deeply immersed in the spirit and world of the ancient Greeks, without whom he declared life

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<sup>20</sup>See *UNE*; *ST*.

<sup>21</sup>See the list of van der Leeuw's *RGG* articles in *PRPS*, pp. 565-6.

<sup>22</sup>Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Goden en mensen in Hellas* (Haarlem: De Erven F. Bohn, 1927), p. viii.



to be impossible.<sup>23</sup>

The problem of primitive mentality, which had caught van der Leeuw's eye in his student days in Leiden, also found expression in print during the late 1920s. *La structure de la mentalité primitive* (*The Structure of Primitive Mentality*) was his attempt to give his own account of the how and why of primitive mentality in non-evolutionary, structural terms. Van der Leeuw thought that primitive mentality could be found virtually everywhere in the history of religion — including modern Western society, albeit not as purely as in non-literate cultures. In his discussion of this very interesting problem, he was critical of positivism for isolating one mode of thought (Western logic and rationality) and rejecting all others as inferior and no longer valid.<sup>24</sup> As it turned out, van der Leeuw was to return to this problem many times during his career.

The period from the mid-1920s to the late-1930s was the period in which van der Leeuw was at his creative best. As the 1930s began, he had already acquired an international reputation as a historian of religion. Yet, the works for which he acquired lasting fame were yet to come. The year 1932 saw the publication of his classical study of the relationship between religion and art entitled *Wegen en grenzen. Studie over de verhouding van religie en*

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<sup>23</sup>See: F. Sierksma, "De Europeaan," in *De Nieuwe Stem* VI/2 (1951), 75; F. Sierksma, "Van der Leeuw na 25 jaar," in *G. van der Leeuw herdacht* (Groningen: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 1975), p. 10.

<sup>24</sup>See *SMP*.

*kunst* (*Ways and Boundaries: A Study of the Relationship Between Religion and Art*). As an amateur musician of sorts (he was a good singer and he played the organ) and lover of the arts, as well as a Christian theologian and historian of religion, van der Leeuw sought to explore the relationship between the holy and the beautiful. The fundamental question in which he was interested might be expressed as follows: Is the relationship between the holy and the beautiful extrinsic or intrinsic? Alternately: Are the holy and the beautiful parallel planes or concentric circles? Beginning with dance and dealing with the other arts in turn, he tried to show the unity of art and religion in primitive cultures and the progressive absence of this unity in other cultures — a development ultimately leading to the opposition of art and religion as hostile powers. However, his analysis did not end there. Believing there to be an essential connection between the two, van der Leeuw saw possibilities for new unity between art and religion. This book too is a testament to van der Leeuw's breathtaking erudition and versatility. One can only marvel at the accomplishment represented by *Wegen en grenzen*.<sup>25</sup>

A year later (1933) van der Leeuw published the book for which he has achieved lasting fame: *Phänomenologie der Religion* (*Phenomenology of Religion*).<sup>26</sup> A massive and systematic introduction to the history of

<sup>25</sup>See Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Wegen en grenzen. Studie over de verhouding van religie en kunst* (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1932).

<sup>26</sup>See PR. When the book was later translated into English, it was entitled not *Phenomenology of Religion* but *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*. See Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, trans. J. E. Turner (Princeton: Princeton

religion, the book has been much read and much criticized.<sup>27</sup> *En route* it has become the classical treatise in phenomenology of religion. With his view of religion as a kind of relationship to power, van der Leeuw organized the book into five parts: the object of religion; the subject of religion; object and subject in reciprocal relation; the world; forms. Appended to the end of the book are "Epilegomena," which deal with methodological and disciplinary matters.<sup>28</sup> Van der Leeuw expressed the aim of the book as follows: "May the book ... contribute something to the understanding of religion, both in its immense wealth as a cultural treasure and in the call to faith which goes out to humanity from it."<sup>29</sup>

The year 1933 also saw the publication of a very different book by van der Leeuw, namely, his *Dogmatische brieven* (*Dogmatic Letters*). These meditations on the Apostles' Creed dedicated to his friend Rümke are, as Rümke later said, a rare expression of van der Leeuw's piety.<sup>30</sup> As such, they show yet another side of the versatile van der Leeuw: the pastor and apologist, attempting to help others find their way from the little theologically and re-

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University Press, 1986).

<sup>27</sup> Perhaps typical has been the complaint that van der Leeuw's *Phänomenologie* is too theological and too Christian. Or, as some might say, it is too "subjective" and lacks methodological self-consciousness.

<sup>28</sup> Compare these divisions with the divisions of the *Inleiding* of 1924: introduction; God; man; God and man; directions of religious thought.

<sup>29</sup> *PR*, p. vi. The last part of this statement can be seen as a clue to van der Leeuw's increasing alarm about the religious and especially Christian decline of the modern Western world. This interpretation is corroborated by Sierksma, who argues that van der Leeuw's *Phänomenologie* is not just a handbook for the study of religion but a message for the modern world. See *DGHG*, pp. 85-8.

<sup>30</sup> See Rümke, "Ter herinnering," 90-1.

ligiously conscious time of the twentieth century to the language and dogma of the church.<sup>31</sup>

As a professor in Groningen, van der Leeuw's activities included his becoming rector of the university during the 1934-35 academic year. He also continued his lectures. His teaching assignment, it will be recalled, included responsibility for theological encyclopedia. The years of teaching in this area bore fruit in 1935 when van der Leeuw published one of his most important books entitled *Inleiding tot de theologie* (*Introduction to Theology*). A formal and not a material introduction to theology, the book examines the nature of science, the nature of theological science and the organization of theology as a discipline. In so doing, it also discusses the relationship of the study of religion to theology. As such, this very important and little studied text takes up the questions of the 1918 inaugural address and answers them after years of experience, reflection and teaching.<sup>32</sup>

Van der Leeuw's various scholarly contributions at home and abroad were formally recognized by his Dutch colleagues in 1936, when he became a member of the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences.<sup>33</sup> Besides the work he had done in theology and history of religion, van der Leeuw was also active in the area of music and the arts. He was president of the Dutch Bach Society for a

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<sup>31</sup>See Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Dogmatische brieven* (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1933). Further on van der Leeuw's piety, see *DGHG*, *passim*.

<sup>32</sup>See *IT*.

<sup>33</sup>Van der Leeuw also became a member of the Royal Flemish Academy of Sciences in Brussels as well as the *Accademia dei Lincei* in Rome.

time and was also involved in local music groups in Groningen. His profound love of the music of J. S. Bach found literal expression in 1937, when he published his *Bach's Mattheuspension* (*Bach's St. Matthew's Passion*). Over the years that followed, van der Leeuw (sometimes with a co-author) published several more treatises dealing with sacred music and especially the music of Bach, including: *Beknopte geschiedenis van het kerklied* (*A Short History of Church Songs*); *Bach's Hoogmis* (*Bach's Mass in B Minor*); and *Bach's Johannes Passion* (*Bach's St. John's Passion*).<sup>34</sup>

The problem of primitive mentality, with which van der Leeuw had been wrestling for more than two decades, once again came to the fore in 1937 when *De primitieve mensch en de religie. Anthropologische studie* (*Primitive Man and Religion: An Anthropological Study*) was published. This book is, among other things, a rebuttal of what van der Leeuw took to be mistaken interpretations of the views of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl. Reviewing the debate about primitive mentality en route to his own descriptions of primitive mentality and modern mentality, van der Leeuw argues in *De primitieve mensch* that one cannot properly understand religion apart from these struc-

<sup>34</sup>See: Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Bach's Mattheuspension* (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1937); Gerardus van der Leeuw and K. Ph. Bernet Kempers, *Beknopte geschiedenis van het kerklied* (Groningen: J. B. Wolters, 1939); Anthon van der Horst and Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Bach's Hoogmis* (Amsterdam: Uitgeversmaatschappij Holland, [1941]); Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Bach's Johannes Passion* (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1946). Mention should also be made here of van der Leeuw's participation in the committee responsible for giving the Dutch Reformed Church a new hymnbook, which was published in 1938 and which contained several adaptations of Latin hymns by van der Leeuw. See *PRPS*, p. 598.

tures of the human mind. This book also constitutes the beginning of van der Leeuw's existential and theological anthropology of human becoming (*Menschwerdung*), in large measure inspired by his ethnological investigations. The mature fruit of these reflections was harvested a few years later (1941) when *Der Mensch und die Religion. Anthropologischer Versuch* (*Man and Religion: An Anthropological Investigation*) was published — van der Leeuw's mature verdict on anthropology.<sup>35</sup>

As the 1930s drew to a close — with Europe on the brink of disaster — van der Leeuw was busy writing a book on Christianity's position in the modern Western world entitled *Balans van het Christendom* (*The Present State of Christianity*), which appeared in 1940. This book reveals van der Leeuw's increasing alarm about the state of European civilization: "Willy nilly, we live in expectation of the new or with nostalgia as regards the old in a new period of the history of humanity. The question is whether this period will signify construction or demolition."<sup>36</sup> Undoubtedly, the situation of the Christian churches in Germany was on his mind as van der Leeuw reflected on Christianity's defensive posture and crippled state in the modern Western world. Sierksma later wrote that there were really two van der Leeuws — one before World War II and one after it. This naturally implies that the early forties were something of a period of transition for van der Leeuw.

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<sup>35</sup>See *PMR* and *MR*.

<sup>36</sup>*BC*, p. v. For further discussion of van der Leeuw's view of Christianity's present condition, see his *Geloof of inbeelding?* (The Hague: D. A. Daamen's U. M. N. V., [1944]).

Increasingly, he came to believe that Europe was on the brink of nihilism. Although hopeful about a speedy end to the War and a better post-War world (he was later deeply disappointed about post-War developments in Europe), van der Leeuw was something of a cultural prophet in the 1940s, declaring in 1944 – when things were actually improving for the Allied cause and thus with reference to more than just the horrors of war — that we “are living in a dreadful crisis.”<sup>37</sup>

Despite his dark view of the times in which he found himself, van der Leeuw went on with his work. In 1940 he published his *Liturgiek* (*Liturgics*).<sup>38</sup> Liturgy and church worship had been a concern for him most of his life, beginning with his contact with his teacher Gerretsen, continuing with his involvement in the *Liturgische Kring*, expressing itself in his work on sacred music, and coming to fullest expression in *Liturgiek*. During the 1940s, other works relevant to liturgics followed, most notably: *Koor, orgel en organist in den eeredienst* (*Choir, Organ and Organist in the Worship Service*); *Liturgische kennis voor den organist* (*Liturgical Awareness for the Organist*); and *Sacramentstheologie* (*Theology of the Sacraments*), van der

<sup>37</sup>Van der Leeuw, *Geloof*, p. 3. Further on van der Leeuw's grim view of Europe and the Western world during these years, see: Sierksma, “Van der Leeuw na,” pp. 2–12; W. Nijenhuis, “Theologie en kerk te Groningen gedurende de periode van het Nationaal-Socialisme (1933–1945), bepaaldelijk met betrekking tot de Duitse kerkstrijd,” *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 40/2 (1986), 122.

<sup>38</sup>In the “Preface” to *Liturgiek*, van der Leeuw wrote: “Writing this book kept me busy, comforted me and strengthened me in the dark months following May 10, 1940 [the date of the German invasion of The Netherlands]. It will have attained its goal if it helps some to realize that although earthly houses are being demolished, the House of God remains open.” Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Liturgiek* (Nijkerk: G. F. Callenbach, [1940]), p. 8.

Leeuw's most important piece of dogmatic theology.<sup>39</sup>

The early war years in The Netherlands did not prevent van der Leeuw and a team of experts from carrying on their professional work and publishing a two-volume introductory textbook on the history of religions. Edited by van der Leeuw, *De godsdiensten der wereld* (*The Religions of the World*) became the standard work on the subject in The Netherlands for several decades. Besides his editorship, van der Leeuw wrote the "Introduction," the chapter on "The Religion of the Primitives" and the chapter on "Greek religion."<sup>40</sup>

As World War II drew to a close, van der Leeuw was hard at work on another book in yet another area.<sup>41</sup> *Balans van Nederland* (*The Present State of The Netherlands*) garnered him attention in a new arena -- that of politics. When the War in Europe finally ended in 1945, van der Leeuw was chosen to serve his country as Minister of Education, Art and Science in the

<sup>39</sup>See: van der Leeuw, *Liturgiek*; Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Koor, orgel en organist in den eeredienst* (The Hague: Drukkerij C. Blommendaal, [1942]); Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Liturgische kennis voor den organist* (Arnhem: S. Gouda Quint-D. Brouwer en Zoon, 1943); Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Sacramentstheologie* (Nijkerk: G. F. Callenbach, 1949).

<sup>40</sup>See: Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Inleiding" in *De godsdiensten der wereld*, 2nd ed., ed. Gerardus van der Leeuw (Amsterdam: H. Meulenhoff, 1941), I, pp. 1-6; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "De religie der primitieve volken" in *De godsdiensten der wereld*, I, pp. 7-69; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Griekse religie" in *De godsdiensten der wereld*, 2nd ed., ed. Gerardus van der Leeuw (Amsterdam: H. Meulenhoff, 1941), II, pp. 1-52.

<sup>41</sup>As C. J. Bleeker once aptly remarked, van der Leeuw's "investigative spirit did not stop at the boundary of his own discipline." "Gerardus van der Leeuw ('s Gravenhage, 18 Maart 1890 — Groningen, December 1950) [sic]," *Jaarboek van de Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde te Leiden, 1950-1951* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1952), p. 145. Bleeker's title contains a rather hard to understand blunder: van der Leeuw died not in Groningen in December of 1950 but in Utrecht in November of 1950.



first post-war federal cabinet. He dedicated himself to this task with great energy, believing that this was a unique opportunity to rebuild and to shape. Van der Leeuw's "cultural politics" endeared him especially to artists in The Netherlands, whom he sought to support and fund in the immediate post-war situation.<sup>42</sup> However, his idealistic, visionary and ambitious activity did not endear him to his more realistic political colleagues and in a cabinet shuffle in the summer of 1946, van der Leeuw lost his post after only one short year. This deeply disappointed him — although he apparently rarely showed it. His disappointment did not prevent him from writing a book based on his experience as a politician entitled *Nationale cultuurtaak* (*The National Cultural Task*).<sup>43</sup>

The year 1946 must have been one of mixed emotions for van der Leeuw. Besides the disappointment about the loss of his cabinet post, his beloved wife of thirty years passed away. Yet, there was also cause for gratitude: van der Leeuw was awarded an honorary doctoral degree by Masaryk University in Brno, Czechoslovakia. In accepting this honour, he gave an address entitled "Confession scientifique" ("Scientific Confession"), which is some-

<sup>42</sup>Van der Leeuw also had Bach's *Matthaeuspassion* translated into Dutch so that the everyday Dutchman could appreciate it. He further worked toward the revision of Dutch orthography, the renewal of higher education and the restructuring of teachers' salaries.

<sup>43</sup>See: Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Balans van Nederland* (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1945); Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Nationale cultuurtaak* (The Hague: D. A. Daamen, 1947). Further on van der Leeuw's career as a politician, see: G. Bolkestein, "De minister," *De Nieuwe Stem* VI/2 (1951), 65-74; *DGHG*, pp. 56-67; H. van Dulken, "De cultuurpolitieke opvattingen van Prof. Dr. G. van der Leeuw (1890-1950)," in *Kunst en beleid in Nederland*, Jaarboek Boekmanstichting, ed. J. Kassies and others (Amsterdam: Van Gennep, 1985), I, pp. 81-162, 269-80.

thing of an autobiographical fragment. Although almost exclusively directed to academic biography, this fragment provides interesting insights into how van der Leeuw saw his own odyssey.<sup>44</sup>

The concern that van der Leeuw felt for the West during the early 1940s did not disappear after the war and his brief career in politics. Continuing his career as a professor in Groningen in what turned out to be his last few years, he became very interested in Sartre and Camus. In the words of Sierksma, with whom van der Leeuw exchanged a published correspondence about nihilism and Christian faith, van der Leeuw was more interested in opposition to religion than he was in attitudes of apathy toward religion.<sup>45</sup> Thinking Europe to be at a crossroads in the post-war years, van der Leeuw wrote near the end of his life: "What will the future hold? The age of secularization is over. It will be necessary to choose between nihilism and faith."<sup>46</sup>

Van der Leeuw's last years were filled with activity — his concerns about the world in which he lived notwithstanding. He lectured at the Eranos Conferences in Switzerland during 1948, 1949 and 1950.<sup>47</sup> No doubt inspired

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<sup>44</sup>Van der Leeuw's comments in his "Confession scientifique" will be considered in the chapters to follow.

<sup>45</sup>See: Gerardus van der Leeuw and F. Sierksma, "Nihilisme en Christelijk geloof. Een briefwisseling," *Wending* 3 (1949), 2-17; *DGHG*, pp. 34-40.

<sup>46</sup>Gerardus van der Leeuw, "L'Église Protestante," *Revue du monde nouveau* (1950), 11. For further evidence of van der Leeuw's post-war alarm about the state of Western civilization, see his review of S. Vestdijk's *De toekomst der religie* in *Wending* 3 (1948), 451-3. See also F. Sierksma's critique of van der Leeuw's comments about Vestdijk's book in "Tussen twee vuren," *Podium* 7/12 (1951), 443-52.

<sup>47</sup>See: Gerardus Van der Leeuw, "L'homme et la civilisation. Ce que peut compren-

by these meetings, van der Leeuw became very interested in the work of C. G. Jung during his last years. While this interest is not clear from his writings, former students attest to his fascination with Jung's archetypes during his discussion of these in lectures.<sup>48</sup> He also travelled widely during the last years. Most notable among these travels were his trip to the United States and his two trips to South Africa on behalf of the Dutch government.

From the viewpoint of his literary output, the last years of van der Leeuw's life were something of a rethinking and summing up. He had continued to work on certain problems his entire life and in 1948, he published several second and expanded editions of key works: *Inleiding tot de godsdienstgeschiedenis* of 1924 was expanded and re-issued as *Inleiding tot de phaenomenologie van den godsdienst* (*Introduction to Phenomenology of Religion*); *Wegen en grenzen* of 1932 was roughly doubled in length in the second edition; *Phänomenologie der Religion* of 1933 appeared in a revised and expanded French translation entitled *La religion dans son essence et ses manifestations: Phénoménologie de la religion* (*Religion in Essence and Manifestation: Phenomenology of Religion*); *Inleiding tot de theologie* of 1935 came out in a second and expanded edition.<sup>49</sup> Besides these new edi-

dre le terme: évolution de l'homme," *Eranos-Jahrbuch*, ed. Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn (Zürich: Rhein-Verlag, 1949), XVI, pp. 141-82; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Urzeit und Endzeit," *Eranos-Jahrbuch*, ed. Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn (Zürich: Rhein-Verlag, 1950), XVII, pp. 11-51; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Unsterblichkeit," *Eranos-Jahrbuch*, ed. Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn (Zürich: Rhein-Verlag, 1950), XVIII, pp. 183-206.

<sup>48</sup>See: DGHG, p. 54; Hubbeling, *Divine*, p. 6.

<sup>49</sup>See: IPG; WG; Gerardus van der Leeuw, *La religion dans son essence et ses manifes-*

tions, a collection of previously published essays by van der Leeuw was published in 1948 under the title *Levensvormen (Forms of Life)* and a year later the already referred to *Sacramentstheologie* appeared, which van der Leeuw apparently considered to be his crowning achievement.<sup>50</sup>

On the occasion of his sixtieth birthday on March 18, 1950, van der Leeuw was presented with a *Festschrift* which included contributions by friends and colleagues inside and outside The Netherlands as well as an almost complete bibliography of his publications.<sup>51</sup> Upon receiving it and thanking his students for their work in organizing it, van der Leeuw responded:

Normally such a book is only presented when one turns seventy or eighty years old. I hope that you are not telling me that I must stop now, for I have the feeling that I haven't really started yet and that I'm only slowly getting around to what I really have to say. But one thing I do hope: that I die before I begin talking nonsense – if for no one else, then for you alone, for you will then look silly for having offered me such a book.<sup>52</sup>

tations, trans. Jacques Marty (Paris: Payot, 1948); *IT. Wegen en grenzen* was re-issued in a third edition after van der Leeuw's death (revised and partially reorganized by E. L. Smelik). A German translation was undertaken based on this third posthumously revised edition. From this German translation in turn, an English translation was made, which scandalously lacks any reference to this complex redaction history. See: Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Wegen en grenzen. Een studie over de verhouding van religie en kunst*, 3rd ed., edited by E. L. Smelik (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1955); Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Sacred and Profane Beauty: The Holy in Art*, trans. David E. Green (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963). Van der Leeuw's *magnum opus* also underwent posthumous revision. A second revised and expanded edition of the *Phänomenologie der Religion* was published in Germany in 1956, based on the changes that van der Leeuw made in preparation for the French translation of 1948. See *PR*.

<sup>50</sup>See van der Leeuw, *Levensvormen* and van der Leeuw, *Sacramentstheologie*. On the importance of *Sacramentstheologie* to van der Leeuw, see: F. Sierksma "Voor en na van der Leeuw," *Vox Theologica* 31/1 (1960), 23; F. Sierksma "Prof. Dr. G. van der Leeuw in tienjarig perspectief," *Het Parool*, November 26, 1960; Waardenburg, "Theologian and Phenomenologist," p. 192.

<sup>51</sup>See *PRPS*.

<sup>52</sup>Van der Leeuw, quoted in *DGHG*, p. 30. On the same day, in a letter to his for-



Always the organizer, van der Leeuw was instrumental in founding the Dutch Society of Historians of Religion, of which he also became president. He also spoke at the first post-war German congress for the history of religions held in Marburg in 1950. He was furthermore one of the key forces behind the organization of the first post-war international congress for the history of religions, held in Amsterdam in September of 1950. Van der Leeuw was chosen as president of the Amsterdam congress as well as president of the newly-formed International Association for the Study of History of Religions (now known as the International Association for the History of Religions or IAHR). At Amsterdam, he also gave a lecture entitled "The Actual Situation of the History of Religions," in which he stressed the new situation facing the history of religions and the need for a cooperative approach to the study of religion.<sup>53</sup>

Although very few knew it at the time, van der Leeuw was already seriously ill at the Amsterdam congress. Soon after it was over, he was admitted to the university hospital in Utrecht, where his friend Rümke worked. Van der Leeuw was never to leave the hospital again. He was, as Rümke said, a patient patient — hopeful that he might recover but fully conscious of the fact that this was highly unlikely.<sup>54</sup> During his last days, he began the

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mer student Eva Hirschmann, van der Leeuw wrote: "If the Lord grants me life, I still have, thank God, much work ahead of me." Van der Leeuw, quoted in Hirschmann, "In Memoriam," 27.

<sup>53</sup>See Bleeker, ed., *Proceedings*, p. 20.

<sup>54</sup>See Rümke, "Ter herinnering," 91-2.

already referred to autobiography, getting as far as his year of study in Germany. He also read the proofs of his student Sierksma's dissertation entitled "Phaenomenologie der religie en complexe psychologie" ("Phenomenology of Religion and Depth Psychology"), which was, among other things, a critique of phenomenology of religion *à la* van der Leeuw for not dealing sufficiently with the work of Freud and Jung. Although highly critical of the proposed dissertation in its earlier stages, the story is told that upon reading the final proofs, van der Leeuw told his friend G. Brom that he was convinced of the methodological correctness of Sierksma's approach to the study of religion, which, as indicated above, implied a fundamental critique of his own position.<sup>55</sup>

On November 18, 1950, van der Leeuw died at the university hospital in Utrecht of poisoning of the kidneys. Four days later, a memorial service was held at the *Duinoordkerk* in The Hague. At the chapel of the cemetery *Oud Eik en Duinen*, also in The Hague, several people representing the many sides of van der Leeuw's rich and varied life offered their words of respect and admiration: W. Drees (the Prime Minister of The Netherlands), on behalf

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<sup>55</sup>See K. D. Jenner, "Fokke Sierksma: A Rough Sketch of His Life," in H. L. Beck and K. D. Jenner, "Fokke Sierksma: A Biographical Sketch and Bibliography" (Unpublished manuscript, Leiden, 1982), p. 15. During these last days, van der Leeuw also received a message from his former student A. A. van Ruler, a prominent Dutch theologian, saying that his teacher's lecture notes meant so much to him that he wished to take them with him to heaven. Van der Leeuw responded — in a fashion which demonstrates both his realism and sense of humour — that there were far better things to take to heaven. See G. Puchinger, *Hervormd-Gereformeerd, een of gescheiden?* (Delft: W. D. Meinema N. V., 1969), pp. 354-5.

of the government; J. Lindeboom, on behalf of the University of Groningen; W. A. Zeydner, who sketched van der Leeuw's significance for the church and liturgy; A. van der Horst, on behalf of artists and musicians; J. M. van Veen, on behalf of van der Leeuw's students; A. J. Sauer, on behalf of friends; G. Snoeck Henkemans and A. J. van der Leeuw, on behalf of the family.<sup>56</sup>

As the news of van der Leeuw's death spread, many tributes and words of appreciation were written about his humanity, generosity of spirit, warmth as a friend and colleague, sense of humour, brilliance, ability to communicate, ability as a teacher, ability as a writer, orderliness, concentration, scholarly contribution, artistry, and the like.<sup>57</sup> Aside from the perhaps perfunctory and eulogistic character of these accolades (which, it should be noted, does not take anything away from their truth), the comments made about van der Leeuw after his death by his friends and colleagues offer interesting insights of a rather personal — or at least of a less formal and less academic — nature.<sup>58</sup> Those who knew van der Leeuw well seem to agree about what

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<sup>56</sup>The liturgy for van der Leeuw's funeral was published in the periodical to which van der Leeuw had given so much of his energy in his last years: *Kerk en Eredienst*. See J. N. Bakhuizen van den Brink, "In Memoriam Gerardus van der Leeuw," *Kerk en Eredienst* 5 (1950), 323-31.

<sup>57</sup>See for example: C. J. Bleeker, "In memoriam Prof. dr G. van der Leeuw," *De Groene Amsterdammer*, November 25, 1950; Lindeboom, "In memoriam," 2-6; Rümke, "Ter herinnering," 96; *DGHG*, pp. 21-30, 68-80.

<sup>58</sup>Because no complete biography of van der Leeuw exists — the closest thing to a biography is Sierksma's biographical appreciation (*DGHG*) — these tributes are very valuable to any scholar wishing to understand van der Leeuw as a person living in a fascinating and often trying period of Western history.

was most outstanding about his life, namely, the fact that he was above all a Christian. As Sierksma said, the centre of his life was found not inside himself but outside himself, in God.<sup>59</sup> As a Christian, a "servant of God and a professor in Groningen," van der Leeuw understood himself to be a theologian first and foremost — even though his international reputation was made as a historian and phenomenologist of religion.<sup>60</sup> He also believed, as he himself often put it, that "theology has to do with everything."<sup>61</sup> Disheartened by the fragmentary and compartmentalized character of modern Western existence, van der Leeuw sought unity in life — the same unity he saw exemplarily expressed in the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation and in the world of the primitive.<sup>62</sup> Those who knew him well attest that he found this unity in his own life, which is what made him the many-sided but integrated "European," "universal spirit" and "Renaissance man" that he was.<sup>63</sup>

In thus going about his life in the way that he did — in search of unity, in search of the encyclopedic whole and the "big picture" — van der Leeuw was constantly seeking boundaries: between faith and history, between primitive

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<sup>59</sup>See *DGHG*, pp. 95–7, 104.

<sup>60</sup>Obviously, van der Leeuw did not take his non-theological work lightly, even once describing himself as a "passionate man of science." Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Is er nog optimisme mogelijk?" *Eltheto* 93/3 (1938), 37.

<sup>61</sup>Van der Leeuw, quoted in Sierksma, "Van der Leeuw na," pp. 3–4.

<sup>62</sup>See *WG*, pp. 34–8, 46, 93–4.

<sup>63</sup>See: Eliade, "Preface," pp. v–vii; Hirschmann, "In memoriam," 28, 37; Lindeboom, "In memoriam," 1–2; Rümke, "Ter herinnering," 93–6; *DGHG*, pp. 81–90; Sierksma, "De Europeaan," 74–8; van Veen "Prof. Dr. G. van der Leeuw," 138–9.



mentality and modern mentality, between authentic human being and inauthentic human being, between theology and science (especially the science of religion), between the sacred and the profane, between religion and art (or the holy and the beautiful), between the divine and the human, between Christianity and culture, between time and history, between revelation and religion, between creation and recreation (or eschaton). The list could go on. Thus it is that I have characterized van der Leeuw as a "boundary seeker," taking the title of his book on art and religion as a clue to his lifework (i.e., *Wegen en grenzen — Ways and Boundaries*). As he himself put it in his autobiographical fragment: "It is my profound conviction that there is no attitude more pernicious in science [and, it could safely be added, in life] than an autonomy which refuses to go beyond its own boundaries."<sup>64</sup>

Gerardus van der Leeuw, versatile genius and prolific writer, servant of God and professor in Groningen, was constantly seeking the boundaries as he sought the unity of life. In so doing, he "had his own style" and "went his own way."<sup>65</sup> He was, in other words, very much a unique thinker and figure. This fact raises the question of his reception and influence, as well as the question of van der Leeuw scholarship. What is the scholarly fate of

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<sup>64</sup>Van der Leeuw, "Confession," 12. Consider also this question (the context is the question of the relationship of religious music to church music), which is so typical for van der Leeuw: "Where do the 'ways and boundaries' lie here?" Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Eeredienst en kerkmuziek," *Eltheto* 90/2 (1935), 50. Sierksma, too, says that van der Leeuw was "always seeking ways and boundaries." *DGHG*, p. 62. Bleeker has also made this point. See Bleeker, "Gerardus van der Leeuw," p. 145.

<sup>65</sup>See *DGHG*, p. 23 and Bleeker, "In memoriam," *Groene*.

a boundary seeker?

## II. A Boundary Dweller

During his own lifetime, van der Leeuw acquired fame and influence as a historian and phenomenologist of religion, as I showed above.<sup>66</sup> However, he did not acquire the same fame or influence as a theologian, which, it bears repeating, was so central to his self-understanding. Why was this so?

Turning to the non-Dutch scene first, the explanation is not particularly difficult to fathom. Unlike his works in history and phenomenology of religion, many of which were written in or translated into German or French or English, van der Leeuw wrote the vast majority of his theological works in Dutch; only a few theological works were written in or translated into a major language of scholarship — most notably German.<sup>67</sup> While he was thus clearly aware that to gain a wide and international readership, publication in other languages was necessary (his writings in history and phenomenol-

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<sup>66</sup>Naturally, there were criticisms of his work both inside and outside The Netherlands. See for example: W. B. Kristensen, "De inaugurele rede van Professor van der Leeuw," *Theologisch Tijdschrift* 53 (1919), 260-5; E. Bickermann, "A propos de la phénoménologie religieuse," *Revue des Etudes Juives* 99 (1935), 92-108; F. Sierksma, *Freud, Jung en de religie* (Assen: Van Gorcum & Comp. N. V., 1951), pp. 26-35, 228-33 (this book is the commercial edition of Sierksma's already referred to dissertation). There was also an "archaeology" of van der Leeuw's phenomenology written by his student. See Eva Hirschmann, *Phänomenologie der Religion. Eine historische-systematische Untersuchung von "Religionsphänomenologie" und "religionsphänomenologischer Methode" in der Religionswissenschaft* (Würzburg-Aumühle: Druckerei Wissenschaftlicher Werke Konrad Triltsch, 1940).

<sup>67</sup>See the bibliographies in *PRPS*, pp. 555-638 and Waardenburg, *Classical*, II, pp. 149-56.

ogy of religion bear witness to this awareness), he did not seem to pursue such a strategy with respect to his theological writings. One is tempted to conclude that he intended his theology for the church and country to which he remained faithful his whole life (which may explain why he turned down attractive offers from universities in Germany and the United States).<sup>68</sup> The result of all of this was that in their entirety, van der Leeuw's theological works could be read only by Dutchmen, Belgians or the occasional scholar able to read Dutch. As for the few translations, it seems that they never enjoyed a wide readership or influence. Perhaps the fact that they followed van der Leeuw's already established reputation as a historian and phenomenologist of religion hurt their credibility among "pure" theologians — especially, one is tempted to think, in a theological climate where the theology of Karl Barth loomed large. And perhaps those to whom van der Leeuw's unique boundary-seeking theological style was not congenial were confused, unimpressed or unconvinced by his work.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, he developed his theology in an era when other Protestant theological giants were receiving much attention: one thinks of Barth, Brunner, Bultmann, Tillich and others. In any

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<sup>68</sup>It is interesting to note in this connection what van der Leeuw once remarked about the cool reception his fellow countrymen gave to his *Sacramentstheologie*, namely, that if the Dutch did not understand it then the Chinese would. See Sierksma, "G. van der Leeuw in tienjarig."

<sup>69</sup>Perhaps this accounts for the distortive and bizarre remark made by J. Haekel, namely, that van der Leeuw "denied transcendence; God is said to be only a later name for an experience of numinous power." "Leeuw, Gerardus van der," in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 2nd ed., ed. Josef Höfer and Karl Rahner (Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 1961), VI, col. 875.

case, the fact of the matter is this: van der Leeuw was not well-known as a theologian outside The Netherlands.<sup>70</sup>

Van der Leeuw's relative lack of theological following in The Netherlands during his own life is a more complex issue. He was, as I mentioned earlier, famous and influential as a historian and phenomenologist of religion — at home and abroad. And while there was an awareness of his theological work in his native land, this awareness was never transformed into wide acceptance or influence.<sup>71</sup> In his early years, he felt quite at home among the ethical theologians.<sup>72</sup> However, as van der Leeuw himself developed theologically and as the ethical theologians became less and less an identifiable group — in large measure due to the increasing influence of dialectical theology in The Netherlands beginning in the mid-1920s — van der Leeuw's alienation

<sup>70</sup>See: Kees W. Bolle, "The History of Religions and Christian Theology," *Anglican Theological Review* LIII/4 (1971), 255-7; John B. Carman, "The Theology of a Phenomenologist," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 29 (1965), 40-2. Van der Leeuw did, however, have a reputation as a liturgist outside The Netherlands. See Oliver S. Tomkins, "Prologue," *Studia Liturgica* 17 (1987), 7-9.

<sup>71</sup>See the following as examples of the generally guarded view the Dutch took of van der Leeuw: R. H. A. Huysmans, "Een nieuwe Protestantische inleiding tot de theologie," *Studia Catholica* 11 (1935), 460-74 (a review by a Catholic theologian of the first edition of *Inleiding tot de theologie*); O. Noordmans, "Wat is theologie," *Algemeen Weekblad voor Kerk en Christendom*, April 3, 1936 (a review by an important Protestant theologian of the first edition of *Inleiding tot de theologie*); G. van der Leeuw, O. Noordmans and W. H. van de Pol, *Liturgie in de crisis* (Nijkerk: G. F. Callenbach, [1940]) (a debate about liturgy); H. Faber, "Een theologische visie op de anthropologie," *Nieuw Theologisch Tijdschrift* 31 (1942), 230-45 (a review of *Der Mensch und die Religion*); *WG*, pp. xiv-xv (where van der Leeuw makes reference to the fact that the first edition of *Wegen en grenzen* was ignored by theologians); F. Sierksma, Review of Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Wegen en grenzen*, 2nd ed. in *Podium* 5 (1949), 113-20; W. F. Dankbaar, Review of Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Sacramentstheologie in Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 4 (1949-1950), 146-50; O. Noordmans, "Figuur en woord: Critiek op de sacramentstheologie van Prof. Dr G. van der Leeuw," in *Gestalte en Geest* (Amsterdam: Holland U. M., 1955), pp. 354-74 (a critique of *Sacramentstheologie*).

<sup>72</sup>I will say more about ethical theology in Chapter Three.

and loneliness in Dutch theology grew. Dialectical theologians, especially those of a particularly Barthian persuasion, were not favourably disposed toward theologians who spent their time studying religion (as opposed to Christian faith). Nor were such theologians sympathetic to anyone who saw certain continuities between Christianity and other religions, between Christian faith and religion.<sup>73</sup> Nor were Dutch Barthian theologians uncritical of what they took to be van der Leeuw's overly friendly view of culture, his non-antagonistic view of the relationship between theology and science, his lack of a Word-centered theology (his theology was more incarnation- and sacrament-centered) or his theological anthropology (!). Moreover, Dutch theologians — both Barthians and non-Barthians — many of whom had a tendency to be suspicious of those who did not seem to belong to any one camp, were suspicious of van der Leeuw's "ecumenicity": his training was not strictly theological; his theology was oriented to neither Rome nor Geneva but was a kind of Catholic Reformed theology (and in the end, van

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<sup>73</sup>One thinks here particularly of Barth's verdict: in the light of revelation, religion is seen to be unbelief. See Karl Barth, "The Revelation of God as the Abolition [*Aufhebung*] of Religion," *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. T. Thomson and H. Knight, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1980), I/2, pp. 280-361. On Barth's visit to The Netherlands in 1926, van der Leeuw (whom Barth's biographer Eberhard Busch interestingly refers to not as a theologian but as a historian of religion) engaged in public disputation with Barth. See Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His life from letters and autobiographical texts*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 170. Van der Leeuw regarded Barth as something of a theological opponent — although he also learned much from him. Perhaps the former felt somewhat overshadowed by the latter. Consider the following story: During a discussion at a conference of psychologists at which van der Leeuw was present, someone said they wished Barth were present to address a certain point. In response to this wish, van der Leeuw later said: "My first impulse was: I am happy precisely because for once he is somewhere else!" See van der Leeuw and Sierksma, "Nihilisme," 7.

der Leeuw's theology was too Protestant for the Catholics and too Catholic for the Protestants); he had many friends and contacts outside The Netherlands; he introduced many foreign ideas and thinkers to The Netherlands; and he had friends and contacts in several different churches and of various persuasions. Van der Leeuw was "accused" of being a member of virtually every group, which probably amused him. The suspicion with which he was viewed extended even to van der Leeuw's own church (the Dutch Reformed Church), where his high church and liturgical ideas were also distrusted. This hurt him, although he was not vocal about it.<sup>74</sup> Theologians thus observed him — and some even admired him — but the majority seemed to feel justified in going on with their more strictly theological work without taking him seriously. In other words, they ignored him for the most part.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>74</sup>Van der Leeuw did not see eye to eye with all his colleagues at the University of Groningen either. Although he felt quite at home with the church historian J. Lindeboom and the philosopher of religion W. J. Aalders, he often had conflicts with the Barthian systematician T. L. Haitjema. See: Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Het nieuwe kerkelijk denken," *Onder Eigen Vaandel* 7 (1932), 220-9; T. L. Haitjema, "'Nieuwe' orthodoxie," *Onder Eigen Vaandel* 7 (1932), 230-9; T. L. Haitjema, "Phaenomenologie der religie en Dogmatische Theologie," *Vox Theologica* 13/2 (1941), 22-8; Puchinger, *Hervormd*, pp. 14-5; Waardenburg, "Theologian and Phenomenologist," pp. 241-7. Although he was not a colleague at the University of Groningen, mention should also be made of the perpetual — albeit respectful — theological debates between van der Leeuw and the well-known systematician O. Noordmans. See: Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Noordmans' Dogmatiek," *Algemeen Weekblad* 11 (February 22, 1935); Noordmans, "Wat,"; van der Leeuw, Noordmans and van de Pol, *Liturgie*, pp. 5-43; Noordmans, "Figuur," 354-74; O. Noordmans, "In memoriam Prof. Dr G. van der Leeuw," *Kerk en Theologie* 2 (1951), 1-3; H. W. de Krijff, *Geest en gestalte. O. Noordmans' bijbeluitlegging in hermeneutisch verband* (Wageningen: H. Veenman & Zonen N. V., 1970), pp. 29-30, 172-83, 197-202.

<sup>75</sup>See: Bleeker, "In memoriam," *Groene*, p. 9; Bolle, "History," 251-69; Carman, "Theology," 13-4, 40-2; Faber, "Een theologische," 230-45; Hallencreutz, *Kraemer*, p. 96; H. G. Hubbeling, "Das Heilige und das Schöne. Gerardus van der Leeuws Anschauungen über das Verhältnis von Religion und Kunst," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 25 (1983), 1-2; L. Leertouwer, "De mens en zijn ontwerp bij G. van der Leeuw," *Vox Theologica* 30/2 (1959), 40-1; Noordmans, "Figuur," 369;

The theological neglect of van der Leeuw in his home country during his life cannot, however, be entirely attributed to the faults and oversights of his theological colleagues.<sup>76</sup> As Sierksma, who knew van der Leeuw very well personally, once wrote: "Theologically, he was a maverick and this lay deep in his being."<sup>77</sup> In a time of theological schools, factions and camps, van der Leeuw went his own way; being the individualist that he was, he did not accept prevailing theological positions and their attendant limitations. Nor was he one to form a school or to organize his followers in order to gain influence and support. In fact, his few students went *their* own ways (which, incidentally, left the master without devout defenders when he was attacked). Furthermore, van der Leeuw's work was pioneering and visionary in character and hence difficult for his colleagues to appreciate.<sup>78</sup> In other words, he was somewhat ahead of his time and thus somewhat misunderstood in his time.<sup>79</sup>

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Noordmans, "In memoriam," 2-3; Sierksma, *DGHG*, pp. 8, 32-3, 41, 58-9, 62-4, 90-1; Sierksma, "G. van der Leeuw in tienjarig"; Sierksma, "Voor en na," 21-6; Sierksma, "Van der Leeuw na," pp. 2-3; J. M. van Veen, "De theoloog," *De Nicuwe Stem* VI/2 (1951), 80; van Veen, "Prof. Dr. G. van der Leeuw," 129-39; Waardenburg, "Theologian and Phenomenologist," pp. 241-7; Jacques Waardenburg, "Leeuw, Gerardus van der (1890-1950)," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987), VIII, p. 494.

<sup>76</sup>However, Sierksma argues that many of van der Leeuw's works were ignored because of a lack of opponents of stature — that is, those learned enough to understand and criticize van der Leeuw's often breathtakingly erudite work. See *DGHG*, pp. 58-9, 90-1.

<sup>77</sup>*DGHG*, p. 41.

<sup>78</sup>This comment should not be misconstrued: van der Leeuw was an excellent writer and communicator. Hence, while his ideas were expressed clearly enough, they found little sympathy.

<sup>79</sup>See *DGHG*, pp. 32-3, 58-9; Waardenburg, "Theologian and Phenomenologist," pp. 241-7.

Turning now to the matter of van der Leeuw's reception and influence outside his native land after his death, it is necessary to speak only of van der Leeuw the phenomenologist of religion, since this is how the non-Dutch scholarly world almost exclusively knew him and knows him: as I noted above, van der Leeuw never gained a theological following outside The Netherlands. While his *Phänomenologie der Religion* has been translated into several languages and has been much read and discussed, scholars involved in the study of religion after van der Leeuw's time have on the whole been critical of his work, chiefly for two reasons. First of all, his approach to the study of religion was thought to be too subjective, too impressionistic and too little empirically oriented.<sup>80</sup> Less interested in the "big picture" than van der Leeuw, scholars after him demanded more attention to detail and specifics. Secondly, van der Leeuw's phenomenology was thought to be too Christian and too theological in its orientation. His desire and efforts to think and practice the study of religion together with Christian theology met with little sympathy after his death. Hence, van der Leeuw's international reputation as a scholar after his death might be summed up as follows: he was an interesting pioneer in the study of religion and a founding father in one branch of the study of religion (i.e., phenomenology of religion), but his views are no longer relevant or worth much study.<sup>81</sup> And thus, relative to

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<sup>80</sup>Van der Leeuw's defence of the controversial views of Lévy-Bruhl was also a factor in the way that he was regarded.

<sup>81</sup>See: Douglas Allen, *Structure and Creativity in Religion: Hermeneutics in Mircea Eli-*



his importance and contribution as a scholar, van der Leeuw has not been much studied outside The Netherlands. (To date, in the non-Dutch scholarly world there are two dissertations which deal exclusively with van der Leeuw — one of them published; a few other dissertations and books in which he is discussed along with some other thinker or problem; a few articles which focus exclusively on him; and a few articles which discuss some aspect of his work in connection with something else.<sup>82</sup>) Four factors have contributed

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ade's *Phenomenology and New Directions*, Religion and Reason 14 (The Hague: Mouton, 1978), pp. 64, 101, 107; Douglas Allen, "Phenomenology of Religion," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987), XI, 277-8; Mircea Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), pp. 29, 35; Lauri Honko, ed., *Science of Religion: Studies in Methodology. Proceedings of the Study Conference of the International Association for the History of Religions, held in Turku, Finland, August 27-31, 1973*, Religion and Reason 13 (The Hague: Mouton, 1979), pp. xxiii-xxiv, 108, 218, 495; A. Hultkrantz, "The Phenomenology of Religion: Aims and Methods," *Temenos* 6 (1970), 71-3; Raffaele Pettazzoni, "Aperçu introductif," *Numen* I (1954), 4; Sharpe, *Comparative*, p. 235; Jacques Waardenburg, "Religion Between Reality and Idea: A Century of Phenomenology of Religion in the Netherlands," *Numen* XIX (1972), 246.

<sup>82</sup>See: Jan Hermelink, *Verstehen und Bezeugen. Der theologische Ertrag der 'Phänomenologie der Religion' des G. van der Leeuw*, Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie 30 (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1960); E. F. Gorski, "Cult-Culture: The Theological Anthropology of Gerardus van der Leeuw" (Th. D. Dissertation, Institut Catholique de Paris, 1971); (a master's thesis said to be written at the University of Montreal by H. van Oorschot (see Waardenburg, *Classical*, II, p. 150) does not exist, as far as I was able to ascertain); Sharpe, *Comparative*, pp. 229-35; Stephen Beasley-Murray, "Development of the Concept of the Holy Since Rudolph Otto" (Ph. D. Dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1980); Frederick E. Detwiler, Jr., "The Sun Dance of the Oglala: A Case Study in Religion, Ritual, and Ethics" (Ph. D. Dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1983); George A. James, "Phenomenological Approaches to Religion: An Essay in Methodology in the Study of Religion with Particular Attention to the Phenomenology of Religion of P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye, William Brede Kristensen, and Gerardus van der Leeuw" (Ph. D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1983); Carman, "Theology"; Bolle, "History"; F. A. Isambert, "La phénoménologie religieuse," in *Introduction aux sciences humaines des religions*, ed. H. Desroche and J. Ségué (Paris: Editions Cujas, 1970), pp. 217-40; Hultkrantz, "Phenomenology," 68-88; Arvind Sharma, "Inquiry into the Nature of the Distinction Between the History of Religion and the Phenomenology of Religion," *Numen* XXII (1975), 81-95; F. R. Struckmeyer, "Phenomenology and Religion: Some Comments," *Religious Studies* 16 (1980), 253-62; George A. James, "Phenomenology and the study of religion: the archaeology of an approach," *Journal of Religion* 65 (1985), 311-35; S. W. Krollick, "Through a glass darkly: what is the phenomenology of

to van der Leeuw's neglect outside of his homeland: 1) the disrepute into which his views fell shortly after his death 2) linguistic obstacles — one must read Dutch, German and French well in order to study his work 3) the intimidating size of his corpus, and 4) the difficulties involved in classifying his work: a little study quickly shows that van der Leeuw was more than just a phenomenologist of religion. But just what *was* he then? How does one get a handle on this versatile thinker?<sup>83</sup>

One might expect the story of van der Leeuw's reception to turn out in such a way that, despite being somewhat ignored abroad after his death, he ends up being the late hero in his homeland. This, however, is far from the truth.<sup>84</sup> Van der Leeuw once wrote that a "vigorous generation honours its great predecessors best by speaking little about them and by building on their legacy."<sup>85</sup> Dutch scholarship, however, did not take his words to heart: van der Leeuw was honoured neither by much talk about him nor by building on his legacy.

Although he had been criticized in The Netherlands during his lifetime,

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religion?" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 17/3 (1985), 193-9.

<sup>83</sup>See Eliade, "Preface," pp. v-vii; Eliade, *Quest*, p. 34. As Eliade said, many assume the truth of the French proverb: "qui trop embrasse, mal étreint" ("one who embraces too much grasps poorly" — or more simply, "grab all lose all"). Sierksma's words are also instructive in this regard: a complete study of van der Leeuw, he once said, would require "a staff of experts." See *DGHG*, p. 10.

<sup>84</sup>Eliade is an example of someone who mistakenly assumed this. Writing in 1963, in connection with a comment about van der Leeuw's undeserved international lack of recognition, Eliade wrote: "he was, and still is, extremely popular in his native Holland." This is simply not true. See Eliade, "Preface," p. v.

<sup>85</sup>Gerardus van der Leeuw, "De vergadering der Ethischen," *Bergopwaarts*, April 24, 1920.

the criticism remained moderate until after his death. Perhaps this earlier less damaging criticism can be attributed to personal affection and the difficulty of hitting such a versatile and slippery target.<sup>86</sup> Whatever the reason, during the 1950s, the situation changed: the criticism of van der Leeuw became vocal and effective.

First came the publication of Sierksma's already mentioned dissertation, with its criticisms of van der Leeuw's phenomenology for ignoring depth psychology. Next came an extremely critical article from T. P. van Baaren, van der Leeuw's successor at the University of Groningen. Van Baaren criticized the ethnological basis of the *Phänomenologie der Religion*, charging that the book was no longer serviceable or satisfactory because of van der Leeuw's heavy and selective reliance on outdated secondary material. Aiming his criticism especially at van der Leeuw's interpretation of primitive religion, van Baaren was essentially criticizing his predecessor's method as subjective and insufficiently empirical. This was followed by criticisms of van der Leeuw's theology by Hendrik Kraemer. Kraemer argued that van der Leeuw's theology was too closely bound up with the study of religion. He further criticized van der Leeuw for positing too much continuity between psychology and theology, between religion and revelation and between Chris-

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<sup>86</sup>In reading the many tributes written about van der Leeuw just after his death, one thing that stands out is how much he was appreciated personally by both sympathizers and opponents. See for example: Noordmans, "In memoriam," 1-3.

tianity and other religions.<sup>87</sup>

These criticisms, added to the already guarded view which the Dutch took of van der Leeuw beginning during his own life, served to tarnish seriously what small reputation van der Leeuw had left in his homeland. His approach to the study of religion had been heavily questioned both at home and abroad, which resulted in his phenomenology's and his method's oblivion. His lack of recognition abroad as a theologian has already been mentioned. The destruction of his reputation as a phenomenologist of religion in The Netherlands was the *coup de grace* to his already wavering theological reputation at home. Plans to publish collections of van der Leeuw's articles after his death never came to fruition. By 1960, ten short years after his death, Sierksma was able to write: "A silence has fallen around the name of Van der Leeuw, even in The Netherlands."<sup>88</sup>

Since that time, similar words have been spoken in The Netherlands

<sup>87</sup>See: Sierksma, *Freud*; Sierksma, "Voor en na," 21-6; T. P. van Baaren, "De ethnologische basis van de faenomenologie van G. van der Leeuw," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 11 (1956-1957), 321-53 (interestingly, this critique of van der Leeuw's phenomenology was published in a theological journal); T. P. van Baaren, *Wij mensen. Religie en wereldsbeschouwing bij schriftloze volken* (Utrecht: J. Bijleveld, 1960); T. P. van Baaren, "Are the Bororo Parrots or Are We?" in *Liber Amicorum: Studies in Honour of Professor Dr. C. J. Bleeker*, Studies in the History of Religion (Supplements to *Numen*), XVII (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), 8-13; Hendrik Kraemer, *De plaats van godsdienstwetenschap en godsdienstfenomenologie in de Theologische Faculteit* (Nijkerk: G. F. Callenbach, [1959]).

<sup>88</sup>Sierksma, "Voor en na," 23. Interestingly, two museums in Holland — one an art museum in Amsterdam and one an anthropological museum in Groningen — were named after van der Leeuw. In this regard, instructive and ironic are the words of George Grant (*Time as History* (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1969), p. 50): "Remembering must obviously be a disciplined activity in a civilization where the institutions which should foster it do not."

on more than one occasion. Some of the speakers of these words have viewed the rapid demise of van der Leeuw's reputation and ideas in his native land as justified; others have lamented it as undeserved and have urged van der Leeuw's rediscovery.<sup>89</sup> Van Baaren and a group of scholars involved in the study of religion in Groningen have continued to be critical of van der Leeuw's phenomenology — although in 1975 the same group took special effort to honour his memory twenty-five years after his death.<sup>90</sup> The early 1970s saw the completion of a short thesis on van der Leeuw's theology. Around the same time, Jacques Waardenburg began his active research on and promotion of van der Leeuw in a series of publications. He, perhaps more than anyone else, deserves recognition for attempting to rescue van der Leeuw from oblivion.<sup>91</sup> During the 1980s, in The Netherlands something of a rebirth of interest in van der Leeuw began: several short studies have appeared; another more substantial study is in preparation; and van

<sup>89</sup>For comments in the latter category, see: van Veen, "Prof. G. van der Leeuw," 534-41; G. C. van Niftrik, "O. Noordmans honderd jaren geleden geboren," *Kerk en Theologie* 22 (1971), 271-4; J. J. ten Ham, "G. van der Leeuw: Ontwikkeling en grondstructuur van zijn theologie" (Doctoraalscriptie, University of Utrecht, 1973), pp. 1-2; Hubbeling, "Das Heilige," 1-2; Hubbeling, *Divine*, pp. 3-6; T. Peppink, "Vloeiende verbeelding. Geloof en kunst bij Prof. Dr. G. van der Leeuw" (Unpublished manuscript, Kampen, 1986), pp. 3, 96, 100, 155.

<sup>90</sup>See: T. P. van Baaren and H. J. W. Drijvers, ed., *Religion, Culture and Methodology: Papers of the Groningen Working-Group for the Study of Fundamental Problems and Methods of Science of Religion*, Religion and Reason 8 (The Hague: Mouton, 1973); G. van der Leeuw *herdacht* (Groningen: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 1975).

<sup>91</sup>See: ten Ham, "G. van der Leeuw"; Waardenburg, "Religion Between," 161-83; Jacques Waardenburg, *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion: Aims, Methods and Theories of Research*, Religion and Reason 3 and 4 (The Hague: Mouton, 1973, 1974), I, pp. 57-8, 398-431, II, pp. 149-56; Waardenburg, "Leeuw," *Biografisch*, pp. 114-20; Waardenburg, "Theologian and Phenomenologist," pp. 187-247; Waardenburg, "Leeuw," *Encyclopedia*, pp. 493-5.

der Leeuw's memory was once again honored in 1989 in commemoration of the one hundredth anniversary of his birth (in early 1990).<sup>92</sup>

Both during his life and after his death, and both inside The Netherlands and outside of it, then, van der Leeuw's thought has not been very popular. Nor has it been much researched. Of the studies I have referred to above,<sup>93</sup> a few ought to be singled out for the contribution they have made.<sup>94</sup>

First of all, Sierksma — a "great admirer of van der Leeuw," as he once described himself<sup>95</sup> — deserves special mention for his biographical appreciation of van der Leeuw, written just after his teacher's death. In this work and in commemorative reflections he wrote in the years that followed, Sierksma gives more insight than anyone else into van der Leeuw's person, lifework and reception. Especially in light of the fact that there is no com-

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<sup>92</sup>See: B. Thijs, "Van heilig beeld tot riskant spel (Over de filosofisch-theologische achtergrond van de esthetiek van Prof. Dr. G. van der Leeuw)" (Doctoraalscriptie, Free University of Amsterdam, 1981); A. Ossewaarde, "De andere wereld van Prof. Dr. G. van der Leeuw. Enkele kanttekeningen bij Van der Leeuw's 'theologie der kunsten,'" *Kerk en Theologie* 33/4 (1982), 265-77; Hubbeling, "Das Heilige," 1-19; H. G. Hubbeling, "Der Symbolbegriff bei Gerardus van der Leeuw," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 27 (1985), 100-10; van Dulken, "De cultuurpolitieke," pp. 81-162, 269-80; Peppink, "Vloeiende"; Hubbeling, *Divine*; the forthcoming dissertation by W. Hofstee of the University of Groningen on van der Leeuw's interpretation of primitive religion; the forthcoming proceedings of the 1989 conference in Groningen organized by H. G. Kippenberg entitled "The History of Religions and Critique of Culture in the Days of Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890-1950)" (see H. G. Kippenberg, "The History of Religions and Critique of Culture in the Days of Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890-1950)," *Numen* XXXVI (1989), 257-9).

<sup>93</sup>See both the text and notes above.

<sup>94</sup>While not every article about van der Leeuw can be considered in the following overview of secondary literature, honourable mention ought to be made of two contributions from the English-speaking world: Carman's "The Theology of a Phenomenologist" and Bolle's "The History of Religions and Christian Theology."

<sup>95</sup>Sierksma, "Van der Leeuw na," p. 9. Sierksma was also, as I noted earlier, critical of van der Leeuw. See: Sierksma, Review of *Wegen*; Sierksma, "Tussen"; Sierksma, *Freud*.

plete biography of van der Leeuw available, Sierksma's contributions remain a very important part of van der Leeuw scholarship.<sup>96</sup>

Secondly, Jan Hermelink's dissertation written at the University of Tübingen in the late 1950s merits brief consideration. Entitled *Verstehen und Bezeugen (Understanding and Witnessing)*, this work has the honour of being the first doctoral dissertation written exclusively on van der Leeuw. Approaching van der Leeuw's phenomenology of religion from the viewpoint of missions, Hermelink's study focuses almost exclusively on the *Phänomenologie der Religion* in an attempt to discover its theological (or, as one is tempted to think in reading Hermelink, its missiological) usefulness (*Ertrag*). His concentration on a theological critique of the *Phänomenologie* leads (unnecessarily, I might add) to his ignoring most of van der Leeuw's other works — many of them relevant to his topic. In fact, many of these works do not even appear in the bibliography (!).<sup>97</sup> While appreciative of van der Leeuw's *verstehende* method in the study of religion and his attempt to relate the study of religion to theology, Hermelink is critical of van der Leeuw's formulation of the relationship between understanding and witnessing (or the *epoche* characteristic of his phenomenology of religion). In the end, Hermelink turns van der Leeuw's formulation around: witnessing is not

<sup>96</sup>See: DGHG; Sierksma, "De Europeaan"; Sierksma, "Voor en na"; Sierksma, "G. van der Leeuw in tienjarig"; Sierksma, "Van der Leeuw na."

<sup>97</sup>One does not get the impression that Hermelink was very well informed about van der Leeuw. Among other things, he wrongly says that van der Leeuw died in 1952.

grounded in understanding but understanding in witnessing.

Thirdly, some attention must be paid to E. F. Gorski's dissertation written at the Institut Catholique de Paris in the early 1970s. "Cult-Culture" has the distinction of being the largest and in many ways most impressive work written on van der Leeuw to date. Gorski correctly argues that van der Leeuw must be seen first and foremost as a distinctive and original Christian theologian and not as a phenomenologist of religion.<sup>98</sup> Noting van der Leeuw's lack of recognition as a theologian, Gorski seeks to uncover his original theological contribution. For Gorski, this means engaging in an interpretive exposition of van der Leeuw's theological anthropology.<sup>99</sup> He argues that on the basis of the Christian doctrine of the incarnation and modern existential anthropology, van der Leeuw sought a mediating response to the problems which modernity poses for Christianity.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, according to Gorski, van der Leeuw's efforts to help moderns attain genuine Christian existence (the unity of religious cult and human culture) by developing an

<sup>98</sup>In this connection, the incorrect interpretation hidden in the title of Carman's article on van der Leeuw ("The Theology of a Phenomenologist") should be noted.

<sup>99</sup>In Gorski's words: van der Leeuw "was essentially a theological anthropologist." "Cult-Culture," p. 19. Attempts to reduce van der Leeuw to an "essential" something are best avoided in my judgment. While there can be no doubt that he was very interested in theological anthropology, one could also make the case that he was just as interested in a number of other things. As Eric Sharpe has written: "it is well-nigh impossible to sum up ... [van der Leeuw's] work in a few sentences, and a variety of distortions have been perpetuated by those who have tried to do so." *Comparative*, p. 230.

<sup>100</sup>Gorski's presentation of van der Leeuw's method leaves doubt as to whether or not he has fully understood van der Leeuw's most important book on method, namely, *Inleiding tot de theologie*. More specifically, I am not convinced Gorski understands van der Leeuw's tripartite division of theology (i.e., historical theology, phenomenological theology and dogmatic theology) or how phenomenology functions in his theology. See Gorski, "Cult-Culture," pp. 78-104.



integral Christian anthropology (one that fulfills the needs of both dogmatic and fundamental theology) are relevant, original and praiseworthy but not entirely satisfactory. In short, Gorski finds van der Leeuw's theological anthropology to be — it must be stated frankly — not sufficiently Catholic.<sup>101</sup>

He nonetheless concludes:

If Gerardus van der Leeuw did not completely achieve the goal he so earnestly desired to attain, he did contribute richly to the lives of believers and non-believers, to the professional lives of theologians. This is an enormous contribution to the modern world. It is a proof of his perduring value and pertinency — the proof, indeed, of his greatness.<sup>102</sup>

Fourthly, consideration must be given to the first thesis written on van der Leeuw in his home country: J. J. ten Ham's *doctoraalscriptie*<sup>103</sup> written at the University of Utrecht in the early 1970s. "G. van der Leeuw. Ontwikkeling en grondstructuur van zijn theologie" ("G. van der Leeuw: The Development and Fundamental Structure of His Theology") is a chronological exposition of nine of van der Leeuw's important theological treatises.<sup>104</sup> In dealing with each of these works in turn, ten Ham argues that there are

<sup>101</sup>At times Gorski seems to have a too ideal-typical view of van der Leeuw's Protestantism, it seems to me. For his specifically Catholic criticisms of van der Leeuw, see "Cult-Culture," pp. 104-59, 364-5, 367-9, 371-2, 375-6, 381-2, 391-2, 395-8, 432-46, 451-61.

<sup>102</sup>Gorski, "Cult-Culture," pp. 477-8.

<sup>103</sup>A *doctoraalscriptie* (doctoral essay) should not be confused with a *proefschrift* (doctoral dissertation). The former can perhaps best be thought of as a master's thesis.

<sup>104</sup>See ten Ham, "G. van der Leeuw," *passim*. The nine works discussed by ten Ham are: *Plaats en taak van de godsdienstgeschiedenis in de theologische wetenschap* (1918); *Historisch Christendom* (1919); *Ethisch: modern of orthodox?* (1924); "Strukturpsychologie und Theologie" (1928); *Inleiding tot de theologie* (1948); *Der Mensch und die Religion* (1941); *Liturgiek* (1940); *Sacramentstheologie* (1949); *Wegen en grenzen* (1955).

three discernible phases in van der Leeuw's theological development: 1) van der Leeuw as an ethical theologian 2) van der Leeuw as a phenomenologist 3) van der Leeuw as a liturgist and anthropologist. Although somewhat summary in character, ten Ham's work is a helpful first guide to van der Leeuw's boundary-seeking theology.

Fifthly, mention should be made of Jacques Waardenburg's 1978 essay on van der Leeuw entitled "Gerardus van der Leeuw as a Theologian and Phenomenologist." Written in English, this work is the best available overview of van der Leeuw's many-sided career, dealing with matters as diverse as biography, publications and archives, theological development, aesthetics, history of religions, phenomenology of religion, other written work, and historical context and influence. Alongside this work, Waardenburg has written shorter overviews of van der Leeuw's work as well as an "overview" of his bibliography.<sup>105</sup>

Sixthly, three works written in The Netherlands during the 1980s merit mention: B. Thijs' *doctoraalscriptie* written at the Free University of Amsterdam in 1981 entitled "Van heilig beeld tot riskant spel (Over de filosofisch-theologische achtergrond van de esthetiek van Prof. Dr. G. van der Leeuw)" ("From Holy Image to Risky Play (On the Philosophico-Theological Background of G. van der Leeuw's Aesthetics)"); H. G. Hubbeling's *Divine Pres-*

<sup>105</sup>See Waardenburg, "Theologian and Phenomenologist." See also: Waardenburg, "Leeuw," *Biografisch*; Waardenburg, "Leeuw," *Encyclopedia*; Waardenburg, *Classical*, II.

ence in *Ordinary Life: Gerardus van der Leeuw's Two-fold Method in his Thinking on Art and Religion*; and T. Peppink's "Vloeiende verbeelding. Geloof en kunst bij Prof. Dr. G. van der Leeuw" ("Flowing Imagination: G. van der Leeuw on Faith and Art"). As their titles indicate, all three works are devoted to van der Leeuw's theological aesthetics — another area in which he made a substantial contribution. These works are significant for three reasons. First of all, they are important in their own right as serious studies and contributions to van der Leeuw scholarship. Secondly, they establish van der Leeuw's aesthetics as the most frequently discussed topic in his thought.<sup>106</sup> Thirdly and more significant for our purposes, these studies are a sign that van der Leeuw is receiving some long overdue recognition in his homeland.<sup>107</sup>

All things considered, then, there has not been an abundance of studies of the thought of Gerardus van der Leeuw, a boundary seeker who ended up becoming a boundary dweller (although not by necessity), an encyclopedic thinker who has long been somewhat lost in the exchange — or lack thereof — between the disciplines to which he gave his life: the study of religion and Christian theology. More now needs to be said about *this* boundary

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<sup>106</sup> Mention should also be made of Ossewaarde's "De andere wereld van Prof. Dr. G. van der Leeuw. Enkele kanttekeningen bij Van der Leeuw's 'theologie der kunsten'."

<sup>107</sup> Van Dulken's "De cultuurpolitieke opvattingen van Prof. Dr. G. van der Leeuw (1890-1950)," Hubbeling's "Der Symbolbegriff bei Gerardus van der Leeuw" and Hofstee's dissertation in progress on van der Leeuw's interpretation of primitive religion are further evidence of this new recognition.

relationship.

### III. An Uncharted Boundary Relationship

What has been said above about van der Leeuw's life and thought, the reception of his work and the present state of van der Leeuw scholarship points to the desirability of further work on this significant and relevant Dutch thinker. And given the desirability — one might even say necessity<sup>108</sup> — of such further work, what has been said above also indicates that the field is open to a large array of possibilities.<sup>109</sup> But desirability and possibility do not necessarily imply utility. What kind of study of van der Leeuw at the present time would accomplish the most both in terms of: a) a significant contribution to understanding this much misunderstood thinker, and b) a meaningful contribution to some current and important questions being asked by contemporary scholarship?

It seems logical to begin to answer this question by looking at that which stands out about van der Leeuw's lifework and the reception of his thought. In light of the fact that van der Leeuw became internationally famous as a historian and phenomenologist of religion, the fact that he understood

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<sup>108</sup> Waardenburg has used the language of necessity with respect to further work on van der Leeuw; Bolle has urged van der Leeuw's rediscovery. See: Waardenburg, "Theologian and Phenomenologist," pp. 192, 247; Bolle, "History," 257.

<sup>109</sup> Perhaps the only area which is not in need of more studies at present — in light of the recent contributions by Thijs, Ossewaarde, Hubbeling and Peppink mentioned above — is the area involving van der Leeuw's aesthetics.

himself above all as a Christian theologian and the fact that he "was a man of connection in many of life's terrains,"<sup>110</sup> the obvious question is this: how did he conceive of these two undertakings and how did he envision their relationship? This is the question that this study will seek to answer. In so doing, it will attempt to get to the heart of what Gerardus van der Leeuw was all about and so seek to make a significant contribution to understanding him. As Sierksma has written, "the problem which was of central significance for him ... [was that of a] connection between theology and science which did justice to both."<sup>111</sup> Van der Leeuw was wrestling with the question of the relationship of the study of religion to Christian theology as early as his years as a doctoral student. His inaugural address at the University of Groningen, which was, as I noted earlier, something of a blueprint for his scholarly career to follow, was specifically devoted to this matter. Articles written during the 1920s further indicate van der Leeuw's continual attention to the relationship between the study of religion and theology. His shorter phenomenology of religion as well as his longer treatise on the same topic also address this issue, as does his most important work on the subject: the 1935 *Inleiding tot de theologie*, which appeared in a substantially expanded second edition in 1948. Finally, at the Amsterdam congress of 1950, van der Leeuw's

<sup>110</sup>Sierksma, "De Europeaan," 77.

<sup>111</sup>Sierksma, "Voor en na," 22. The term "science" (*wetenschap* — to be understood more in the sense of the German term *Wissenschaft* than the English term science) in this quote can responsibly be replaced by "science of religion," which is the science in which van der Leeuw was most involved outside of theology.

address deals with (among other things) the relationship of the study of religion to theology. In sum, from the beginning to the end of his career, van der Leeuw was deeply concerned about the relationship between the two disciplines in which he was principally involved professionally, namely, the study of religion and Christian theology.<sup>112</sup>

The present study also hopes to be in a position to make a contribution to three questions which are current and important in contemporary scholarship: a) the question of the self-definition and identity of the study of religion<sup>113</sup> b) the question of the self-definition and agenda of Christian theology in the West, especially in light of the fact of religious pluralism, and c) the question of the relationship of the study of religion to theology,<sup>114</sup> which is important for the self-understanding of both the former and the latter.

In thus examining van der Leeuw with the above key question in mind (How did he conceive of the study of religion, the nature of theology and the relationship between the two?), it is important to bear one thing in mind

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<sup>112</sup>Again, the reminder not to reduce van der Leeuw to any "essential" something bears reiteration here. Although I am tempted to say that van der Leeuw was "essentially" interested in the question of the relationship of the study of religion to Christian theology, this would be inaccurate for it would not sufficiently recognize his simultaneous interest in several other matters. Thus, it can perhaps best be said that the question under investigation in this study is one of the most important questions to consider in seeking to understand van der Leeuw — no more, no less.

<sup>113</sup>By "study of religion" I mean to designate the field of inquiry that is known by this and various other names such as "Religious Studies," *Religionswissenschaft*, "Comparative Religion" and so on. For overviews of the classical and current states of the study of religion, see: Waardenburg, *Classical*, I and II; Sharpe, *Comparative*; Frank Whaling, ed., *Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religion*, 2 vols., Religion and Reason 27 and 28 (Berlin: Mouton Publishers, 1984, 1985).

<sup>114</sup>When I use the term "theology" I mean to designate "Christian theology" unless I indicate otherwise.

— something so obvious that it seems almost platitudinous even to mention it. But it must be mentioned because it has not always been understood by those who have rendered judgments about van der Leeuw's work. What needs to be borne in mind is this: van der Leeuw was a historian and phenomenologist of religion *and* a Christian theologian. He hence addressed two different groups of scholars engaged in two different undertakings. His different strategies for the publication of his work in the study of religion and for the publication of his theological work, which I noted above, bear witness to his own awareness of the distinctiveness of these two audiences. Hence, one needs constantly to ask: what audience does van der Leeuw have in mind in the work in question? Parenthetically, another question must be posed — although the answer to it will not always be immediately clear: how does a boundary seeker, a person in search of the unity of life harmonize such apparently disparate ventures?

Bearing the above directing set of questions in mind, Chapter Two of the present study is dedicated to explicating how van der Leeuw conceived of the study of religion. In the process, it sketches the relevant views of five of van der Leeuw's important guides in his exploration of the vast world of religious phenomena: Pierre Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye, William Brede Kristensen, Nathan Söderblom, Rudolf Otto and Lucien Lévy- Bruhl. Next, it sets forth van der Leeuw's conception of religion. Finally, Chapter

Two outlines van der Leeuw's view of the history of the study of religion, his thoughts on primitive mentality, his four-fold conception of the study of religion and the development of the method for which he has attained lasting fame in the study of religion, namely, the phenomenological method. *En route*, the question of the relationship of the study of religion to theology will receive an answer *from the point of view of the study of religion*.

Chapter Three is an exposition of van der Leeuw's conception of theology. It begins by delimiting his theological milieu, especially his involvement with Dutch ethical theology. Next, it gathers together his comments on the nature of theology in works other than *Inleiding tot de theologie*. Finally and most importantly for the purposes of this study, Chapter Three engages in a lengthy presentation of the argument of *Inleiding tot de theologie*, van der Leeuw's most important statement about the nature of theology. In the examination of this work, it will become clear that the question of theology's relationship to the study of religion is answered *from the point of view of theology*.

Chapter Four seeks to apply the results of the exegeses of Chapters Two and Three.<sup>115</sup> It begins with a brief statement about the fact of religious pluralism in the twentieth century and the need for Christian theology to address it, which need requires overcoming the gulf between theology and

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<sup>115</sup>I understand and use the term "application" in Chapter Four in a Gadamerian sense: understanding, interpretation and application must ultimately be seen as one.



the study of religion. Chapter Four next examines the possibilities for a fruitful relationship between theology and the study of religion by briefly examining the work of three important twentieth century Protestant theologians (Karl Barth, Paul Tillich and Wolfhart Pannenberg) and the work of two important twentieth century historians of religion (Joachim Wach and Wilfred Cantwell Smith). The examination of the work of these scholars is intended to provide a context for critically examining the position of van der Leeuw. The final chapter of this study next briefly summarizes the central theses of the dissertation and then offers a critique of van der Leeuw's conceptions of the study of religion, of theology and of the relationship between the two. Arguing that van der Leeuw was ahead of his time, I conclude that this implies that he has something to say to our time. And what he has to say to our time he says as a theologian. This implies that he must be understood as a theologian,<sup>116</sup> which, I argue, means that careful attention must be paid to his most important book on the nature of theology (i.e., *Inleiding tot de theologie*) — something that has not been done properly by van der Leeuw scholarship to date.<sup>117</sup> In this key text, van der Leeuw the theologian

<sup>116</sup>The necessity of interpreting van der Leeuw as a theologian has been pointed out by more than one scholar. See: Leertouwer, "De mens," 40-1; Waardenburg, "Religion Between," 183; Sharpe, *Comparative*, p. 234.

<sup>117</sup>*Inleiding tot de theologie* is not only central to this study; it is central to van der Leeuw's thought as a whole. Written at the height of his career and expanded near the end of his life, this book summarizes the encyclopedic views of the boundary seeker in search of the unity of life in a fragmented age. Among other things, then, *Inleiding tot de theologie* sheds valuable light on van der Leeuw's work in the study of religion. I would even go so far as to say that the *Inleiding* is the proper completion of the *Phänomenologie der Religion*. As such, the former renders the latter intelligible.

addresses theologians and offers a conception of theology in which the study of religion plays a key part. This alone qualifies him as a twentieth century Protestant theologian of distinction. For very few — if any — twentieth century Protestant theologians have tried to make the study of religion an *integral* part of theology.<sup>118</sup> Likewise, very few twentieth century Protestant theologians have been professional historians of religion qualified to make theological judgments.<sup>119</sup> In a time in which Christian theologians are being urged to take the fact of religious pluralism seriously, they will need to find a way to study other religious traditions in a theological context. In facing this new — yet very old — challenge,<sup>120</sup> they will look to past theologians who have taken the history of religions seriously (i.e., theologians who have studied the history of religions and who have sought to include such study in the definition of theology). Gerardus van der Leeuw qualifies as one of the very few theologians in whom present-day theologians may find some direction in this matter. But before this direction for today's theologians can become clear, much groundwork needs to be laid. I shall, therefore,

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<sup>118</sup>As the earlier presentation of Chapter Four endeavours to make clear, Karl Barth did not envision a place for the study of religion within theology; Paul Tillich saw the need for a conception of theology which takes the history of religion seriously at the end of his life; Wolfhart Pannenberg has in a qualified sense made an attempt to make the study of religion an important part of theology.

<sup>119</sup>As the earlier presentation of Chapter Four also endeavours to make clear, neither Joachim Wach nor Wilfred Cantwell Smith were theologically qualified to follow through on the theological conclusions reached during the course of their careers as historians of religion.

<sup>120</sup>The problem of religious pluralism is as old as Christianity. Dormant for several centuries — during which time Christianity has been a dominant force in the West — the problem has come to the fore once again in the twentieth century.

begin the discussion by examining the conception of the study of religion of a significant but yet hitherto little heeded theologian.

## Chapter 2

# Exploration: The Study of Religion

### I. Guides

Van der Leeuw took his bearings for his exploration of the world of religious phenomena from a number of scholars. Some of these bearings are easier to determine than others — owing chiefly to van der Leeuw's "vast gift of assimilation."<sup>1</sup> While his five chief guides in the study of religion were P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye, W. B. Kristensen, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Nathan Söderblom and Rudolf Otto, one can also detect the influences of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, Baden neo-Kantianism, Karl Jaspers, Eduard Spranger and Ludwig Binswanger on his thought. (The name of Edmund Husserl is purposely and perhaps in the view of many scholars, who believe that van der Leeuw drew heavily on Husserl, suprisingly absent from this list.) However, it is hard to say what the detection of these latter in-

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<sup>1</sup>See Sharpe, *Comparative*, p. 230.

fluences asserts or proves.<sup>2</sup> "Influence" is indeed a rather imprecise notion.<sup>3</sup> Hence, in order to solve this thorny problem, I will briefly discuss the relevant views of the five thinkers whom van der Leeuw himself acknowledged as important for the development of his work in the study of religion: Chantepie de la Saussaye, Kristensen, Lévy-Bruhl, Söderblom and Otto.<sup>4</sup>

### a. P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye

One of the rites of passage which made the birth of the new science of religion (*Religionswissenschaft*) official in the last third of the nineteenth century was its academic recognition in the form of university chairs. Some of the earliest chairs in the then fledgling science were instituted in The Netherlands — thanks in large measure to the pioneering efforts of C. P.

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<sup>2</sup>Moreover, I should add that this study does not intend to be an "archaeology" of van der Leeuw's thought. Should one desire to understand all the influences operating on van der Leeuw, one would do well to read his 400 book reviews in order to get some sense of his intellectual milieu and his view of it.

<sup>3</sup>Thus, while van der Leeuw had read Schleiermacher and had also undergone his "influence" at the feet of Chantepie de la Saussaye and Kristensen as well as by reading Söderblom and Otto, he is quite critical of Schleiermacher on certain key issues (such as his view of religion, which I will discuss below). Further on the matter of influence, in a general way one could say that van der Leeuw was impressed by Dilthey's general approach to culture and his attempt to understand life from its expressions (one thinks of the key triad of experience, expression, understanding). Baden neo-Kantianism (especially the thought of Wilhelm Windelband and Heinrich Rickert), Karl Jaspers, Eduard Spranger and Ludwig Binswanger further all played a role in the formation of van der Leeuw's method in the study of religion. Parenthetically, it should be noted that the contribution that Edmund Husserl made to van der Leeuw's method has been much overrated. Instead of discussing all of these thinkers here, I shall mention them in the following discussion when appropriate. I should also note that in speaking of influences on van der Leeuw, a discussion of his theological milieu (especially ethical theology) will follow in Chapter Three. Discussions of the poets he loved (Goethe, Novalis), the musicians he loved (especially Bach) and the thinkers he had certainly read and wrestled with (Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Barth, Camus, Sartre, Jung) are beyond the scope of this study.

<sup>4</sup>See van der Leeuw, "Confession," 9-15.

Tiele and to certain forces of secularization.<sup>5</sup> The Dutch Universities Act of 1877 replaced the traditional theological discipline of *theologia naturalis* with history of religions and so created four new chairs for the new discipline in the theological faculties of the country's four state universities (Leiden, Amsterdam, Utrecht and Groningen). Tiele took the new chair at Leiden; the new chair at Amsterdam went to the young P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye (1848–1920).<sup>6</sup>

It is not difficult to imagine the suspicion and perhaps hostility with which Dutch theologians greeted the new and alien presence in their midst. Nor is it difficult to understand the motive for Chantepie's apology for the study of religion that he made in his 1878 inaugural address at the University of Amsterdam entitled "Het belang van de studie der godsdiensten voor de kennis van het Christendom" ("The Importance of the Study of Religion for the Knowledge of Christianity").<sup>7</sup> In appealing to what might be called "theological despisers of the study of religion," Chantepie's strategy was

<sup>5</sup>See Sharpe, *Comparative*, pp. 119–21.

<sup>6</sup>On Chantepie de la Saussaye, see: H. W. Obbink, "Pierre Daniël Chantepie de la Saussaye (1848–1920)" in *Ernst en vrede. Opstellen rondom de ethische theologie* (The Hague: Boekencentrum N. V., 1951), pp. 100–20; Richard J. Plantinga, "In the Beginning: P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye on Religionswissenschaft and Theology," *Religious Studies and Theology* 8 (1988), 24–30; Waardenburg, *Classical*, I, pp. 15–7, 105; Waardenburg, *Classical*, II, pp. 37–8; Jacques Waardenburg, "Chantepie de la Saussaye, P. D.," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987), III, pp. 202–3.

<sup>7</sup>See P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye, *Het belang van de studie der godsdiensten voor de kennis van het Christendom* (Groningen: P. Noordhoff, 1878). Because of the peculiarity of the Dutch situation, in which chairs of the history of religion were instituted in theological faculties, many new occupants of such chairs felt the need to address the question of the relationship of the study of religion to theology in their inaugural addresses. As I noted above, van der Leeuw did precisely this.

quite simple: he sought to convince his new colleagues that theology *needs* the study of religion. In order to meet the societal needs of the day, he said, theology needs to pay attention to the results of other sciences — especially the science concerned with religion. The first branch of this science — history of religion — considers the work of ethnologists and philologists, selects what is relevant to religion and then processes this selection historically. In so doing, history of religion forms a bridge to theology via philosophy of religion. The contribution of the history of religion to theology is thus one of helping Christianity to understand itself and its place among the religions of the world.<sup>8</sup>

As Chantepie took up his work as a professor of the history of religion in the theological faculty of the University of Amsterdam, he needed to give courses of a summary nature for theological students. This particular kind of teaching led him to publish one of the first textbooks in the field of the history of religion. Published in two volumes during the late 1880s, *Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte* (*Manual of the History of Religion*) was aimed at a theological audience.<sup>9</sup> As Chantepie wrote in the book's "Preface": "If it [the book] makes a contribution by convincing theologians of the importance

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<sup>8</sup>Further on the importance of the study of religion for theology according to Chantepie, see his "Die vergleichende Religionsforschung und der religiöse Glaube" in *Portretten en kritieken* (Haarlem: De Erven F. Bohn, 1909), pp. 337-67.

<sup>9</sup>See P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye, *Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte*, 2 vols. (Freiburg i. B.: Akademische Verlagsbuchhandlung von J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1887, 1889).

of the results of the science of religion, then the effort of the author will be richly rewarded."<sup>10</sup>

The "General Part" of the *Lehrbuch* contains Chantepie's conception of the study of religion. As a new discipline, Chantepie said, the study of religion must be viewed as a process, as a youth undergoing development. As such, it must fight for recognition of its rights (presumably, this means that the study of religion must define itself over against theology — Chantepie does not specify). The task of the study of religion is to examine both the manifestations and essence of religion. This new science is hence divided into two main parts: history of religion and philosophy of religion. The former is further subdivided into ethnography and history. The summarizing and grouping of various religious manifestations constitutes the bridge from history of religion to philosophy of religion. Philosophy of religion in turn discusses the objective and subjective sides of religion and hence has a metaphysical as well as a psychological part.<sup>11</sup>

The "General Part" of Chantepie's *Lehrbuch* was followed by something highly original: a "Phenomenological Part." This part of one of the earliest textbooks in the history of religion has rightly been regarded as the first attempt at phenomenology of religion. (Interestingly, the "Phenomenologi-

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<sup>10</sup>Chantepie, *Lehrbuch*, I, p. vi. It should be noted that although he pleaded for a relationship between the study of religion and theology, Chantepie did not wish to collapse either one into the other. See Chantepie, *Lehrbuch*, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup>See Chantepie, *Lehrbuch*, I, pp. 2-7.



cal Part" of the *Lehrbuch* was left out of subsequent editions of the work.) In this part of the book, Chantepie argued that phenomenology of religion (which, as I intimated above, forms a bridge from history of religion to philosophy of religion) is closely connected to psychology, since both have to do with facts of human consciousness. In so arguing, he was expressing his conviction that external manifestations of religion can only be understood from internal occurrences. Underlining the direction from inner (the source) to outer (the goal), he wrote: "We are thus not attempting to give an analysis of the religious consciousness but merely to discuss the meaning of the most important groups of religious manifestations."<sup>12</sup> Such discussion is best accomplished by studying religious belief and cult from various angles. From this point of departure (and with a view of religion as "the belief in superhuman powers and their worship"<sup>13</sup>), Chantepie went on to discuss the religions of the world, past and present.

In 1899, Chantepie left his chair of history of religion at the University of Amsterdam for a chair of theology and ethics at the University of Leiden.<sup>14</sup> It was at Leiden of course that the young van der Leeuw came to know Chantepie, both inside and outside the classroom. Van der Leeuw later said

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<sup>12</sup>Chantepie, *Lehrbuch*, p. 48.

<sup>13</sup>Chantepie, *Lehrbuch*, p. 51. Further on the same page one reads: "Actually, religion has only one single object: the living God, who testifies of himself to all peoples as the one true God."

<sup>14</sup>Chantepie's inaugural lecture at Leiden entitled "De taak der theologie" ("The Task of Theology"), along with his theological influence on van der Leeuw, will be briefly considered in Chapter Three.

that Chantepie had exercised a formative influence on his development and that the time he spent in Chantepie's lectures constituted some of the best memories of his academic career. Near the end of his life, he even went so far as to say that he was unable to speak his teacher's name without emotional feelings and a sense of profound gratitude.<sup>15</sup>

In many ways, it seems to me, the pioneering work of Chantepie was continued by van der Leeuw. First of all, the phenomenology of religion that Chantepie was unable to write<sup>16</sup> was written by his student van der Leeuw and appeared in 1933 under the title *Phänomenologie der Religion*. It is clear from the latter's writings that he consciously saw himself working in the tradition of his teacher.<sup>17</sup> Secondly, like Chantepie, van der Leeuw attempted to make the study of religion attractive to theologians: this can be seen both in his 1918 inaugural address at Groningen as well as in his *Inleiding tot de theologie*. Like his teacher, then, van der Leeuw was busily engaged in more than one field at once. Hence, what he said about Chantepie after his death could, *mutatis mutandis*, also have been said of van der Leeuw after his own death: "It will seldom come to pass that someone will possess such masterly command of two so divergent and exacting areas of study as

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<sup>15</sup>See: Van der Leeuw, *Godsvoorstellingen*, p. vii; *PT*, pp. 23-4; van der Leeuw, "Confession," 9-10.

<sup>16</sup>What I have in mind here is the fact that Chantepie never expanded the "Phenomenological Part" of the *Lehrbuch* into a complete phenomenology of religion.

<sup>17</sup>See: *IG*, p. 1; van der Leeuw, "Confession," p. 10; Waardenburg, "Chantepie," p. 203.

la Saussaye's mastery of history of religion ...and ethics and the problems of Christian culture."<sup>18</sup>

### b. W. B. Kristensen

Van der Leeuw had the good fortune to study with some of the leading European scholars of his time. Besides the renowned Chantepie de la Saussaye, the young van der Leeuw also made the acquaintance at Leiden of the expatriate Norwegian scholar W. B. Kristensen (1867–1953). Kristensen, a brilliant student and professor of religion — although almost unknown outside of The Netherlands and Scandinavia — replaced C. P. Tiele after the latter's retirement in 1901 and inspired virtually a generation of Dutch historians of religion.<sup>19</sup>

Kristensen was deeply indebted to Schleiermacher for his general orientation to the study of religion.<sup>20</sup> Among other things, he adopted the latter's view of religion as an *Anschauung des Universums*, as the human capacity for creatively and intuitively conceiving an infinite spiritual reality (the universe or God) in a personal way. With this conception, Kristensen thought

<sup>18</sup>Gerardus van der Leeuw, "P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye," *De Nieuwe Courant*, April 20, 1920.

<sup>19</sup>On Kristensen, see: J. B. Carman, "Kristensen, W. Brede" in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987), VIII, pp. 382–3; Hendrik Kraemer, "Introduction" in W. B. Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion: Lectures in the Phenomenology of Religion*, trans. J. B. Carman (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), pp. xi–xxv; Richard J. Plantinga, "W. B. Kristensen and the Study of Religion," *Numen* XXXVI (1989), 173–88; Waardenburg, *Classical*, I, pp. 55–6, 390; Waardenburg, *Classical*, II, pp. 137–9; Waardenburg, "Religion Between," 145–61.

<sup>20</sup>Kristensen's focus in the history of religion was ancient Mediterranean religion, especially ancient Egyptian religion.

that Schleiermacher had laid the foundation for the study of the history of religion — the first part in Kristensen's three-fold conception of the study of religion and his own true love. That is, different peoples in different times and places inevitably produce different *Anschaungen des Universums*; it is for this reason that there are many religions.<sup>21</sup>

In studying the history of religion, Kristensen held, one ought not engage in "evaluative comparison," which presupposes an *a priori* ideal or standard by which to measure, compare and evaluate the data studied. In such an approach, according to Kristensen, one does not listen to what the data say but rather one tells the data what one wants to hear and in this way one arrives at pre-determined results. Instead of judging by what the believers of the religion in question took to be the interpretive key to their religious expressions, the historian who engages in evaluative comparison uses an alien interpretive key or pre-judgment imposed from without. Such an approach is egocentric: "We do not learn to know and understand the other (although that indeed should be the task of historical research!); we see only its relation to us. We look for and find and understand ourselves in the events of history."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>See: W. B. Kristensen, "Schleiermacher's opvatting van de godsdienstgeschiedenis" in *Symbol en werkelijkheid. Godsdiensthistorische studiën* (Zeist: Uitgeversmaatschappij W. De Haan N. V., 1962), pp. 24-30; Kristensen, *Meaning*, pp. 28, 30, 48, 212, 254-5, 262, 276, 279, 286.

<sup>22</sup>W. B. Kristensen, "Over waardering van historische gegevens," in *Symbol en werkelijkheid*, p. 79. Kristensen, it must be borne in mind, was working in an era when the assumptions of evolutionary approaches to the study of religion were still strong. It is

Over against such evaluative comparison, Kristensen advocated the practice of "informative comparison" in historical study. In order to understand a given phenomenon, one can and sometimes must compare similar phenomena in different traditions. Such an approach is not evaluative but descriptive — and going about the task of historical investigation in this way means that the historian does not take history captive but is rather taken captive by history. This means that in order to understand the believers of a given religious tradition, which for Kristensen meant to understand them as they understood themselves, the historian needs to selflessly and sympathetically adopt their point of view and so let them speak for themselves without interruption.<sup>23</sup>

In thus becoming "Persians in order to understand Persian religion ... [and] Babylonians to understand Babylonian religion, and so forth,"<sup>24</sup> a new type of evaluation results. During the work of investigation, the historian comes to see the inner and independent worth of the other — without reference to a preconceived ideal. Such evaluation makes *itself* known as it grips the historian and calls forth sympathy. In the process of historical study, then, the very norm by which the investigator proceeds is modified; the data define the historian as much as the historian defines the data. Hence,

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these assumptions that he was constantly battling.

<sup>23</sup>See: W. B. Kristensen, *Inleiding tot de godsdienstgeschiedenis*, 3rd ed., [trans. J. Kristensen-Heldring] (Haarlem: De Haan, 1980), pp. 18-21, 24-37; Kristensen, "Over waardering," pp. 67-82.

<sup>24</sup>Kristensen, "Over waardering," p. 77.

Kristensen says, the study of the history of religion does not leave the investigator unchanged: in studying religion, one grows religiously. Such religious growth may on occasion "paralyse" the historian somewhat. Nonetheless, this need not lead to skepticism: the background of every religious formulation is infinite, divine reality. Hence, in coming to know different attempts to express the inexpressible, the historian is led toward the mystery that is the goal of all religions.<sup>25</sup>

In striving for objectivity in historical study, the investigator should inquire only into what the believers themselves expressed. It is their sole right to testify about their religion and the historian has no right to doubt their testimony. Their conceptions and judgments are the only reality that exists for the historian; one must learn to see with their eyes in order to understand them as they understood themselves.<sup>26</sup> In so adopting their judgments — in accordance with Kristensen's policy of self-surrender — the historian comes to see that the believers are always right, that their religion has independent validity and that their religion makes an absolute and incomparable claim. Kristensen was unrelenting in his emphasis on this

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<sup>25</sup>See Kristensen, "Over waardering," pp. 80-4.

<sup>26</sup>On Kristensen's debt to Schleiermacher's Romantic hermeneutics, see Richard J. Plantinga, "Romanticism and the History of Religion: The Case of W. B. Kristensen," forthcoming in the proceedings of the conference entitled "The History of Religions and Critique of Culture in the Days of Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890-1950)" held in Groningen in May 1989 and organized by H. G. Kippenberg. For an overview of the proceedings of this conference, see H. G. Kippenberg, "The History of Religions and Critique of Culture in the Days of Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890-1950)," *Numen* XXXVI (1989), 257-9.

matter. In his own words:

If we want to learn to know them [historical religions] as the believers themselves conceived and judged them, we must first attempt to understand their own evaluation of their own religion. ... Let us not forget that there exists no other religious reality than the faith of the believers. If we want to learn to know genuine religion, we are exclusively assigned to the expressions of the believers. What we think from our standpoint about the essence or value of other religions bears witness to our own faith, to our own conception of religious belief, but if our opinion about another religion deviates from the opinion and the evaluation of the believers themselves, then we are no longer dealing with their religion ... [but] we are exclusively concerned with ourselves.<sup>27</sup>

In the attempt to understand as the believers understood and understand, the historian comes to recognize that this is a goal which can never be fully reached, although it must always be striven for. Especially with regard to ancient religions, the investigator recognizes the great difference between their conceptions and his own.<sup>28</sup> Their experience cannot be completely relived; a modern cannot see with ancient eyes; one cannot understand perfectly (i.e., like the believer) but only approximately by using empathy and imagination. This recognition makes symbolic interpretation necessary for the investigator. Even though the modern conception of symbol was unknown to the ancients, the historian needs to make use of this heuristic device in order to understand. In other words, we can only construe their

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<sup>27</sup>Kristensen, *Inleiding*, p. 22.

<sup>28</sup>Kristensen's ancient-modern distinction, of which van der Leeuw was undoubtedly aware, may well have been a factor in the latter's attraction to the theories of Lévy-Bruhl.

reality symbolically; what they knew directly and perfectly, we can only know indirectly and approximately. Because "religion is belief in divine reality, not in symbols of that reality ... we remain strangers in the forecourt of the temple."<sup>29</sup>

Turning now from Kristensen's conception of the history of religion to a consideration of his view of the phenomenology of religion, the first thing to be noted is the close relationship that exists between these two branches of the science of religion. According to Kristensen, history and phenomenology of religion assume and mutually anticipate one another. Hence, it is not surprising that many of the themes that Kristensen discusses in his treatment of the task of the history of religion are also emphasized in his comments on the nature of the phenomenology of religion. In fact, he defines phenomenology of religion as the "systematic, that is to say, comparative, history of religion."<sup>30</sup> Availing itself of the results of the history of religion, phenomenology engages in the work of systematic and typological comparison. In other words, phenomenology takes historical data out of their historical contexts, studies them in groups, makes use of typology and draws ideal lines of connection. In so doing, the phenomenologist needs to use intuition in order to anticipate which data are essential and which are not.

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<sup>29</sup>W. B. Kristensen, "Symbool en werkelijkheid" in *Symbool en werkelijkheid*, p. 14. See also: Kristensen, *Inleiding*, pp. 16-8, 23-37; Kristensen, "Schleiermacher's opvatting," p. 29; Kristensen, "Symbool," pp. 7-14.

<sup>30</sup>Kristensen, *Inleiding*, p. 19.



The phenomenologist asks: What religious thought, idea or need underlies this group of phenomena? What religious value did these phenomena have for the believers themselves? Taking the viewpoint of the believers as its starting-point, phenomenology of religion "tries to gain an over-all view of the ideas and motives which are of decisive importance in all of History of Religion."<sup>31</sup> As in the history of religion, this task involves abandoning our preconceptions; only in surrendering ourselves to others will they surrender to us. If we speak, they will remain silent and thus we will not understand them — which is the goal of phenomenological inquiry. Like historical study, then, phenomenological investigation is capable of only approximate understanding.

Although phenomenology of religion tries to understand the overall ideas and motives operative in the history of religion, it does not and cannot articulate the essence of religion. This formulation is the chief task of the third branch of the science of religion, namely, philosophy of religion. In executing this task, philosophy of religion needs to pay attention to historical data as well as to experience: it is not possible to describe the essence of religion, Kristensen argued, without knowing from experience what religion is. Philosophy of religion thus makes use of the results of the history and

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<sup>31</sup> Kristensen, *Meaning*, p. 2. Kristensen's insistence on beginning with the viewpoint of the believer led him to a rejection of Rudolf Otto's starting-point in the study of religion: "the holy." While Kristensen believed "the holy" to be central to religion, he felt that this kind of *a priori* view of the essence of religion produced distortive results in historical and phenomenological study. See Kristensen, *Meaning*, pp. 15-8, 355-6.

phenomenology of religion; and the history and phenomenology of religion anticipate the philosophy of religion as well as utilize its formulation of the essence of religion. In a statement that sums up the interdependence and non-linear unity of the three branches of the science of religion, Kristensen writes:

Thus we see that anticipated concepts and principles are used in all the provinces of the general science of religion: history, typology [phenomenology] and philosophy. We are continually anticipating the results of later research. That typifies the character of the "authority" of each of the three subdivisions of the science of religion. None of the three is independent; the value and the accuracy of the results of one of them depend on the value and accuracy of the results of the other two. The place which the research of Phenomenology occupies between history and philosophy makes it extraordinarily interesting and important. The particular and the universal interpenetrate again and again; Phenomenology is at once systematic History of Religion and applied Philosophy of Religion.<sup>32</sup>

As van der Leeuw's doctoral supervisor, Kristensen undoubtedly impressed his points of view on his young student. Van der Leeuw himself admitted that it was Kristensen and his exemplary spirit of self-denial and love that permanently influenced him and inspired a love for the history of religion in him. And as he had said of Chantepie, van der Leeuw said late in his life that he was unable to say Kristensen's name without emotional feelings and a sense of profound gratitude. Oddly, van der Leeuw also said that Kristensen's teaching was more psychological than historical and that

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<sup>32</sup>Kristensen, *Meaning*, p. 9. See also pp. 8-18.

this psychological approach very much influenced him and made him receptive to the work of Söderblom and Otto.<sup>33</sup> I say "oddly" because there seems to have been some misunderstanding between teacher and student on the matter of psychological approaches to religion, for Kristensen — who, unlike his student, did not write profusely — took the time and effort to criticize his former student concerning the approach to the study of religion outlined in his inaugural address at Groningen, which Kristensen took to be too psychological and subjective.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, while there are some similarities between the approaches to the study of religion of the two scholars, the differences are deeper in the final analysis. This will become clear as this chapter unfolds. For the present, suffice it to say that van der Leeuw was inspired by Kristensen's "reverent" posture as regards the study of religion and that he in some sense operated with a three-tiered conception of the study of religion (which he saw in both Kristensen and Chantepie). On the other hand, van der Leeuw was not nearly as sanguine as his teacher about the prospects of objectivity in the study of religion. Another way of stating this latter point would be to say that van der Leeuw's approach to the study of religion had greater philosophical and hermeneutical depth than did Kristensen's. The latter indeed "influenced" the former — but not entirely in terms that one might describe as "positive appropriation."

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<sup>33</sup>See: van der Leeuw, *Godsvoorstellingen*, p. vii; *PT*, pp. 23-4; van der Leeuw, "Confession," 9.

<sup>34</sup>See Kristensen, "De inaugureele," 260-5.

### c. Lucien Lévy-Bruhl

Lévy-Bruhl (1857–1939) began his career as a student of modern philosophy, especially modern moral theory.<sup>35</sup> His work in this area led to his being awarded a professorate at the Sorbonne in Paris, where he came into contact with the then dominant sociological school of Émile Durkheim. Both his own philosophical work and his criticisms of Durkheim and his school sparked Lévy-Bruhl's interest in the question of primitive thought patterns. In 1910 he published his first and most important treatise on this subject entitled *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* (*The Functions of the Mind in Undeveloped Societies* — or, somewhat more innocuously, as in the title of the authorized English translation, *How Natives Think*).<sup>36</sup> This book has been the subject of much criticism, both during and after Lévy-Bruhl's life.<sup>37</sup> In light of the criticisms that the book's publication met, Lévy-Bruhl continued to examine and refine his theory. This task became his scholarly focus for the rest of his life — resulting in several more publications on the

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<sup>35</sup>On Lévy-Bruhl, see: Jean Cazeneuve, "Lévy-Bruhl, Lucien" in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. D. L. Sills (New York: The Macmillan Co. and The Free Press, 1972), IX, pp. 263–6; Jean Cazeneuve, *Lucien Lévy-Bruhl*, trans. Peter Rivière (New York: Harper and Row, 1972); Claude Rivière, "Lévy-Bruhl, Lucien" in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987), VIII, pp. 533–4; Waardenburg, *Classical*, I, pp. 46–8, 334; Waardenburg, *Classical*, II, pp. 159–62.

<sup>36</sup>See Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, trans. Lillian A. Clare (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

<sup>37</sup>See: C. Scott Littleton, "Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and the Concept of Cognitive Relativity" in Lévy-Bruhl, *How*, pp. v–lviii; Donald Wiebe, "The Prelogical Mentality Revisited," *Religion* 17 (1987), 29–61.

topic.<sup>38</sup> In the end, it was for his theory of primitive mentality (and not his work as a philosopher) that Lévy-Bruhl became (in)famous.

As I noted above, Lévy-Bruhl's first book on the question of primitive mentality was his most important statement about the matter. In this much misunderstood and much criticized volume, the philosopher turned anthropologist<sup>39</sup> began by indicating his dissatisfaction with the *assumption* of the British anthropological and French sociological schools that the human mind is the same and works in the same way in all times and places. Because of the wide and uncritical acceptance of this assumption, Lévy-Bruhl said, many scholars are unable to see what anthropological research is now really telling us. Such scholars are not, in other words, open to the theoretical possibility that primitives<sup>40</sup> think differently than do moderns.<sup>41</sup> It is time, he argued, to reconsider this assumption. Such reconsideration holds forth the possibility that we will better understand both primitives — who in many ways seem so different from us — and moderns.<sup>42</sup>

The first thing to note about primitive mentality, according to Lévy-Bruhl, is its collective character. This characteristic already begins to dis-

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<sup>38</sup>For bibliographical information about these publications, see Waardenburg, *Classical*, II, p. 162.

<sup>39</sup>Lévy-Bruhl was an "armchair" anthropologist; he never did any serious field-work. As such, he is often referred to as a sociologist.

<sup>40</sup>I shall employ this out of fashion term as a synonym for "non-literate peoples."

<sup>41</sup>Looking back, one senses how bold and *avant-garde* Lévy-Bruhl's questioning of such a regnant assumption was.

<sup>42</sup>See Lévy-Bruhl, *How*, pp. 13-32.

tinguish it from modern mentality, which is more individual in character. Secondly, primitive mentality has a mystic<sup>43</sup> quality unlike the logical quality of modern mentality. The more one looks at these two mentalities and thinks about them, in fact, the more one is led to the conclusion that primitive perception is entirely unlike modern perception. Lévy-Bruhl writes: "Primitives see with eyes like ours, but they do not perceive with the same minds."<sup>44</sup>

Based on these observations, Lévy-Bruhl presents the reader with the possibility that primitive mentality obeys a logic different than the logic adhered to by modern mentality. In other words, primitives are not guilty of misunderstanding causality or of committing logical fallacies as these are conceived in the West. Primitive mentality obeys not the vaunted law of excluded middle of Western logic but the "law of participation": "objects, beings, phenomena can be ... both themselves and something other than themselves ... they give forth and they receive mystic powers, virtues, qualities, influences, which make themselves felt outside, without ceasing to remain where they are."<sup>45</sup> Hence, according to Lévy-Bruhl, one might characterize primitive mentality as "prelogical." In using this term, he did

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<sup>43</sup> "[M]ystic' implies belief in forces and influences and actions which, though imperceptible to sense, are nevertheless real." Lévy-Bruhl, *How*, p. 38.

<sup>44</sup> Lévy-Bruhl, *How*, p. 43. It must be stressed that Lévy-Bruhl's point is the difference between the two mentalities. This does not necessarily imply any evaluation — something many of his critics seemed unable to understand.

<sup>45</sup> Lévy-Bruhl, *How*, pp. 76-7.

not wish to suggest that primitive mentality antedates modern mentality or that primitive mentality is alogical or antilogical; he merely wished to suggest that primitive mentality does not obey the law of non-contradiction but rather the law of participation. This of course implies that primitive mentality must be understood on its own terms and not in Western terms.

Lévy-Bruhl spent the remainder of his book fleshing out his theses about primitive mentality by examining characteristics of the language, numeration and institutions of non-literate peoples. In the last chapter of the book, he briefly discussed the transition from primitive mentality to other mental types as well as the presence of primitive mentality in other such types. He concluded the book by saying: "And if it be true that our mentality is both logical and prelogical, the history of religious dogmas and systems of philosophy may henceforth be explained in a new light."<sup>46</sup>

One can only imagine the impression that the closing words of Lévy-Bruhl's book must have made on van der Leeuw, then a student of theology and history of religion at the University of Leiden.<sup>47</sup> Much of the history of religion seems so foreign and so difficult to understand. Could this be because a different mentality than ours is operative there? As I noted earlier,

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<sup>46</sup>Lévy-Bruhl, *How*, p. 386.

<sup>47</sup>Van der Leeuw said in his "Confession scientifique" of 1946 that his admiration for Lévy-Bruhl had been increasing for thirty-five years. This puts his first contact with the ideas of the French anthropologist at 1911, the year after the publication of *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures*. Van der Leeuw also refers to Lévy-Bruhl in his dissertation. See: van der Leeuw, "Confession," 11; van der Leeuw, *Godsvoorstellingen*, pp. 39, 124; *PMR*, p. 3.

van der Leeuw wrestled with this question for the remainder of his life and even published two important works on the matter.<sup>48</sup> He himself credited Lévy-Bruhl with getting him to think about the question of other mentalities. As he said in a short obituary after the French anthropologist's death in 1939: "we honor his memory best by carrying on in his spirit."<sup>49</sup> This van der Leeuw did: he worked in the spirit of Lévy-Bruhl both during the life and after the death of the great French thinker. In fact, the former's approach to the study of religion is unthinkable apart from the contribution of the latter. This will become apparent later on in this chapter.<sup>50</sup>

#### d. Nathan Söderblom

Söderblom (1866-1931), like van der Leeuw, is one of those thinkers who resists easy characterization.<sup>51</sup> Trained in the conservative theologi-

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<sup>48</sup>See *SMP* and *PMR*.

<sup>49</sup>Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Uit de godsdienstgeschiedenis," *Nieuwe Theologische Studiën* 22 (1939), 283. Ten years after this obituary, van der Leeuw wrote a short article on Lévy-Bruhl in which he gave his interpretation of *Les Carnets*, Lévy-Bruhl's posthumously published notebooks. In short and against those who claimed that Lévy-Bruhl abandoned the theory of primitive mentality in his notebooks, van der Leeuw argued that he merely abandoned the term "prelogical." In other words, van der Leeuw saw the notebooks not as a retraction but as a refinement of the fundamental thesis. See Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Lucien Levy Bruhl [sic] en de primitieve mentaliteit," *Nederlands Studieblad* 11 (1949), 194-5.

<sup>50</sup>I do not wish to give the impression, however, that van der Leeuw was not critical of Lévy-Bruhl. He did in fact make some important criticisms of his work (most notably, he was critical of Lévy-Bruhl's positivism: he thought Lévy-Bruhl too easily assumed the normativity of modern mentality and never satisfactorily described this mentality). But in an atmosphere in which Lévy-Bruhl was almost universally attacked, van der Leeuw spent more time defending him than adding his own voice to the chorus of criticism. See *PMR*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>51</sup>There are many parallels that could be drawn between Söderblom and van der Leeuw: both were theologians and historians of religion (both even dedicated their inaugural



cal faculty of the University of Uppsala in his native Sweden, Söderblom nonetheless became acquainted with and sympathetic to German liberal theology (ultimately stemming from Friedrich Schleiermacher and especially embodied in the theology of Albrecht Ritschl with its broad, dynamic and non-propositional conception of revelation). He was hence regarded as something of a liberal by his fellow Swedes — a reputation he was never able to fully shake. Söderblom's interest in Christian missions and the view of revelation that he adopted from Ritschl opened him to the religious experience of non-Christians. Upon completion of his theological education in Uppsala, the young Söderblom accepted a position as pastor of the Swedish legation in Paris. His location in Paris gave him the opportunity to continue his studies at the Sorbonne's Protestant theological faculty. There he carried on with his study of non-Christian religious experience, ultimately obtaining a doctorate with a dissertation on Iranian religion. In 1901, he became professor of theology at the University of Uppsala, where he remained until

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professorial addresses to the question of the relationship of the history of religion to theology); both served their countries in public office (Söderblom as Archbishop, van der Leeuw as Minister of Education, Art and Science); and both were lovers of music and the arts. Hence, it is not surprising that the characterization "versatile genius" has been independently applied to both of them. See: Eliade, "Preface," p. v; Sharpe, *Comparative*, p. 155. On Söderblom, see: Charles J. Adams, "Söderblom, Nathan" in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987), XIII, pp. 403-4; Yngve Brilioth, "A Biographical Introduction" in Nathan Söderblom, *The Living God: Basal Forms of Personal Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), pp. xi-xxix; Sharpe, *Comparative*, pp. 154-61; Eric J. Sharpe, "The Legacy of Nathan Söderblom," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 12/2 (1988), 65-70; Waardenburg, *Classical*, I, pp. 54-5, 381; Waardenburg, *Classical*, II, pp. 266-72.

1914.<sup>52</sup> His professorship in Uppsala was for all practical purposes as much geared to history of religion as it was to theology. From 1912 to 1914 he simultaneously occupied the chair of history of religion at the University of Leipzig. During his years as a professor, Söderblom published several important treatises on the history of religion. In 1914, he was chosen to serve the Lutheran Church of Sweden as the Archbishop of Uppsala. In this capacity, he became a pioneering figure in the ecumenical movement. The honours he received late in his life included the Nobel Peace Prize (1930) and the 1931-1932 Gifford Lectureship, the latter of which was never completed because of his death in 1931. On his deathbed he was said to have confessed: "I know that God lives; I can prove it by the history of religion."<sup>53</sup>

For the purposes of the present study, two things about Söderblom's career as a historian of religion and theologian stand out. First of all, there is the very fact that these two pursuits were really one for him: Söderblom saw no conflict between the history of religion and theology, between the scientific and the devotional. If indeed history — including the history of religion — gradually reveals the living God (most clearly and fully, to be sure, in Christianity), it behooves the historian of religion or theologian to adopt an attitude of seriousness toward all religions — rather than seeing

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<sup>52</sup>Söderblom was a candidate for the chair of history of religion at Leiden vacated by Tiele in 1901. As I noted earlier, this chair was awarded to the Norwegian Kristensen. One can only wonder how differently the young van der Leeuw might have developed if Söderblom — rather than Kristensen — had been his mentor.

<sup>53</sup>Söderblom cited in Sharpe, *Comparative*, p. 159.

them as falsehoods or as mere stages of evolutionary development. Implied in Söderblom's view of the history of religion is his contention that religion is a *sui generis* phenomenon; and to understand religion properly, he held, one must know from religious experience what this phenomenon is.

Secondly, Söderblom's view of religion, which follows from his dynamic conception of revelation, stands out. Before Rudolf Otto became famous for his essay on "the Holy," Söderblom wrote: "Holiness is the great word in religion; it is even more essential than the notion of God. Real religion may exist without a definite conception of divinity, but there is no real religion without a distinction between holy and profane."<sup>54</sup> Söderblom's point in this statement is that an overemphasis on divinity renders many religious phenomena unintelligible. Thus, he said, one must focus not on divinity but on *mana*, power, awe, terror, astonishment — or holiness — in religion. Hence: "Religious is the man to whom something is holy."<sup>55</sup>

Van der Leeuw did not learn any particular doctrine or gain any particular insight from Söderblom as much as he inherited an exemplary way of approaching his own work in the history of religion and theology.<sup>56</sup> As he said shortly after Söderblom's death, the Swedish Archbishop was not only a great man of the church but perhaps the greatest representative of his

<sup>54</sup>Nathan Söderblom, "Holiness: General and Primitive" in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1913), VI, p. 731.

<sup>55</sup>Söderblom, "Holiness," p. 731.

<sup>56</sup>Van der Leeuw said that Söderblom reinforced the "psychological" approach to religion he had learned from Kristensen. See van der Leeuw, "Confession," 9.



science (i.e., history of religion). Like the great Albert Schweitzer, van der Leeuw went on, Söderblom was able to do many things and do them well. His ecclesiastical and scientific activities did not hinder but in fact supported one another. In a demonstration of his great respect for the Swedish scholar and churchman, van der Leeuw writes:

Söderblom helped us realize that the religious struggle of centuries and peoples is something other than a collection of curiosities, something other than a series of errors, something other than a childish beginning. He helped us realize that in this struggle live the same forces that still animate us, the same tensions that still oppress our lives. He helped us realize that religion is never and nowhere a dead thing or a museum piece but a living reality. And he helped us see that we Christians — far from judging this struggle in our orthodoxy as a misconception, far from slighting it in our modernism as a childish beginning — can understand it properly for the first time because we after all have been given the centre [of revelation]. And from this centre we have the broadest viewpoint because we have been given the fulfilment [of human religious striving]; and in possession of this knowledge we are able to understand religions and tendencies as prophecy.<sup>57</sup>

In non-theological terms, van der Leeuw's point is that Söderblom allowed us to see that in studying others (and not just the Old Testament Hebrews) we are really studying ourselves. In so doing, he opened new perspectives for the history of religion and for theology.<sup>58</sup> Thus, van der Leeuw concluded about "this truly catholic spirit" from Sweden: "The greatness of this scholar is

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<sup>57</sup>Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Söderblom's wetenschappelijke beteekenis," *Stemmen des Tijds* 20 (1931), 139.

<sup>58</sup>Van der Leeuw discusses Söderblom's analysis of "holiness" at length, noting that for Söderblom holiness has three chief forms: power, will and highest being. See van der Leeuw, "Söderblom's," 141-3.

this: in all his scientific work we can feel ... [a] burning heart beating."<sup>59</sup>

### e. Rudolf Otto

Along with Karl Barth, Otto (1869–1937) was one of the two great theological influences in his native Germany in the years following World War One.<sup>60</sup> However, whereas Barth's theological identity was forged in his attempt to overcome the liberal theology of the nineteenth century stemming from Schleiermacher, Otto sought to appropriate this tradition and work within it.<sup>61</sup> Among other things, this meant that whereas Barth was critical of "religion," much of Otto's theological work was focused on precisely that which Barth found so objectionable.<sup>62</sup>

Otto's appropriation of nineteenth century liberal theology and especially the views of Schleiermacher naturally meant that he was fundamentally open to religious experience outside the Christian tradition. Thus — and rather uncharacteristically for a German *theologian* — Otto studied Sanskrit and

<sup>59</sup> Van der Leeuw, "Söderblom's," 141, 144.

<sup>60</sup> On Otto, see: John W. Harvey, "Translator's Preface to the Second Edition" in Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, 2nd ed., trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. ix–xix; Theodore M. Ludwig, "Otto, Rudolf" in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987), XI, pp. 139–41; Sharpe, *Comparative*, pp. 161–7; Waardenburg, *Classical*, I, pp. 59–60, 432; Waardenburg, *Classical*, II, pp. 200–6.

<sup>61</sup> At the Universities of Erlangen and Göttingen, Otto received an education which left him deeply indebted to four thinkers: Luther, Kant, Schleiermacher and Fries. He himself later taught at the Universities of Göttingen (from 1904 to 1914), Breslau (from 1914 to 1917) and Marburg (from 1917 to 1929, the year of his retirement).

<sup>62</sup> I am indebted to Professor John Robertson for the following illustrative limerick: "There once was a young man named Barth / Who walked by himself quite apart. / His favourite motto / Was 'Blast Rudolf Otto! / And Ritschl was wrong from the start!'"

made several trips to Asia in his quest for imaginative and sympathetic understanding of non-Christian religious experience. Above and beyond his more traditional theological and philosophical studies, then, he also published in the areas of Indian religion, mysticism and what many would call "phenomenology of religion." But in the end, almost all of Otto's other writings and accomplishments were eclipsed by the book he published in 1917 entitled *Das Heilige* (translated into English under the title *The Idea of the Holy*), which "now holds near-canonical status as one of the books which every student of comparative religion imagines himself or herself to have read."<sup>63</sup>

Very much in the spirit of Schleiermacher, Otto began his now classical treatise by distinguishing the rational and the non-rational (read: affective) aspect of religion. The former of these, he says, has dominated both theology and comparative religion. But religion is in no way exhausted rationally and conceptually; it must also be understood non-rationally. To this end, the non-conceptual category of the holy, which is unique to religion, can be useful. By "holy" Otto did not have in mind the common ethical conception (i.e., complete goodness) but rather something very basic to religion: "a unique original feeling-response."<sup>64</sup> In order to avoid confusion with the ethical conception of holiness, Otto coined a new term, derived from the Latin

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<sup>63</sup>Sharpe, *Comparative*, p. 161.

<sup>64</sup>Otto, *Holy*, p. 6.

*numen*: (the) "numinous." This category is *sui generis* and irreducible; as a primary datum, the numinous can be discussed but not defined. In fact, Otto went on, one can best understand the numinous by considering and discussing it with one's mind until it begins to stir in one's own life and consciousness. In other words, the numinous cannot be taught but only evoked or awakened.<sup>65</sup>

The remainder of Otto's book can be seen as an attempt to evoke the numinous in his reader.<sup>66</sup> Consider, he says, a moment of religious experience — say, being rapt in worship. Schleiermacher argued that what is unique about such an experience is the feeling of absolute dependence. This affective state is perhaps better thought of, Otto says, as "creature-feeling": "the emotion of a creature, submerged and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures."<sup>67</sup> The numinous, in other words, is felt as something objective existing outside of the self. It manifests itself in certain affective states. In deeply religious experience, for example, there is something which can only be called *mysterium tremendum*. This something may be felt in various ways:

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<sup>65</sup>See Otto, *Holy*, pp. 1–7.

<sup>66</sup>See Otto, *Holy*, p. 8.

<sup>67</sup>Otto, *Holy*, p. 10. Otto was critical of Schleiermacher's feeling of absolute dependence for two reasons. First of all, he did not believe the feeling of absolute dependence to be unique to religious experience. Secondly, Schleiermacher's category is one of self-consciousness, from which one infers God. However, experience dictates the opposite: creature-feeling is not a cause but an effect of something other, which is primary. See Otto, *Holy*, pp. 9–10, 20–1.



The feeling of it may at times come sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship. It may pass over into a more set and lasting attitude of the soul, continuing, as it were, thrillingly vibrant and resonant, until at last it dies away and the soul resumes its "profane," non-religious mood of everyday experience. It may burst in sudden eruption up from the depths of the soul with spasms and convulsions, or lead to the strangest excitements, to intoxicated frenzy, to transport, and to ecstasy. It has its wild and demonic forms and can sink to an almost grisly horror and shuddering. It has its crude, barbaric antecedents and early manifestations, and again it may be developed into something beautiful and pure and glorious. It may become the hushed, trembling, and speechless humility of the creature in the presence of — whom or what? In the presence of that which is a *mystery* inexpressible and above all creatures.<sup>68</sup>

In order to understand the object of such religious feelings, Otto continues, an analysis of *mysterium tremendum* is required. *Tremendum*, he says, has to do with three things: fear — not in the sense of being afraid but rather in the sense of awe, religious dread and "absolute unapproachability"; *majestas* — that is, might, power and absolute overpoweringness; and energy and urgency.<sup>69</sup> *Mysterium* has to do with something wholly other, something beyond the sphere of the usual. As such, the reaction to it is one of wonder, astonishment and stupor. Alongside of awe and majesty, then, *mysterium tremendum* is also characterized by attraction and *fascinations*, giving the numinous a dual character: "The daemonic-divine object may appear to the mind an object of horror and dread, but at the same time

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<sup>68</sup>Otto, *Holy*, pp. 12-3.

<sup>69</sup>See Otto, *Holy*, pp. 13-24.

it is no less something that allures with a potent charm."<sup>70</sup>

Otto goes on to argue that the feeling of the numinous is *sui generis* and underivable from any other feeling — even though analogies to it may be found elsewhere in human experience. In other words, the numinous is an *a priori* category: "The facts of the numinous consciousness point therefore ... to a hidden substantive source, from which the religious ideas and feelings are formed, which lies in the mind independently of sense-experience."<sup>71</sup> Alternately expressed: human beings have an inbuilt capacity for religion. With this assertion, Otto lays the last plank of his argument in the book. He devotes the remainder of the volume chiefly to two matters: a discussion of the numinous' manifestation; and an explanation of how the rational and non-rational aspects of religion relate to one another.

More than once in his life, van der Leeuw took the time to pause, reflect and write about the significance of Otto's work.<sup>72</sup> Whereas late nineteenth and early twentieth century scholars tended to detheologize the study of religion, to explain religion in terms of other cultural and societal factors, Otto, van der Leeuw observed, saw a more fruitful path for the study of

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<sup>70</sup>Otto, *Holy*, p. 31.

<sup>71</sup>Otto, *Holy*, pp. 113-4. "Now this is the criterion of all *a priori* knowledge, namely, that, so soon as an assertion has been clearly expressed and understood, knowledge of its truth comes into the mind with the certitude of first hand insight." Otto, *Holy*, p. 137.

<sup>72</sup>See: Gerardus van der Leeuw, "[Inleidend woord]" in Rudolf Otto, *Het heilige. Over het irrationeele in de idee van het goddelijke en de verhouding ervan tot het rationeele*, trans. J. W. Dippel (Amsterdam: Seyffardt's Boek- en Muziekhandel, 1928), pp. v-vi; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Godsdiensthistorische notities," *Nieuwe Theologische Studiën* 20 (1937), 175-6; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Rudolf Otto und die Religionsgeschichte," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* N. F. XIX (1938), 71-81.

religion to follow. In particular, van der Leeuw said, Otto's significance for the study of religion is three-fold. First of all, he brought about the "psychological turn" taken by the study of religion. That is to say, Otto possessed an amazing understanding of the human soul, of human beings as religious beings. Moreover, he was able to make this comprehensible to others. But he was not, van der Leeuw argued, guilty of psychologism — as often charged. He probed the depths of the soul because he wanted to touch God, the Wholly Other who underlies all religious experience. Otto expressed himself most forcefully about the profound and religious nature of the human soul in *Das Heilige* — a book "that can never be read enough."<sup>73</sup>

*Das Heilige*, van der Leeuw thought, opened up a new understanding of religion — one which will influence generations to come.<sup>74</sup>

Secondly, van der Leeuw continued, Otto is significant for the history of religion because — like Schleiermacher — he endeavoured to convince his contemporaries that religion is a province unto itself, that religious experience is autonomous and not derivable from or reducible to something else. In so doing, he fashioned a series of new terms, which are very helpful in thinking about religion (*mysterium tremendum*, etc.). Moreover, in demon-

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<sup>73</sup>Van der Leeuw, "[Inleidend]," p. v. In pointing out the great influence that Otto's book has had, van der Leeuw went on: "One can even say that anyone who writes knowledgeably about religious phenomena has taken in and reckoned with Otto's thoughts, even though *Das Heilige* might not be explicitly quoted." Van der Leeuw, "[Inleidend]," p. v.

<sup>74</sup>See van der Leeuw, "Rudolf Otto," pp. 71-6.

strating that religion is an area unto itself, Otto made his contemporaries see that in order to understand religious experience, one must reckon with the Wholly Other.<sup>75</sup>

Thirdly, Otto is significant for the history of religion because he offered this field a conception of religion which summarizes all religions. In other words, van der Leeuw held, Otto's analysis of the holy is the key that unlocks the essence of religion; essential to any and all religion is holiness (as Söderblom had earlier pointed out) — even on the fringes of the world of religion the Wholly Other can be seen. Thus, Otto has rendered his discipline several great services. And the task of his followers is to further his efforts by continuing in his spirit.<sup>76</sup> This is precisely what van der Leeuw set out to do.

## II. An Ambivalent Relationship to the Holy

Before turning to van der Leeuw's conception of religion,<sup>77</sup> a word about

<sup>75</sup>See van der Leeuw, "Rudolf Otto," pp. 76-8. Furthermore, according to van der Leeuw, Otto showed us that in our lives is a forbidden room, which both attracts us and repels us, containing all our hopes and fears. Thus, Otto's contribution extends beyond the academic to the personal realm. See van der Leeuw, "[Inleidend]," p. vi.

<sup>76</sup>See: van der Leeuw, "Godsdiensthistorische," 176; van der Leeuw, "Rudolf Otto," 78-81.

<sup>77</sup>Van der Leeuw's conception of religion is most clearly expressed in the following: Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Religion: I. Erscheinungs- und Ideenwelt" in *RGG*, IV, col. 1860-3; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Godsdienst, 1" in *Winkler Prins Algemeene Encyclopaedie*, 5th ed., ed. J. De Vries (Amsterdam: N. V. Uitgevers-Maatschappij "Elsevier," 1935), VIII, pp. 346-7; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Inleiding" in *De godsdiensten der wereld*, 2nd ed., ed. Gerardus van der Leeuw (Amsterdam: H. J. Meulenhoff, 1941), I, pp. 1-6; *PR*, *passim* (especially pp. 3-4, 8-11, 19, 27-39, 54-57, 66-70, 77-84, 141-4, 155-70, 183-7, 195-6,

his view of the business of offering definitions of religion is in order. One can, he notes, adopt the view of religion found in any one religion — most often one's own — and allow this to stand for religion in general, explaining other religions as approximations, deviations or falsehoods. A much better approach, van der Leeuw says, is to attempt the very difficult task of seeking what is common in the many different conceptions of the object of religion. One then seeks a term that is as "colourless" as possible, a term that will do justice to all the forms of religion which it is intended to summarize. However, this approach too is riddled with difficulties. Van der Leeuw points out that such definitions of religion often tell us more about the intentions and opinions of the person doing the defining and the period in which they were written than they tell us about the phenomenon of religion itself. For, as Schleiermacher argued in the *Reden*, one finds religion only in religions — and thus by implication not in definitions of religion.<sup>78</sup>


Having drawn attention to the precarious character of that which he was about to undertake, van der Leeuw sought to characterize religion — a

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201-3, 208-10, 226-30, 235, 269-72, 302-3, 382-6, 526-37, 579-80, 610-1, 618-25, 642-6, 669-70, 724-9, 778-81). See also: Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Furcht" in *RGG*, II, col. 839-40; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Godsgeloof" in *Winkler Prins*, VIII, p. 351; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Heilig, Heiligheid" in *Winkler Prins Algemeene Encyclopaedic*, 5th ed., ed. J. De Vries (Amsterdam: N. V. Uitgevers-Maatschappij "Elsevier," 1935), IX, pp. 113-4; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Phaenomenologie der openbaring?" *Vox Theologica* 8 (1937), 125-31; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Religionsgeschichte und persönliches religiöses Leben" in *In Deo Omnia Unum. Eine Heilige Kirche: Zeitschrift für Kirchenkunde und Religionswissenschaft* 23 (1942), 6-7, 18, 23.

<sup>78</sup>See: van der Leeuw, "Religion," col. 1860-1; van der Leeuw, "Godsdienst," p. 346; van der Leeuw, "Inleiding," pp. 1-2; *PR*, pp. 669-70.

phenomenon rooted in human experience — by preliminarily defining it as a relationship of a person to something or someone “other.” The world of religion displays a variety of ways of conceiving this “other” by which one is touched, which one encounters in experience, which intrudes into one’s life. Because of this intrusive nature of the other, van der Leeuw notes, life is a dangerous affair filled with critical moments. In stressing the experiential character of the human encounter with the other, van der Leeuw writes: “The essence of all religions ... is a relation to a power or to powers — a real relation and real powers, a relation which is felt to be stronger, more real and more living than the relation we have with our fellow human beings.”<sup>79</sup> The power (*Macht* — one of the central notions in the *Phänomenologie*) referred to here may be impersonal. It may also be personal; that is, it may be combined with will and form. In fact, van der Leeuw says, in “the three words power, will and form is contained almost the entire concept of the object of religion.”<sup>80</sup>



In discussing the concept of religion, van der Leeuw called for circumspection with respect to the term “God.” While many people are prone to think of religion in terms of belief in and worship of God, such a view of religion is problematic for more than one reason. First of all, van der

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<sup>79</sup>Gerardus van der Leeuw, “De betekenis van de religie in de ontwikkeling der moderne wereld” in *De onrust der mensheid*, ed. W. J. Kooiman (Amsterdam: W. Ten Have, 1960), p. 168.

<sup>80</sup>*PR*, p. 83.

Leeuw notes, if one chooses to think about religion in terms of God, the term must be so carefully circumscribed that it risks dying the death of a thousand qualifications. In the process, it ceases to say anything significant. In the second place, in thinking about religion in terms of God, one often has a particular conception of God in mind. Naturally, operating with such a (pre)conception has great potential for distortion where one's own conception of God does not obtain or where God is not part of a given religion. God is if not a Christian then at least a Greek representation of the object of religion which is not applicable everywhere in the world of religion. Instead of this Graeco-Christian conception, one ought to think of God as the indication of that to which human religious striving directs itself. Notions of God thus arise out of the experience of power encountered in life to which one seeks a relation. In this connection, van der Leeuw speaks of the "double experience of form": the first experience of the numinous (experience of power and encounter with will) is formless and without structure; the second experience of the numinous produces representations — power and will acquire name and form as demons, gods or God. In this way, humanity overcomes its painful solitude. Van der Leeuw hastens to add that this is no Feuerbachian or Freudian process: what one sees here is not projection, theorizing or abstraction but rather something concrete and empirical — giving name and form to the experience of power and will. It is in light of

this that one should understand van der Leeuw's *prima facie* strange remark that "God" is a latecomer to the history of religion.

Thus, instead of God, one would do better to speak of *numen*, which is a less personal designation for half-formed power with an element of will. Likewise, the Dutch term *religie*, derived from the Latin *religio*, is a less precise and hence more desirable term than the Dutch term *godsdiens*t, which is widely used in the Dutch language as a synonym for *religie*. The former indicates only a relation while the latter rather narrowly fixes the object of the relation and focuses on only one religious form.<sup>81</sup>

The encounter with the object of the relation constitutive of religion is characterized by van der Leeuw as wholly other, different, out of the ordinary, strange, marked off, *tabu*, *mana*-like, greater than oneself, superior, powerful, numinous, sacred. All of these terms can be summed up in the terms "holy," "holiness" and "the Holy," which van der Leeuw of course borrowed from Söderblom and Otto.<sup>82</sup> In summarizing this impressive encounter with the other van der Leeuw expresses himself in rather pregnant fashion by saying that "in religion one interprets one's experience as revelation."<sup>83</sup> Thus, religion is a relationship to the Holy or "the existen-

<sup>81</sup> See: van der Leeuw, "Religion," col. 1860-1; van der Leeuw, "Godsdienst," pp. 346-7; van der Leeuw, "Godsgeloof," p. 351; van der Leeuw, "Inleiding," pp. 1-2; *PR*, pp. 3-4, 72, 103, 155-6, 160, 168-9.

<sup>82</sup> "As the basic concept of the science of religion ... Holiness was first described by Söderblom and thereafter in a brilliant study by Rudolf Otto." Van der Leeuw, "Heilig," pp. 113-4.

<sup>83</sup> Van der Leeuw, "Religion," col. 1861.



tial relation, indeed the unity between man and the object of his experience, which he calls world, superhuman forces or God."<sup>84</sup>

The human reaction to this encounter with the other is one of awe, amazement, wonder. This the most basic of religious feelings is not at all straightforward. That is, one's relationship to the other can take various forms. One may seek to dominate the other, or serve it, or love it, or fear it, or seek unity with it. Whatever the form, one's relation to the other or the Holy is always two-sided. In the presence of this uncanny other, one has feelings of fear,<sup>85</sup> dread, repulsion, terror, horror, apprehension, *tremendum* — as well as love, longing, attraction, surrender, adoration, reverence, *fascinans*. Thus van der Leeuw writes: "Religion is an ambivalent relationship to the Holy."<sup>86</sup> Why this is so one cannot say, for the essence of religion is a mystery. However, one can say that the person seeks a relationship to the Holy because he or she is impelled by it.

An encounter with the Holy does not leave one unchanged; after this experience, the religious person feels an imperative and the necessity of fulfilling a task. In other words, awe develops into observance. This, according

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<sup>84</sup>Gerardus Van der Leeuw, "La mentalité primitive et la religion," *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* (1935), 494.

<sup>85</sup>Van der Leeuw distinguishes primary from secondary fear. The latter is post-experiential and objectively determined: one fears being run over by a car or being attacked when walking in the forest. This has little if anything to do with religion. The former is pre-experiential, unconscious, intuitive: one fears or dreads the otherness of machines or the depths of the forest. This is intimately connected to religion. See: van der Leeuw, "Furcht," col. 839-40; *PR*, pp. 527-31, 579-80.

<sup>86</sup>Van der Leeuw, "Inleiding," p. 4.

to van der Leeuw, is the significance of the Latin *religio*, which may mean the bond of a person to something or the fact that a person pays attention to something. In fact, both meanings are possible: "Religion is the phenomenon whereby one binds oneself or knows oneself to be bound to something or someone; one pays attention to something, one reckons with something."<sup>87</sup> Thus, the opposite of *homo religiosus* is *homo neglegens* (and the modern feeling is one in which awe has become formalized and hence meaningless).<sup>88</sup>

An implication of the foregoing is that life is both a given and a possibility. That is to say, one does not accept life the way it is — one is concerned with one's world and one's relationship to the Holy. One is on the alert; one seeks to flee the Holy, or to dominate it, or to form habits in regard to it (rites and customs) — or one adopts a posture of faith. In other words, existential concern develops into a certain type of conduct, which often has a celebratory character. Such conduct accounts for the existence of various religious expressions, the chief of which are cult, myth, doctrine and inner religious life.<sup>89</sup>

With such a conception of religion, it is not difficult to see why van der Leeuw was uncomfortable with Schleiermacher's famous definition of

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<sup>87</sup>Van der Leeuw, "Inleiding," p. 2.

<sup>88</sup>See *PR*, pp. 35-7.

<sup>89</sup>See: van der Leeuw, "Religion," col. 1862-3; van der Leeuw, "Godsdienst," pp. 346-7; van der Leeuw, "Inleiding," p. 5; *PR*, pp. 533-7.

religion (shared, as I noted above, by Kristensen) as "the feeling of absolute dependence."<sup>90</sup> On the one hand, this definition says too much: fear, terror and rebellion against the Holy, which one finds in the history of religion, are partially screened by the notion of dependence. On the other hand, this definition does not say enough: the feelings of surrender, devotion and love, which one also finds in the history of religion, are not properly expressed.<sup>91</sup>

Finally, van der Leeuw notes the limitations of conceiving religion as a human phenomenon.<sup>92</sup> Religion is not *merely* human experience, feeling, action and so forth. For the religious person (as opposed to the scholarly investigator of religion), religion is something quite different. "To the person who experiences, religious experience is precisely not experience in the first place, but an act of God."<sup>93</sup> As he notes time and again in the *Phänomenologie*, the object of the science of religion (i.e., the activity of human beings in relation to God) is the subject, the primary agent of religion itself (i.e., God).

<sup>90</sup>See: Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der Evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt*, 7th ed., ed. Martin Redeker (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter & Co., 1960), I, pp. 14-30; Kristensen, "Schleiermacher's opvatting," pp. 24-30; van der Leeuw, "Religion," col. 1861-2; van der Leeuw, "Inleiding," pp. 3-4. Of Schleiermacher, van der Leeuw remarked: "Everything later in theology and the science of religion proceeds from him in that his ideas are either opposed or further developed." Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Erlebnis, religiöses" in *RGG*, II, col. 255. Further on van der Leeuw's view of Schleiermacher's dominance, see: van der Leeuw, "Het nieuwe," 221-4.

<sup>91</sup>Van der Leeuw was also dissatisfied with Chantepie's definition of religion: "belief in superhuman powers and their worship" (Chantepie, *Lehrbuch*, I, p. 51). See van der Leeuw, "Inleiding," p. 2.

<sup>92</sup>About the human phenomenon of religion, van der Leeuw notes two further characteristics: religion is not individual but communal in character; and the goal of all religion is salvation. See *PR*, pp. 81-3, 208-10, 270-2, 610, 778-81.

<sup>93</sup>Van der Leeuw, "Erlebnis," col. 256.

Van der Leeuw says: "The peculiar relation that is built between oneself and the Other does not seem to one to proceed from oneself but from the Other, from God. Religion is not a human attempt, a human gesture, a human cultural possession but a gift from God to humanity, a change which God brings about in humanity through revelation."<sup>94</sup>

Thus, it is necessary to speak not of religion but of that which corresponds to revelation: faith. Faith, however, is hidden from historical conception. The task of its investigation belongs to philosophy of religion and theology. The historian of religion must hence bear in mind that the truly religious person conceives his or her religion in such a way that history can only speak of the human and least important part of it.<sup>95</sup> One must not forget that "the basic marvel of all religion is that the other becomes one's own. This is what justifies summarizing all religions under one concept, even though the means and way in which revelation takes place is different time and again."<sup>96</sup> In the final analysis for van der Leeuw, religion — an ambivalent relationship to the Holy, to God — is *both* a human phenomenon

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<sup>94</sup>Van der Leeuw, "Inleiding," p. 4. Elsewhere van der Leeuw writes about religion as the "bond of man to God" and revelation as the "bond of God to man." See Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Christendom en andere religies," *Algemeen Weekblad voor Christendom en Cultuur*, June 1, 1934.

<sup>95</sup>See: van der Leeuw, "Religion," col. 1862-3; van der Leeuw, "Godsdienst," pp. 346-7; van der Leeuw, "Godsgeloof," p. 351; van der Leeuw, "Inleiding," pp. 4-5; *PR*, pp. 3, 208, 382, 778-81.

<sup>96</sup>Van der Leeuw, "Religionsgeschichte," 6-7. Thus, for van der Leeuw, what is central to religion — in an ultimate sense — is revelation: the former should thus be seen as a response to the latter. See: Gerardus van der Leeuw, Review of H. T. Obbink, *De godsdienst in zijn verschijningsvormen* in *Mensch en Maatschappij* 10 (1934), 233-4; van der Leeuw, "Phaenomenologie der openbaring?" 127-9.

and a more-than-human phenomenon.

### III. In Search of Understanding

Van der Leeuw's search for understanding in the world of religious phenomena culminated in his forging a new method — what came to be called “the phenomenological method.” In order to see how and why he developed this method, it is helpful to understand his view of the history of the study of religion in the last few centuries. Moreover, it is important to understand van der Leeuw's view of primitive mentality, which functions as something of a “hermeneutical preface” to his view of the study of religion. Lastly, it is necessary to understand what van der Leeuw took the different branches of the study of religion to be and how he viewed their tasks and interrelationships.

#### a. Antecedents

Although the study of religion (*Religionswissenschaft*) was not widely and self-consciously practiced as a new discipline until the second half of the nineteenth century, its origins, van der Leeuw thought, actually go back to the late eighteenth century. The dawning of historical consciousness and the birth of the idea of humanity in the Enlightenment, coupled with the “disappearance” of the Christian God active in history, prepared the soil for new thinking about religion. Such thought, says van der Leeuw, sought

universal laws about and signs of humanity's development apart from the idea of revelation: religion has to do not with revelation but with reason or feeling. This essentially anti-Christian stance created an interest in non-Christian religions and had a levelling effect: all religions were thought to be similar and all should hence be tolerated since all can be summarized under one viewpoint (i.e., the idea of natural religion).

In this climate, the German scholar Christoph Meiners (1747-1810) practiced a phenomenological kind of history of religion. Seeking elements common to religion Christian and non-Christian (or the essence of religion), Meiners attempted to name and classify different religious phenomena. For that reason, van der Leeuw counts Meiners as the first phenomenologist of religion. Also noteworthy in this period, says van der Leeuw, are the efforts of the Swiss scholar Benjamin Constant (1767-1830), the most important scholar of religion of the Enlightenment (although he also belonged to the Romantic period to some degree). While he was not well-known, the ideas that he defended have become extremely popular without using his name. For Constant held that religion has to do with feeling. Hence, the student of religion should focus not just on externals but on inner affective states as well. Moreover, according to Constant, religious feeling is not accidental but corresponds to a fundamental law of human nature. In other words, to be human is to be religious. Furthermore, religion is a province unto itself

and cannot be reduced to something else or done away with. Constant, says van der Leeuw, did not care about the origin of religion but was rather concerned about the essence of religion; this concern made him superior to many nineteenth century scholars who followed him.<sup>97</sup>

The next period significant for the development of the study of religion, according to van der Leeuw, is the era of Romanticism, which overlapped somewhat with the first period (i.e., the Enlightenment) in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In this period, there is first of all the accomplishment of philosophical Romanticism, which attempted to understand the meaning of the history of religion as expressions of a primordial revelation. In this way, Creuzer interpreted myths and sagas as expressions of an original mother-tongue. Hegel, van der Leeuw goes on, believed he heard religions speak the language of reason; he was the first philosopher to treat the history of religion seriously. Herder was the first thinker to understand the particular voices of different peoples, the first to see history as experience, the first to see the writing of history as an act of sympathy and the first to understand the language of religion as poetry. He was thus highly significant for the development of the study of religion. Lastly, Schleiermacher sought to understand religion as religion; he opposed any

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<sup>97</sup>See: Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Religionsgeschichte" in *RGG*, IV, col. 1895; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "De godsdienstgeschiedenis in de crisis," *Vox Theologica* 4 (1933), 81-3; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Inzichten betreffende godsdienst en geschiedenis aan het eind der achttiende en het begin der negentiende eeuw" in *Levensvormen*, pp. 100-42: *PR*, pp. 789-93.

reduction of religion to anything else. In so doing, he broke the power of the Enlightenment interpretation of religion. Philosophical Romanticism, van der Leeuw concludes, was comprehensive but it naturally lacked expertise about particular religions.<sup>98</sup>

Precisely this lack of expertise was remedied by Romantic philology, which sought to move away from Romantic speculation by closely studying sources. Nineteenth century philologists nonetheless remained Romantic, van der Leeuw says, insofar as they viewed religion as expressive of a universal and unified way of human thinking. To enlighten this universal human thought, the philologists believed, one ought to study and compare different languages. This insight gave the study of religion a comparative impetus; much new material in translation appeared as a consequence. The work of Max Müller is especially noteworthy in this regard. At bottom, according to van der Leeuw, nineteenth century philology was Romantic and symbolic inasmuch as it had a tendency to see the life of nature symbolized in religious concepts. This period was an extremely fruitful one for the study of religion; one could say that in nineteenth century philology, *Religionswissenschaft's* real beginning can be seen.<sup>99</sup>

The next period in the history of the study of religion, according to van

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<sup>98</sup>See: Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Religion: III. Religionsgeschichtliche Entwicklung" in *RGG*, IV, col. 1876; van der Leeuw, "Religionsgeschichte" in *RGG*, col. 1895-6; *PR*, pp. 793-4.

<sup>99</sup>See: van der Leeuw, "Religionsgeschichte" in *RGG*, col. 1896; *PR*, pp. 794-5.



der Leeuw, was that of positivism. Positivism, he thought, flourished in an atmosphere spellbound by the idea of development. Nonetheless, positivism was still Romantic as well insofar as it understood religion as the language of humanity. That is, in religion humanity has spoken — but like a child. In classical Comtean parlance, the religious stage of humanity is past. Thus, much study of religion undertaken by those of a positivistic bent focused on “primitive religion” — a survival of humanity’s youth. The results of research in this era, says van der Leeuw, were inestimably great; this period represents the blossoming of the study of religion. However, this period also deserves particular criticism.<sup>100</sup>

Most notably, van der Leeuw is critical of the late nineteenth and even early twentieth century search — under the influence of positivism and the theory of unilinear evolution — for the origin of religion. The question of the origin of religion cannot, he argued, be historically answered: “Primordial religion [*Urreligion*] is not a historical manifestation; it lies on the other side of our knowledge and our ability to know.”<sup>101</sup> Whether in the guise of animism, dynamism, totemism, natural religion or high god degenerationism,

<sup>100</sup>See: van der Leeuw, “Religionsgeschichte” in *RGG*, col. 1896-7; *PR*, pp. 795-6.

<sup>101</sup>Gerardus van der Leeuw, “Urreligion” in *RGG*, V, col. 1417. The question of the origin of religion, van der Leeuw held, can only be discussed in philosophically and psychologically oriented anthropology (i.e., in the sense of “doctrine of humankind” and not in the sense of the social science known by this name): one can then study the origin of religion in oneself or in one’s neighbour just as well or better than in a non-literate person. See Gerardus van der Leeuw, “De religie van den voorhistorischen mens” in *Gedenkboek A. E. van Giffen. Een kwart eeuw oudheidkundig Bodemonderzoek in Nederland* (Meppel: J. A. Boom & Zoon, 1947), pp. 115-6.

the quest for the origin of religion ought to be abandoned — not only on historical but also on moral grounds: the presupposition of unilinear development dictates that prior things are valuable only as a preparation for what came later — the end of the chain is always the yardstick by which things are measured. Hence, the primitive is judged to be child-like or underdeveloped. Instead of seizing and distorting a given reality (such as primitive religion) in this way, van der Leeuw says, one would do better to surrender oneself to it and so try to see its unique character and value.<sup>102</sup> Rather than trying to grasp religion with the use of a comprehensive hypothesis, one should investigate what is common to religions and attempt to understand the essence of religion by studying its manifestations.<sup>103</sup>

In order to understand religion properly, it became clear to some scholars working after the heyday of positivism and evolutionism that an appeal to psychology would be helpful in attaining such understanding. This most

<sup>102</sup>This means for van der Leeuw that animism, dynamism and primordial monotheism ought to be regarded not as historical phenomena but as permanent structures found in various times and places in the history of religion. This will become clearer in the discussion of the phenomenological method below.

<sup>103</sup>See: Gerardus van der Leeuw, "De religieuze beteekenis van het animisme," *Mededeelingen Nederlandsch Zendingsgenootschap* 65 (1921), 301-20; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Animismus" in *RGG*, I, col. 347-8; Gerardus van der Leeuw, Review of J. J. Fahrenfort, *Het hoogste wezen der primitieven* in *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* (1929), 5-8; van der Leeuw, "Religion: III," col. 1875-7; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Opkomst en verval van geestelijke waarden," *Van Tijd tot Tijd* (1930), 11-4; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Die Struktur der Vorstellung des sogenannten höchsten Wesens," *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 29 (1931), 81-106; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Uit de godsdienstgeschiedenis," *Nieuwe Theologische Studiën* 14 (1931), 193-4; van der Leeuw, "Urreligion," col. 1417-8; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Nog eens het oermonotheïsme. Methode en theologie," *Studia Catholica* 9 (1933), 397-8; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Altägyptischer Pantheismus," *Aus der Welt der Religion* N. F. 1 (1940), 16-7.

contemporary period in the history of the study of religion<sup>104</sup> has sought to understand religion on its own terms rather than reducing it to something else. Ultimately stemming from the insights of Schleiermacher and Dilthey, this new approach to the study of religion — which one might call the school of understanding — van der Leeuw says, has been and is being most fruitfully practiced by Wilhelm Wundt, Lévy-Bruhl, Söderblom, Otto and Joachim Wach. It is not as though phenomena have not been understood before, van der Leeuw quickly adds. But in this new school the aim is to make understanding into a methodological principle. And this is precisely where van der Leeuw would seek to make a contribution of his own, to which the discussion will turn momentarily.<sup>105</sup>

## b. Primitive and Modern

As I noted above, van der Leeuw became interested in the problem of primitive mentality during his student days in Leiden (1908–16). One imagines the young doctoral student hard at work attempting to fathom the deep mysteries of ancient Egyptian religion, especially as they are expressed in the Pyramid Texts. Around the same time, the same young doctoral student is reading a book by a French philosopher turned anthropologist which

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<sup>104</sup>This statement is meant with reference to van der Leeuw's perspective in the 1920s and 1930s.

<sup>105</sup>See: van der Leeuw, "Religionsgeschichte" in *RGG*, 1897; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Uit de godsdienstgeschiedenis," *Nieuwe Theologische Studiën* 11 (1928), 297; van der Leeuw, "Rudolf Otto," 71–4; *IPG*, pp. 87–91; *PR*, pp. 796–8.

argues that not everybody in the world has thought or thinks like modern Westerners do. One imagines the sense of discovery that van der Leeuw must have felt as he put the two together: Lévy-Bruhl had given him a way to understand the hermeneutical distance which he felt existed between himself and the ancients.<sup>106</sup> Yet, he had to admit that this distance was not ultimate or decisive — for understanding the ancients was indeed possible. Perhaps these thoughts were van der Leeuw's first about the problem of primitive mentality. Consider the following highly significant words written in retrospect near the end of his life:

But what has taken a place of importance above all others in my work is the pluriformity of mental life. I found myself in the impossible situation of trying to understand religious life, not only that of so-called primitives but also that of antiquity and even that of our own day, in departing from modern thought such as it had been formulated by Descartes and Kant. It appeared necessary to me to admit of the existence of a primitive mentality which not only preceded modern thought but which also coexists with it in such a way that there is a modern in every primitive and a primitive in every modern.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>106</sup>See van der Leeuw, *Godsvoorstellingen*, pp. 1-6.

<sup>107</sup>Van der Leeuw, "Confession," 11. Van der Leeuw never tired of stressing the importance of primitive mentality and the co-presence of the two mental structures in all peoples in all times. See: Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Geestelijke stroomingen in onzen tijd* (Utrecht: G. J. A. Ruys, 1921), *passim*; *IG*, pp. 7-8; *UNE*, 28; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Het heidendom in den Indischen Archipel" in *Achste Koloniale Vacantie cursus voor Geografen* (n. p., 1927), pp. 3-5; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Primitieve religie in Indonesië," *Tijdschrift van het Koninklijk Nederlandsch Aardrijkskundig Genootschap* 2nd ser. 45 (1928), 873-81; Gerardus van der Leeuw, Review of K. T. Preuss, *Glauben und Mystik im Schatten des höchsten Wesens* in *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* (1928), 609-12; Gerardus van der Leeuw, Review of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *Le surnaturel et la nature dans la mentalité primitive* in *Mensch en Maatschappij* 8 (1932), 59-61; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Dynamisme en logies denken bij natuurvölker. Bijdrage tot de psychologie der primitieven van J. J. Fahrenfort," *Tijdschrift van het Koninklijk Nederlandsch Aardrijkskundig Genootschap* 2nd ser. 51 (1934), 16; *WG*, p. 6.

Van der Leeuw's first major work on primitive mentality was the aforementioned *La structure de la mentalité primitive* of 1928. In this work, he notes the importance of structural psychology for the debate about primitive mentality, which few seem to have realized at that time. Van der Leeuw goes on to describe primitive mentality as "asyntactical" and "heterological" (as correlates to and improvements on Lévy-Bruhl's terms "prelogical" and "participatory"): "We say that a thing is the cause or effect of another thing, that an object 'signifies' another such object. For primitive mentality, in a great number of cases a thing is another thing. The line of demarcation between different objects in the world is often totally absent."<sup>108</sup> There are several other characteristics which distinguish the two mentalities: whereas we think in individual terms, primitives think in collective terms; they lack our sense of identity; they conceive space and time differently than we do; they do not distinguish dreams and reality like we do; and their life is a whole and not compartmentalized like ours.<sup>109</sup>

However different the mentalities are, van der Leeuw continues, one cannot justifiably regard them as hermetically sealed entities existing in entirely different parts of space and time: "The greatest part and perhaps most important part of our spiritual existence is also dominated by press-

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<sup>108</sup>*SMP*, p. 6. Van der Leeuw particularly disliked the term "prelogical" because it appeared to imply an unjustifiable assumption about chronological order. See *SMP*, pp. 1-6.

<sup>109</sup>See *SMP*, pp. 6-13.

ing needs which are affective in character. One thinks in the first place of religion."<sup>110</sup> This is where Lévy-Bruhl fell short, according to van der Leeuw: he never applied the results of his research to moderns.<sup>111</sup> This shortcoming on the part of Lévy-Bruhl and many like-minded scholars can be explained, van der Leeuw thought, by the uncritical assumption of positivism: primitive mentality is regarded as inferior to modern logic, which is taken to be the best possible way of thinking and the culmination of a long process of development.<sup>112</sup> Poetry, art and religion are thus so many aberrations which have not yet disappeared in the inexorable march of human progress.

But how can one then justify the claim that primitive mentality is to be found in so many diverse peoples and places? Van der Leeuw responds to this question by appealing to structural psychology. That is, primitive mentality is not really a historical phenomenon but a non-historical, non-chronological and permanent structure of the human psyche. This structure may appear in purer form among non-literate peoples — but it is not absent among moderns: "We regard 'primitive' mentality as a general structure which embraces the same elements . . . as our mentality (we possess several of them) but differently grouped."<sup>113</sup> Primitive mentality and modern mentality are,

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<sup>110</sup>*SMP*, p. 15.

<sup>111</sup>See *SMP*, pp. 8, 13, 21.

<sup>112</sup>Van der Leeuw writes: "The fault of positivism was to isolate one single mode of thought . . . while rejecting all others as inferior and past." *SMP*, p. 29. Moreover: "The error of positivistic argumentation always is to be found in the fact that it represents the 'world' as a simple and solid thing, whereas the world changes with the mentality which contemplates it." *SMP*, p. 27.

<sup>113</sup>*SMP*, p. 29. See also: Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Primitive Religion" in *RGG*, IV, col.

in van der Leeuw's view, inextricably interwoven in our thought. What really distinguishes us from primitives is not our particular mentality but rather the fact that we are conscious of the interweaving of diverse elements which are taken to be incompatible. Alternately expressed: we are as primitive as the primitives sometimes but not always — we are able to think in different modes.<sup>114</sup> And, it bears repeating, religion is one of those areas in which all people engage in primitive ways of thinking. Thus, one cannot begin the study of religion without some reflection on primitive mentality: "Religious ideas and concepts ... can certainly never be formed according to the laws of pure theoretical reason."<sup>115</sup>

Evidently van der Leeuw felt he had not satisfactorily dealt with the problem of primitive mentality in *La structure de la mentalité primitive*, for nine years later (1937) he devoted another work to it. *De primitieve mensch en de religie* shows how the question of primitive mentality started as an ethnological problem for van der Leeuw and grew into an anthropological

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1496-7; van der Leeuw, "La mentalité," 485-94. In the latter essay, van der Leeuw argues that whether primitive or modern, "man" is always "man" — that is, a diversity of mental structures which unite in different combinations. Thus, all human beings participate in primitive mentality but in different degrees and ways; also, all human beings participate in modern mentality but in different degrees and ways. To understand primitive mentality, one must give up the myth of pure rational man: it is "impossible to explain human life in paying attention to reason alone or to will alone" (488). Thus, to properly understand primitive mentality, it is necessary to describe modern mentality — a task to which van der Leeuw turned in *De primitieve mensch en de religie*, to which the discussion will turn shortly.

<sup>114</sup>See *SMP*, pp. 30-1, 44-5.

<sup>115</sup>*IG*, p. 205.

and theological one.<sup>116</sup> In reviewing the scholarly debate about primitive mentality,<sup>117</sup> van der Leeuw reiterates his thesis that the two mentalities cannot be related in an evolutionistic fashion. Rather, the two should be seen as names or symbols for two structures of the human spirit present in all times and cultures — although not always in equal proportions. Thus, it is not a question of “us” and “them” but rather a question of two different structures in the same period or person: the “modern primitive” and the “primitive modern.”<sup>118</sup>

In once again reviewing the characteristics of primitive mentality which distinguish it from modern mentality, van der Leeuw notes that: the former does not distinguish subject and object like the latter; the former does not distinguish object and object like the latter; the former does not distinguish subject and subject like the latter; the former does not distinguish dream-consciousness from waking-consciousness like the latter; the former does not distinguish an economic or utility factor from the rest of life like the latter; the former relates to the world magically unlike the latter; the former is mythically oriented while the latter is conceptually oriented; and the former is ritually and recreatively oriented while the latter is historically

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<sup>116</sup>See *PMR*, p. 3.

<sup>117</sup>In so doing, van der Leeuw seeks to defend Lévy-Bruhl against his detractors. However, he also criticizes the French anthropologist for his positivistic assumption about the normativity of modern mentality. See *PMR*, pp. 5-17, 21-3.

<sup>118</sup>See *PMR*, pp. 10-1, 21-4.



and creatively oriented.<sup>119</sup>

Van der Leeuw next turns to a description of modern mentality — something seldom if ever done because the normativity of Western logical thinking is uncritically assumed by the vast majority of twentieth century people. Moreover, one cannot properly understand primitive mentality without understanding (and not just assuming) modern mentality. To this end, van der Leeuw sought to characterize modern mentality as an “abstraction.” That is, modern mentality is not a condition of the human spirit that one can actually find in reality but is rather that which remains when one eliminates the actual content of complete human thinking and experience. What remains after such abstraction is “concept,” something that is nothing in itself, something that is merely a way of conceiving reality. Without intending to disparage such abstraction, which is in fact necessary for scientific thought, van der Leeuw urges his reader to see it for what it is — no more, no less — and to warn against the totalitarian tendency to confuse the resultant projected logical world with reality itself.<sup>120</sup> He writes:

The sovereignty of abstraction, which in idealistic and materialistic forms dominated the greater part of the nineteenth century, is breaking up in our time against the hard powers of reality: man is once again discovering himself as a man of flesh and blood; he is finding back his passions; he is rediscovering the powers which dominate the world; he is even busy once again finding

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<sup>119</sup>See *PMR*, pp. 24-110. See also Gerardus van der Leeuw, “De religie der primitieven” in *De godsdiensten der wereld*, pp. 13-34.

<sup>120</sup>See *PMR*, pp. 140-4.

the reality of his gods and sometimes of his God.<sup>121</sup>

Modern mentality is, thus, a particular aspect of human being or what might be called one of many possible anthropological structures. And in this structure or form of life, van der Leeuw goes on, what one sees is the ability to abstract, the tendency to put distance between subject and object which leads to the representation and consciousness of an "I." This "I" in turn senses less and less that it belongs to abstracted reality. In this process of abstraction the "I" discovers the "Other." For this reason, modern mentality plays an important part in religion and in the process of human becoming.<sup>122</sup> Van der Leeuw concludes his provocative reflections on primitive and modern mentality and their significance for the study of religion by saying:

It is absolutely impossible to understand any religious phenomenon without consciousness of the anthropological structures with which we became acquainted above and which we called "primitive." The great fault of all kinds of historical and exegetical reflections in the study of religion is thus not seldom a lack of "primitive" consciousness. One interprets and explains according to the standard which a rational thinking person would apply — a person, moreover, who has learned to have respect for logic but who has simultaneously inherited a pietistic or humanistic religiosity. Fortunately much is changing in this regard. We must furthermore admit that these considerations apply more or less just as strongly to literature, art, law, economics and so forth. In a word, what has been said above applies to the entire life of the spirit, where "modern" standards are sometimes applied with the same ease as they are in the case of religion —

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<sup>121</sup> *PMR*, p. 143.

<sup>122</sup> See *PMR*, pp. 144-85. Van der Leeuw begins here to develop his anthropology — something beyond the scope and requirements of the present study. Further on his anthropology, see *MR*.

even though such standards are not applicable to the majority of the structures of human life. This practice should be stopped. On the other hand we do not wish to give the impression that religion is bound up with "primitive" mentality and separated from "modern" mentality. ... we do not wish to succumb to the temptation of romantically regarding "primitive mentality" as a sort of religious paradise.<sup>123</sup>

### c. Experience, Expression, Understanding

Before turning to the tasks and interrelationships of the different branches of the study of religion, a word about van der Leeuw's terminology is in order. He was, in short, not very precise in his designation of the general field of the study of religion — reflecting, it would seem, what he took to be imprecise use of terminology in the field in general.<sup>124</sup> He thus sometimes calls it "science of religion" (Dutch *godsdienswetenschap*, German *Religionswissenschaft*); on other occasions he refers to it as "history of religion" (Dutch *godsdiensgeschiedenis*, German *Religionsgeschichte*) or even "phenomenology of religion" (Dutch *phaenomenologie van den godsdienst*, German *Phänomenologie der Religion*). Sometimes he adds a qualifying term to these different designations (such as "general" or "comparative".) Hence, some care is required in the attempt to spell out van der Leeuw's view of the field of the study of religion as a whole.

With this in mind, one can safely say that van der Leeuw envisioned the

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<sup>123</sup> *PMR*, p. 169.

<sup>124</sup> See *PR*, p. 783.

study of religion — “the purely human attempt to understand the human phenomenon of religion”<sup>125</sup> — as consisting of four parts: history of religion, phenomenology of religion, psychology of religion and philosophy of religion. The first of these, beginning with a general concept of religion as a human phenomenon,<sup>126</sup> impartially studies and describes all the religions of the world — past and present, without distinction — as historical phenomena. History of religion is primarily engaged in detailed work; it attempts to ascertain what particular events took place in history. It asks: What happened? When? Where? How? History of religion attempts to establish facts and historical connections based on careful study of sources in their original languages. The historian collects data and provisionally interprets these in their historical contexts as the signs left behind by religious people of the past and present.<sup>127</sup> This of course implies that the “historian of religion” is more of a concept than a reality: one scholar may perhaps master two religions (languages, sources, history, ethnology, etc.) — but no more. *Truly* teaching history of religions would be a Sisyphean task. The fact-seeking and specialist nature of the history of religion also implies that it is in no way

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<sup>125</sup>Van der Leeuw “Nog eens,” 401. Elsewhere van der Leeuw describes the study of religion as the science which describes and compares the forms that man’s religious life and striving has taken in the course of history. See Gerardus van der Leeuw, “Het Christendom en de andere religies,” *Algemeen Weekblad voor Christendom en Cultuur*, January 26, 1934.

<sup>126</sup>See section IIb above.

<sup>127</sup>“The object of the history of religion is not only extremely large; it is more — it is alive.” Van der Leeuw, “Religionsgeschichte” in *RGG*, col. 1895.

a normative discipline or a systematic discipline. In other words, history of religion is neither theology nor phenomenology of religion: only historical connections are sought; only historical variety is regarded. History of religion, furthermore, does not need theology to do its work. But it does need phenomenology of religion to help it comprehend what is encountered in history; phenomenology helps history understand what, for example, prayer is; the former can thereby help the latter to better understand, say, Christian prayer or Islamic prayer.<sup>128</sup> History of religion can hence ill afford to isolate itself.<sup>129</sup>

Van der Leeuw's view of the history of religion as outlined above indicates that this branch of the study of religion is closely related to the phenomenology of religion — the area to which the majority of his attention as a scholar of religion was devoted. To appreciate and understand his view

<sup>128</sup>Van der Leeuw recognized the legitimacy of the "hermeneutical circle": to determine what happened in history, history of religion needs assistance from phenomenology of religion; to understand phenomena, on the other hand, phenomenology of religion must make use of the results of research provided by history of religion. The similarities of this scheme to those of Chantepie and Kristensen merit mention here. On the hermeneutical circle, see: Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Sündenbekenntnis. Das Lebenswerk Raffaele Pettazonis [sic]," *Theologische Rundschau* N. F. 10 (1938), 201; Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Vriendschap met God*, Mededeelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandsche Akademie van Wetenschappen, N. R. 1, Afd. Letterkunde (Amsterdam: Noord-Hollandische Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1938), pp. 1-3.

<sup>129</sup>On van der Leeuw's view of history of religion, see: *PT*, pp. 3-4, 7, 11-2; *IG*, pp. 1-3; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Phänomenologie der Religion" in *RGG*, IV, col. 1171; van der Leeuw, "Religion," col. 1860; van der Leeuw, "Religionsgeschichte" in *RGG*, col. 1892-5; Gerardus van der Leeuw, Review of H. T. Obbink, *De godsdienst in zijn verschijningsvormen* in *Museum* 40 (1933), 314-5; van der Leeuw, "Inleiding," p. 1; van der Leeuw, "Religionsgeschichte," 5; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Geschiedenis der godsdiensten" in *Inleiding tot de theologische studie*, ed. H. van Oyen (Groningen: J. B. Wolters, 1946), pp. 82-7; *WG*, pp. 4-5; *PR*, pp. 784-5.

of the phenomenology of religion and its method, it is helpful to examine these genetically (i.e., as these emerged in the course of his research). This has seldom been done by scholars: in most cases, discussions of van der Leeuw's phenomenological method have been limited to an examination of the extremely compact and less than self-explanatory "Epilegomena" of the *Phänomenologie der Religion*. The comments in the "Epilegomena" represent the fruit of almost two decades of thought and research. Hence, it is important to see how van der Leeuw arrived at the conclusions summarized in his *magnum opus*.<sup>130</sup>

This is best done by picturing the young van der Leeuw at the end of his doctoral studies at Leiden: having studied the history of religion in detail (i.e., ancient Egyptian religion and Christianity) and having been exposed to the efforts of Chantepie and Edvard Lehmann to give a systematic description of the multiplicity of religious phenomena,<sup>131</sup> the boundary seeker in

<sup>130</sup>In examining the genesis of van der Leeuw's phenomenology and its method, some repetition is unavoidable. In my view, such a genetic approach along with its attendant repetition is preferable to short and cryptic summaries of the "Epilegomena" undertaken by most scholars who have busied themselves with van der Leeuw's method.

<sup>131</sup>In his "Confession scientifique," van der Leeuw notes the phenomenological efforts of Chantepie and Lehmann but not Kristensen. Van der Leeuw apparently did not consider Kristensen to be a phenomenologist of religion. This hypothesis is evidenced by the fact that Eva Hirschmann's dissertation on phenomenology of religion, which was written under van der Leeuw's supervision, considers the phenomenological work of thirteen scholars — among whom Kristensen was not included. See Hirschmann, *Phänomenologie*. Also, Kristensen's name does not appear in van der Leeuw's various surveys of the history of phenomenology of religion. See for example *PR*, pp. 788–98. The Danish scholar Lehmann wrote the lengthy article on phenomenology of religion in the first edition of *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. See Edvard Lehmann, "Erscheinungswelt der Religion" in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 1st ed., ed. F. M. Schiele and L. Zscharnack (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1910), II, col. 497–577. As van der Leeuw put it: "I understood myself to be continuing the magnificent but essentially

search of unity wanted to forge ahead in his quest for understanding. Later in his life, van der Leeuw wrote of this time:

I always keenly sensed the need to find a method to embrace the entire vast domain of the religions of the world. I wished to do so without being restrained to a few provinces whose languages and civilization I knew. I also wished to do so without losing my way in a poorly grounded dilettantism. And behind this need for orientation and perspective I more and more strongly felt the need to penetrate to the heart of this impressive and enigmatic phenomenon known as religion, to find the way which leads from the scattered and quasi-detached phenomena of historical religions to the essence of the phenomenon, to proceed from religions to religion, to its being as it manifests itself to us.<sup>132</sup>

It is with roughly these thoughts in mind that the young professor gave his inaugural lecture in Groningen (1918), to which I have referred earlier. Seeking in this address to explain the task of the study of religion to his new theological colleagues,<sup>133</sup> van der Leeuw explains that his goal is indeed the study of religion and not the study of religions. Whereas the latter is an impossibility for one scholar, the former is not. The study of religion, van der Leeuw says in making a crucial move, presupposes some common ground in all religions — the same working of the human spirit — and can thus be approached not as a historical but as a psychological unity. While differences

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unphilosophical work of Chantepie and Lehmann." Van der Leeuw, "Confession," 10.

<sup>132</sup>Van der Leeuw, "Confession," 10. Elsewhere, van der Leeuw wrote: "In the end every monograph, as indispensable and important as it may be, is only valuable as a contribution to the history of religion as a whole — and it gains in value according to the degree to which the author consciously emphasizes this." Gerardus van der Leeuw, Review of H. Wagenvoort, *Imperium* in *Nieuwe Theologische Studiën* 24 (1941), 273.

<sup>133</sup>Van der Leeuw also sought to explain the relationship of the study of religion to theology. This matter will be dealt with in Chapter Three.

among religions are undeniable (i.e., empirically and historically), so are similarities (i.e., psychologically). Thus, the study of religion is a closed science with a unified object. This does not mean, however, that all religions constitute a unity from the point of view of content; rather, all religions constitute a unity according to form (i.e., the one similar functioning of the human spirit). To say this, van der Leeuw continues in making a less than crystal clear statement, is to say that religion must be phenomenologically treated.<sup>134</sup>

Phenomenology of religion studies and seeks to understand the phenomena of religion as such. Its method is predominantly psychological.<sup>135</sup> It does not seek the origin of religion; nor does it seek to derive all religion from one primordial form. Phenomenology seeks only to understand — and not explain — religion as such. In a word, it wishes to penetrate “to the psychological foundation.”<sup>136</sup> This means, among other things, that religion must be understood as religion; it must not be explained by or reduced to something else. To understand religion in this way, phenomenology presupposes the work of the history of religion. Constant and careful attention to the facts established by history of religion prevents phenomenology from falling

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<sup>134</sup>See *PT*, pp. 3–7.

<sup>135</sup>Because psychology and phenomenology are so closely connected for van der Leeuw, his conception of the study of religion can be regarded as three-fold (like his teachers Chantepie and Kristensen) and not really four-fold (i.e., history of religion, phenomenology/psychology of religion, philosophy of religion).

<sup>136</sup>*PT*, p. 7.



into hastily made generalizations which do not do justice to the phenomena in their complexity. Phenomenology reciprocates by preventing history from too heavily focusing on the historical material at the expense of a view of the whole.<sup>137</sup>

Yet, there is a problem here, van der Leeuw says in anticipating an objection: How can one master all religions so as to be able to draw sound conclusions about the essence of religion? Are we condemned to the mastery of one or two religions and mere acquaintance with the rest of them? Is Harnack right — must we study religion through one religion (i.e., Christianity) and view the rest as a distant mountain range? Phenomenology, van der Leeuw responds, can be content with neither careful study of one or two religions nor the view of the distant mountain range. The phenomenologist must learn to use intuition in recognizing and separating genuine from non-genuine, reliable from non-reliable, essential from non-essential in studying religion. For if the view of the whole is lost, detailed work remains fruitless.<sup>138</sup>

With respect to both object and method, then, phenomenology forms a unity. However, there is another problem to be faced. The phenomenologist

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<sup>137</sup>See *PT*, pp. 7-11. See also: Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Uit de godsdienstgeschiedenis," *Nieuwe Theologische Studiën* 4 (1921), 85-8; Gerardus van der Leeuw, Review of Karl Beth, *Einführung in die vergleichende Religionsgeschichte* in *Museum* 29 (1922), 18-9; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Nieuwe phaenomenologie — Edv. Lehmann," *Nieuwe Theologische Studiën* 8 (1925), 207-8.

<sup>138</sup>See *PT*, pp. 11-2.

must know the phenomena in their respective contexts and in their essence; one must be able to understand the phenomena and re-experience them, which is very difficult. It is not enough to pay attention to the externals of religion (doctrines, prayers, hymns, etc.); one must also seek the experience that lies behind these. How can this be done when the people to whom such experience belonged lived thousands of years ago in strange cultures with (as it often turns out) different mentalities? Where is our unity now? Indeed, van der Leeuw says, the task is difficult but not impossible. No matter how different the other may seem to us, he says in a debatable statement, nothing is so completely different that we do not carry the germ of it within ourselves. To deny the unity of the human spirit would be tantamount to making understanding impossible — and understanding is indeed possible. Even in modern society, there are primitive traces to be found; we must call on these to assist us in our task. Naturally, we can never penetrate to the very heart of the other, who lived in a foreign culture thousands of years ago. But in principle, van der Leeuw asserts (without sufficient argumentation), understanding such a culturally and temporally distant other is no more difficult than understanding our contemporaries. Both, after all, are different people. In studying the other, hence, we must look for affinities, for things that are also related to us. Only by so doing can we hope to approach a phenomenon in its distinctiveness and unity.

Such an approach to religion, van der Leeuw declares, means that to study religion one must be religious oneself. Without common threads and the possibility of basic resonance, real understanding cannot take place. This means that supposed objectivity is thrown overboard: one cannot, van der Leeuw argues, work in a presuppositionless fashion. Rather, one should become aware of one's presuppositions, aware of the place from which one views religion — and work from there.<sup>139</sup>

With the ambitious agenda laid down in his inaugural address before him, van der Leeuw began his professorial career by setting about the task of imposing some order on the ever-increasing material provided by the history of religion. Eventually, he realized, an overview of phenomenology of religion would have to be written. In a 1921 review of Karl Beth's contribution to this need, *Einführung in die vergleichende Religionsgeschichte* (*Introduction to Comparative History of Religion*), van der Leeuw writes: "An excellent introduction thus. Who will write the book that must follow this introduction?"<sup>140</sup> A few years later he answered the question with an introduction of his own.

*Inleiding tot de godsdienstgeschiedenis* (1924) is actually a rehearsal for the much larger *Phänomenologie der Religion* which followed almost a decade

<sup>139</sup>See *PT*, pp. 12-4. See also van der Leeuw, "Uit" (1921), 87-8. From this point in his address, van der Leeuw goes on to give his view of the place of the study of religion in theology, which I will consider in Chapter Three.

<sup>140</sup>Van der Leeuw, Review of Beth, *Einführung*, 19.

later (1933). In what van der Leeuw's students called "the little pheno" the author explains that phenomenology of religion takes the material presented by the history of religion and orders and arranges it according to some principle and in accordance with a general idea of religion. Phenomenology, he says, asks how the facts of history look when regarded from the point of view of religious life. It wishes to discover what an offering or a sacrifice is (i.e., not in particular but in general). This requires a classification of the facts of religious life; various phenomena must be brought into mutual relation wherein affinities are joined and differences are separated: "Our aim is thus to *describe* the facts according to their actual essence as fully as possible with the use of our classification."<sup>141</sup> In other words, van der Leeuw goes on, the object is to locate the general by continually looking at the specific — and vice versa to see the particular from the point of view of the general. The execution of this task requires the assistance of both psychology of religion and history of religion: the facts are described on the basis of one's knowledge of their (historical) external manifestation and (psychological) significance.<sup>142</sup>

Quite clearly, phenomenology does not seek the essence of phenomena in their historical origins. The origin, van der Leeuw believed, cannot be known — either historically or psychologically. Moreover, the essence of a

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<sup>141</sup> *IG*, p. 5.

<sup>142</sup> See *IG*, pp. 1-6.

phenomenon is not exclusively to be found in its origin and earliest forms. Nonetheless, he notes, much attention must be paid to primitive religion because only in the contrast between "primitive" and "modern" can human spiritual life be understood. Consequently, van der Leeuw says in another of his most important methodological statements, phenomenology does not seek the chronological but the comprehensible order of things; its object is to make the phenomena and their mutual relations comprehensible. Naturally, this implies that the phenomenologist is limited by his or her understanding, sphere of vision and experience. In full recognition of this limitation, the phenomenologist seeks to investigate the facts with an eye to the religious experience which stands behind them (and ultimately with an eye to the Being which stands behind them — this, in short, is van der Leeuw's view of the essence of religion). Having determined the experiential content and the psychical heart of the facts, the phenomenologist then compares the discovered experience with his or her own experience: the other is approached through oneself. It is not possible, van der Leeuw argues, to penetrate to the essence of phenomena without seeking affinity, without feeling and without re-experience.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>143</sup>See *JG*, pp. 7-10. For van der Leeuw, "essence" is hence not meant in a metaphysical sense but in a purely psychological sense as the deepest experience lying behind the phenomena. See *JG*, p. 10. Elsewhere he similarly describes "essence" not in terms of a metaphysical something beyond reality or an object in itself but in terms of the Being who is neither experience as such nor fact in itself — but the indissoluble unity of life and experience. See van der Leeuw, "Confession," 12.



Some people may, van der Leeuw continues, see this method as dangerous insofar as it seeks to understand and not to approve or disapprove of that which it studies. For such people, the option to remain content with annals and chronicles is always open. Fortunately, many scholars are now getting beyond this kind of timid myopia: general psychology has begun to deviate from rational and causal explanation of facts in opting for intuitive understanding of the background of the facts. In so doing, the difficulty of understanding strange and other spiritual life has been eased. Although every person is always an other, van der Leeuw again asserts somewhat controversially, the other is always related to the investigator. Both, after all, are human and hence not completely other. Even though the experience and feelings of the other may be very different, one can always find something within oneself that echoes at some level.<sup>144</sup> And only in applying the phenomenological method can one penetrate to the psychological centre of the facts investigated.<sup>145</sup>

<sup>144</sup>As Sierksma notes, phenomenology for van der Leeuw is thus "the art of listening." Sierksma writes: "Van der Leeuw methodologically and systematically made this art of listening the foundation of the study of religion. He was able to do this because he had fabulous intuition and an equally astonishing universality with which he was able to survey and penetrate the entire terrain of the study of religion. First listen and then speak — or else we do not know whereof we speak — that was always the leitmotif of his lectures." *DGHG*, p. 53. As I will note in Chapter Four below, this point about van der Leeuw's intuition and universality can be construed as a critique of his approach to the study of religion. Hubbeling testifies that van der Leeuw's lectures stressed the importance of looking for the original religious experience in reading a text. See Hubbeling, *Divine*, p. 8.

<sup>145</sup>See *IG*, pp. 10–3. This method, van der Leeuw argues, enables one to avoid dogmatic construction according to one system, naive objectivity and the temptation to explain religion in a reductive fashion.

Van der Leeuw's developing phenomenological method — which more and more came to draw heavily on structural psychology — still lacked, it seemed to him, theoretical elaboration.<sup>146</sup> In the latter half of the 1920s, he wrote several articles of a methodological nature in which he attempted to spell out his method more carefully.<sup>147</sup> These articles constitute his most important statement on method; the "Epilegomena" of the *Phänomenologie der Religion*, which are van der Leeuw's mature statement on method, very much presuppose these earlier methodological articulations. Hence, these articles merit careful consideration here.<sup>148</sup>

Both structural psychology and the study of religion, according to van der Leeuw, began to see in the early twentieth century that reality cannot be explained by only one principle or studied with the use of only one method. Psychologically learned researchers in the study of religion such as Söderblom, Otto, Lévy-Bruhl and Friedrich Heiler have helped to reverse

<sup>146</sup>Van der Leeuw's book reviews written during the 1920s show his growing conviction that the phenomenological method needs to make use of the recent results of research in structural psychology. See: van der Leeuw, "Nieuwe phaenomenologie," 202-6; Gerardus van der Leeuw, Review of Paul Hofmann, *Das religiöse Erlebnis in Deutsche Literaturzeitung* (1927), 1795-7; van der Leeuw, "Uit" (1928), 297; van der Leeuw, Review of Fahrenfort, *Het hoogste wezen*, 5-8; Gerardus van der Leeuw, Review of Alfred Jeremias, *Germanische Frömmigkeit in Nieuwe Theologische Studiën* 12 (1929), 146. See also Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Het achste Internationale psychologencongres te Groningen (6-11 September)," *Algemeen Weekblad voor Christendom en Cultuur*, September 24, 1926.

<sup>147</sup>It should be noted that van der Leeuw viewed science as that which all can practice so that all is comprehensible and accessible to all. Science must be undertaken in the service of life, not in the service of a select group of "experts" who talk to one another. Hence, he strove for clarity of expression so that "non-experts" could also understand and benefit from his work. See Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Het belang van de studie der godsdienstgeschiedenis (II)," *Bergopwaarts*, June 1, 1924.

<sup>148</sup>See especially *UNE*, 1-43. See also: van der Leeuw, "Erlebnis," col. 254-6; van der Leeuw, "Phänomenologie der Religion," col. 1171-2.

earlier methodological monism. But, van der Leeuw goes on, such an orientation to psychology antedates all these scholars; this orientation goes back to Dilthey (and even to the Romantics).<sup>149</sup> In recent times, the heritage of Dilthey is once again being explored by scholars with great profit. One can observe, van der Leeuw notes, a new turn to experience and the attempt to understand it from its expressions in life. These efforts by structural psychologists ought not to go unheeded by practitioners of the study of religion. In this connection, van der Leeuw sets himself to the task of giving an exposition of the results of research achieved by structural psychology and how these results might be applied by the study of religion.<sup>150</sup>

Central to van der Leeuw's entire approach is his desire to understand persons, or, more accurately, their expressed religious experience (*Erlebnis*).<sup>151</sup> The triad experience, expression, understanding indicates van der Leeuw's substantial debt to Dilthey, on whom he very much drew in formulation of his phenomenological method. Dilthey — and not Husserl, as is often mistakenly assumed — is the important German philosopher at the heart of van der Leeuw's phenomenology. Consider the following quotation, which demonstrates van der Leeuw's Diltheyan heritage:

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<sup>149</sup>On Dilthey, see Theodore Plantinga, *Historical Understanding in the Thought of Wilhelm Dilthey* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980).

<sup>150</sup>See *UNE*, 1-3.

<sup>151</sup>Because of the universal significance of religion, van der Leeuw thought, all life expressions can be seen as religious experience. See Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Leben" in *RGG*, III, col. 1508.



Something is experienced by an individual or a group. That which is experienced is immediately gone and cannot be repeated, not even by the one who experiences. The experience has, however, expressed itself in some way: in a gesture, in a word, in an act, in a work of art and so forth. This expression is most often faded and dissipated; in some cases, however, it is preserved for us. It naturally offers only a reflection of the experience. ... Now the phenomenology of religion finds such reflections in its material — its texts, monuments and so forth. If we wish to approach the religious experience, its expression must be understood. ... Three moments can be distinguished in the understanding of the experience: 1) devoted immersion of oneself in the object, so-called empathy 2) delimitation of the experience, purification of the experience of foreign elements and definition of what is in accordance with its essence 3) demonstration of the actual meaning of the experience. If we have come this far, then we can say we have understood the experience insofar as this is possible for us. The result is naturally never an adequate picture of reality; the result is related to the experience ideal-typically.<sup>152</sup>

The heart of van der Leeuw's method is contained in this quote. What is required now is an expanded analysis of it.

First of all, there is the matter of empathy (*Einfühlung*). Unlike the physicist, van der Leeuw says, the phenomenologist cannot be content with viewing an object from a distance. Rather, one must enter into the object, put oneself into its place and re-experience it. Obviously, this means that the reality sought by the phenomenologist is not spatio-temporal: the phenomenologist does not seek causal connections but rather attempts to

<sup>152</sup>Van der Leeuw, "Erlebnis," col. 255-6. Because the primordial experience is gone and cannot be repeated, van der Leeuw says, the hunt for the origin of religion should be given up: we should seek the essence of religion instead. See: Gerardus van der Leeuw, Review of Paul Hofmann, *Allgemeinwissenschaft und Geisteswissenschaft*, in *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* (1927), 997; van der Leeuw, Review of Fahrenfort, *Het hoogste wezen*, 8.

penetrate to the stream of consciousness in which the object participates. This can only be done from within; the unanalysed whole must be allowed to have an effect on the researcher. Only then can empathetic understanding begin to stir. Empathy, van der Leeuw says, has to do with wholes — and for this reason, analysis is an obstacle for empathy. “Whoever dismantles the whole kills it. And we have to do with living things.”<sup>153</sup> Alternately formulated: Understanding of the whole requires re-experience — and this in turn requires the openness to and the allowance of the object’s effect. Only by allowing such action by the object can the phenomenologist understand an “I” and re-experience the experiences of the “I.”<sup>154</sup>

Proceeding in such a wholistic fashion does not, however, preclude analysis entirely. But the analysis done by the phenomenologist is fundamentally different from that done by the natural scientist. To get to know a river, van der Leeuw says, one does not look at its parts, at drops or buckets of water; rather, one learns to swim — and this is an art. Similarly, phenomenological understanding must be learned and practiced, like any other art. To the phenomenologist, analysis means taking the phenomena as they present themselves, looking for commonly related elements and seeking their essence. Phenomenological analysis is not rational but intuitive. In short, one takes something in and allows what stands before one to be born anew; one then

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<sup>153</sup> *UNE*, 4.

<sup>154</sup> See *UNE*, 3–5.

finds the proper point of view from which the object must be seen in order to understand it in its life context. This naturally presupposes the work of classification of phenomena.<sup>155</sup> "Phenomenology helps us understand reality by allowing us to know what we are talking about and by making sure we never speak or think we can speak about the so-called real. The basis of this procedure always remains living and loving devotion to the experience — empathy itself."<sup>156</sup> Van der Leeuw further — and somewhat surprisingly — notes that it is not necessary to distinguish introspection (self-perception) and empathy (perception of the other): the other is equally as clear and obscure to me as I am to myself. To understand the content of my experience as well as that of the other, the process of re-experiencing is necessary.<sup>157</sup>

Understanding is a hard taskmaster; in order to reach it, the phenomenologist must go a step further. Now that analysis has taken place, it is necessary to see how the parts relate to the whole and vice versa. This means that the phenomenologist seeks comprehensible relations (*verständliche Zusammenhänge*). Van der Leeuw borrowed this term from Karl Jaspers, who opposed genetic understanding (which attempts to fathom personality by placing oneself in the place of the personality in question) to causal explanation (which links facts in a chain of regularities in the manner of the natural

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<sup>155</sup>See van der Leeuw, "Phänomenologie der Religion," col. 1171.

<sup>156</sup>UNE, 7.

<sup>157</sup>See UNE, 6-8.

sciences.).<sup>158</sup> From the many individual phenomena of phenomenological analysis, genetic understanding once again produces a living whole through reconstruction governed by intuition. Such understanding brings about the visualization of the object in question the way it is and the way it emerges. In so doing, defining boundaries, differentiation, distinction, naming and the experience of relations constitute one procedure, namely, understanding in the fullest sense of the term. To describe "B," one must also describe "A" and "C" — and this constitutes a to-be-understood relation. To form such relations, one needs evidence; for phenomenologists, this presupposes the capacity for divination, for intuitive perception of the essential, the typical and the meaningful. Such presupposition approaches artistic giftedness and must be conscientiously practiced in order to achieve results.<sup>159</sup>

Understanding in the above manner claims no correspondence to reality. This raises the subject of ideal types.<sup>160</sup> Ideal types bring together comprehensible relations into an experience and have as their goal making

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<sup>158</sup>Van der Leeuw thought Jaspers to be an able psychologist in the tradition of Dilthey and drew on him quite heavily in the formulation of his phenomenological method. Jaspers' famous book *Vernunft und Existenz* consists of five lectures which he delivered at the University of Groningen in 1935 — which happened to concur with van der Leeuw's rectorship of the university. On Jaspers, see: Peter Koestenbaum, "Jaspers, Karl" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1967), IV, pp. 254-8; Leszek Kolakowski, "Jaspers, Karl" in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: The Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987), VII, pp. 557-8. On van der Leeuw's view of Jaspers, see: Gerardus van der Leeuw, "De beteekenis van Karl Jaspers," *De Gids* 99/3 (1935), 307-22; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Karl Jaspers," *Der Clercke Cronike* 11/22 (1935), 215-6.

<sup>159</sup>See *UNE*, 8-10.

<sup>160</sup>Van der Leeuw adapted the notion of ideal type from Dilthey, Weber and Jaspers. See *UNE*, 10-3.

life comprehensible through an experienced and normative kind of construction. Ideal types are not copies of reality; and they need not even be found in reality. Without them and artistic capacity, however, description and understanding are not possible:

"Reality" is not knowable according to understanding psychology; one can measure it, count it, statistically process it, chronologically divide it up — but all of this does not help understanding at all. "Reality" does not even express anything; the understanding psychologist or historian must interpret it. And it consists for him only of signs and hieroglyphs which "indicate" something. What the signs finally "mean" depends simply on the experience of the psychologist or historian in the act of interpretation. "Sources," essential though they are, have never made the great historian; that is done by the historian's practiced intention and "fine understanding."<sup>161</sup>

Naturally, van der Leeuw continues, the phenomenologist cannot be artistic without qualification. That is, unlike the artist, the phenomenologist is not completely free to fantasize and create; the latter is in some sense a slave to the phenomena and thus limited in his freedom. Bound to a specific object, phenomenology pursues science and not art in search of understanding. But in so doing it may be artistic.<sup>162</sup>

Now, says van der Leeuw, we have a method to study religion.<sup>163</sup> And

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<sup>161</sup> *UNE*, 14–5.

<sup>162</sup> "Knowledge of signs, understanding language in the first place is, like the creation of signs, the deed of the poet. Every feeling that we today all feel in ourselves and know by a particular name had to be, as Scheler appropriately remarked, forced by a poet from the terrible dumbness of our inner life." *UNE*, 16.

<sup>163</sup> See the following compact summaries of van der Leeuw's method: *SMP*, p. 26; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Phénoménologie de l'âme," *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* (1930), 3; van der Leeuw, "Religionsgeschichte" in *RGG*, col. 1893.

this method, he asserts, has a number of advantages: it frees us from the illusion that one's ideal-typical experience of the phenomenon is the primordial experience; it guards against the tendency to explain by recognizing that one simply understands (and further prevents one from having to say anything about the question of truth); it overcomes "annalism" and mere chronicling in the study of religion; it gradually expands the "I" who understands and thus makes even greater understanding possible. One must not forget, however, that this method is also subject to two dangers: arbitrariness and oversystematization. Recognition of these potential dangers helps one to avoid falling victim to them.<sup>164</sup>

In order to clarify his method's use, van der Leeuw provides some examples.<sup>165</sup> Take, he says, the constantly debated question about the origin of religion. Some scholars locate the origin of religion in animism and others in dynamism. But, van der Leeuw points out, representatives of neither position were there at the beginning: the primordial experience is long since gone and cannot be known. However, one can learn to understand how humanity has behaved in the face of powers. Thus, one does not propound two theories but rather one experiences two ideal types (i.e., animism and dynamism). Both portray but one side of reality — as ideal types the two complement and complete one another. Animism and dynamism are hence

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<sup>164</sup>See *UNE*, 21-7.

<sup>165</sup>See *UNE*, 27-43.

not historical phenomena but ideal-typical structures useful in understanding religion: "Animists and dynamists do not exist anywhere. There are people who have experiences; and we exist and have our experiences — and the 'animist' or the 'dynamist' is such an experience."<sup>166</sup>

With the above formulation of his method as well as the rehearsal constituted by "the little pheno" behind him, van der Leeuw was prepared to write what his students conversely called "the big pheno" (i.e., *Phänomenologie der Religion*) — the book by which most scholars of religion know and judge him. Although matters of a formal methodological nature are reserved for the "Epilegomena," van der Leeuw nonetheless makes some interesting methodological comments here and there throughout the book. He notes in the "Preface" that in seeking to make the material of the history of religion comprehensible, knowledge of the historical material is presupposed.<sup>167</sup> He further warns the reader that no search for the origin of religion will be found in the book.<sup>168</sup> Phenomenology is concerned with the human response to the experience of power — and not with revelation as such or with God as

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<sup>166</sup> *UNE*, 32. See also: van der Leeuw, "Die Struktur," 81–106; van der Leeuw, "Nog eens," 397–8.

<sup>167</sup> See *PR*, p. v. As I noted in section IIb above, van der Leeuw believed religion to be found only in historical religions.

<sup>168</sup> In his treatment of primitive religion, van der Leeuw again reviews the debates about animism, dynamism and primordial monotheism and again concludes that all these phenomena are valid as structures. "Phenomenology is not concerned with any 'primordality' [*Urheit*]." *PR*, p. 273. "Primordial religion is thus not a question for us; the primordial basis of religion is hidden from us." *PR*, p. 669. See also *PR*, pp. vi, 8–9, 83–4, 164, 171–6.

such.<sup>169</sup> In such study of human religious experience, the phenomenologist cannot proceed in a presuppositionless fashion. Those who attempt to do so actually import a host of unconscious presuppositions into their work.<sup>170</sup> One lives in the world and not outside of it; to truly understand, one needs to call on one's entire person and resources.<sup>171</sup> To be presuppositionless is thus to be bereft of understanding. Hence, says van der Leeuw, one must begin from oneself. For a Christian, this means beginning from Christianity (i.e., from Christian experience). And for a Buddhist, this means beginning from Buddhism. Phenomenology does not decide who is "right"; it observes *epoche*.<sup>172</sup>

In the "Epilegomena" van der Leeuw attempts to define both phenomenology and phenomenon. Phenomenology, he says, seeks the phenomenon — that which shows itself. In so showing itself, a phenomenon is related both to that which shows itself and the person to whom it is shown. Thus, phenomenology is neither purely objective or subjective.<sup>173</sup> A phenomenon is

<sup>169</sup>See *PR*, pp. 3, 208, 382, 640-2. See also: Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Offenbarung" in *RGG*, IV, col. 654-5; van der Leeuw, "Phaenomenologie der openbaring?" 125-7.

<sup>170</sup>"One is amazed how modern scholars so casually apply modern concepts ... to religion." *PR*, p. 619. See also: Gerardus van der Leeuw, Review of Rudolf Otto, *Das Gefühl des Überweltlichen in Museum* 40 (1933), 79-80; Gerardus van der Leeuw, Review of C. J. Bleeker, *Inleiding tot een phaenomenologie van den godsdienst in Mensch en Maatschappij* 11 (1935), 147-8.

<sup>171</sup>"Scientifically, we are living in a time of transition: gradually we are coming to see that a method which does not reckon with the most important things in life — hunch, beauty, faith — cannot be the right one." Gerardus van der Leeuw, Review of Edgar Dacqué, *Das verlorene Paradies in Theologische Literaturzeitung* 64 (1939), 440.

<sup>172</sup>See *PR*, pp. 736-8.

<sup>173</sup>Metaphysics, according to van der Leeuw, is about objects and psychology is about subjects.



an object related to a subject and a subject related to an object. The essence of any phenomenon is the fact that it shows itself to someone — and when this someone begins to speak about what has been shown to him, phenomenology begins. The phenomenon, as it shows itself, has three levels of phenomenality: its relative hiddenness (which corresponds to experience); its gradual obviousness (which corresponds to understanding); and its relative transparency (which corresponds to witnessing). The last two levels constitute actual phenomenology.<sup>174</sup> Once again, it bears repeating at this point that Husserl's contribution to van der Leeuw's phenomenology, which has been much overrated, is very small at best.<sup>175</sup>

Van der Leeuw goes on to discuss the nature of experience and the necessity of reconstruction. Because experience almost immediately disappears into the past (see above), it must be reconstructed. This means, according to van der Leeuw, that one must make a sketch of the chaotic jumble of so-called reality. This sketch is called "structure." In meaningfully organizing chaotic reality into structures, one sees that meaning belongs in part to the ordered reality and in part to whoever seeks to understand it; the kingdom of meaning is a third kingdom beyond mere subjectivity and objectivity. Meaning is thus the gate to the unapproachable reality of the primordial experience: the investigator's meaning and the meaning of reality become

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<sup>174</sup>See *PR*, pp. 768-9.

<sup>175</sup>Van der Leeuw seems to have borrowed the term *epoche* from Husserl. Other than this, there is little to be said about his relationship to Husserl.

one in the act of understanding. Understanding, van der Leeuw says, dawns on one as similar experiences (or comprehensible relations) come together to form a whole or a unity — or what can be called a type. The type has no “reality” of its own; it is not a photograph of reality. It is timeless and need not even have appeared in history. An example of a type, says van der Leeuw, is what is commonly referred to as “soul,” which never and nowhere appears as such. There are only beliefs in particular kinds of souls. Yet there is a type which is referred to as soul, a comprehensible relation connecting various conceptions of soul.<sup>176</sup>

When one takes note of such a type and speaks about what has shown itself, one engages in phenomenology (i.e., *logos* about phenomena). Such speech contains several stages which can be distinguished in theory but not in practice. First of all, one names that which has become visible and classifies it as this or that. Secondly, one interpolates the phenomenon into one's own life and seeks to experience it methodologically. This step is necessary for proper interpretation of the phenomenon: one must oneself experience that about which one wishes to speak. An analogy here, says van der Leeuw, is the procedure of the actor or the artist. Thirdly, one recognizes limits. Phenomenology is not metaphysics; as one understands, one employs brackets and restraint (*epoche*). Phenomenology, in other words, does not judge a

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<sup>176</sup>See *PR*, pp. 769-72.

phenomenon's truth, value or reality. Fourthly, having seen what has shown itself, one seeks to clarify what one has seen. Those things which belong together should be put together; those things which do not belong together should be separated (i.e., typologically). Fifthly, the above four acts together constitute true understanding: chaotic reality becomes a revelation. Experience is understood through its expressions and thus, van der Leeuw says, science is the science of understanding — or hermeneutics. (Again, van der Leeuw's Diltheyan orientation can be detected in this formulation.) While not an easy task, understanding is always possible in principle, van der Leeuw says in reiterating his debatable claim, because there is always something in accordance with our human experience that makes other human experience comprehensible (i.e., through its expressions).

To complete its task, phenomenology needs perpetual correction by auxiliary disciplines (archaeology, philology). Phenomenology must always be prepared to confront the data — although to understand the data one needs understanding (the hermeneutical circle). Without perpetual correction, phenomenology becomes art or fantasy.<sup>177</sup>

In the formulation of his approach in the "Epilegomena," van der Leeuw notes that he has been guilty of a certain inconsistency: one must begin

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<sup>177</sup>See *PR*, pp. 772-7, 787-8. Hubbeling notes that van der Leeuw applied perpetual correction to his own work: when one of his works was to be reprinted, he often sought to revise and update it. This is especially true of his major works *Wegen en grenzen*, *Phänomenologie der Religion* and *Inleiding tot de theologie*. See Hubbeling, *Divine*, pp. 9-10.

one's work from one's own experience — in his case, this means beginning from the experience of Christian faith. Yet, one must also observe *epoche*. How can this conflict be resolved? In other words, how can one understand religion by watching from a distance? This problem vanishes, van der Leeuw says — making a strong theological claim — when one recognizes that understanding ultimately reaches a boundary where it loses its name and becomes a "being understood": the final ground of understanding does not lie in oneself but in the other (God) who understands from the other side of the boundary. In other words, all understanding is ultimately religious; all meaning leads to ultimate meaning. One can also say that all love is ultimately being loved (i.e., a response to the God who loved us first). And for this reason, understanding does indeed presuppose *epoche* — understood not as the attitude of the cold-blooded spectator but rather as self-surrendering love or the loving gaze of the lover upon the beloved object.<sup>178</sup>

After composing the *Phänomenologie der Religion*, van der Leeuw apparently felt that he had articulated the nature and method of phenomenology in an adequate manner, for he never added anything substantial to it. He

<sup>178</sup>See *PR*, pp. 781–3. As Pettazzoni once remarked, for van der Leeuw it is not enough to study religion in order to understand it; it is necessary to love it. For as van der Leeuw said: "Loving and understanding are much the same thing." See Pettazzoni, "Gerardus van der Leeuw," p. 5. Van der Leeuw's love for religious phenomena naturally prevented him from negatively judging non-Christian religions. He once criticized his Dutch Catholic colleague K. L. Bellon for characterizing everything not in accordance with Christianity as pseudo-religion, superstition and false religion. Van der Leeuw wrote: "That this is not my method, I emphatically do not need to say." Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Godsdiensthistorische literatuur," *Nieuwe Theologische Studiën* 18 (1935), 219.

did summarize his mature views on this matter on a number of occasions.<sup>179</sup> But these summaries are precisely that — summaries and restatements; they do not deviate from his position as developed above. Hence, they need not be reviewed here.

Van der Leeuw's comments about the final two subdivisions of the study of religion are very brief. Psychology of religion, he says, investigates the psychical aspect of religion, the nature of religious experience (the content of religious consciousness and the way religious experience comes to be). As such, psychology of religion is limited to one terrain — consciousness. For its data, it turns to the history of religion. For its method, it turns to psychology.<sup>180</sup>

Philosophy of religion moves beyond the limitations imposed on history and phenomenology of religion. Philosophy of religion investigates faith.<sup>181</sup> Drawing on history and phenomenology of religion (phenomenology is a bridge from history to philosophy), philosophy exercises "worldly wisdom" in making judgments as to the value, truth and reality of religious phenomena. It thus forms the apex of the study of religion.<sup>182</sup>

<sup>179</sup>See: Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Phaenomenologie van den godsdienst" in *Inleiding tot de theologische studie*, ed. H. van Oyen (Groningen: J. B. Wolters, 1946), pp. 189-90; *IPG*, pp. 1-9. The latter is a particularly clear and helpful summary.

<sup>180</sup>See: *IG*, p. 3; van der Leeuw, "Religionsgesichte" in *RGG*, col. 1894; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Godsdienstpsychologie" in *Winkler Prins Algemeene Encyclopaedie*, 5th ed., ed. J. De Vries (Amsterdam: N. V. Uitgevers-Maatschappij "Elsevier," 1935), VIII, p. 350; *PR*, pp. 785-6.

<sup>181</sup>It bears mention here that theology also investigates faith — although with different presuppositions and method.

<sup>182</sup>See: *IG*, p. 3; van der Leeuw, "Religionsgesichte" in *RGG*, col. 1893-4; van der

To sum up: From his chief guides in the study of religion (Chantepie, Kristensen, Lévy-Bruhl, Söderblom and Otto), van der Leeuw sought to explore the world of religion, which he conceived as an ambivalent relationship to the holy, in a four-fold fashion (historically, phenomenologically, psychologically and philosophically). His own preference and specialty — indeed his child — was the phenomenological approach. For this phenomenological approach, he was indebted to Dilthey and structural psychology (and not Husserl). Van der Leeuw's psychologico-phenomenological approach to religion amounts to a refined method for understanding religious experience through its expressions. He forged this approach against the background of positivistic and evolutionistic approaches to the study of religion, which he saw as deeply problematic (i.e., because of the ill-fated search for the historical origin of religion, which explains — but does not understand or love — and which hence distorts religion).

Van der Leeuw always stressed that the study of religion can ill afford to isolate itself. Although it is an independent discipline,<sup>183</sup> it needs to pay attention to other disciplines.<sup>184</sup> And other disciplines need to pay attention to it. This is especially true of theology: although the study of

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Leeuw, Review of Obbink, *De godsdienst in Museum*, 314-5; van der Leeuw, "Inleiding," p. 4; *WG*, pp. 4-5; *PR*, p. 786.

<sup>183</sup>"I am of the opinion that the science of religion and theology are two independent disciplines." *ST*, 321.

<sup>184</sup>See: van der Leeuw, "De godsdienstgeschiedenis," 80-1; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Bericht over de godsdienstwetenschap," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 4 (1949-50), 121; Bleeker, ed., *Proceedings*, p. 20.

religion can exist on its own and be practiced independently (from the point of view of the practitioner of the study of religion), its proper destination is theology (from the point of view of the Christian theologian). For the study of religion (and especially phenomenology of religion) "frees the terrain for actual theological questioning."<sup>185</sup> This last statement raises the subject of the next chapter: the nature of theology.

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<sup>185</sup>Van der Leeuw, "De godsdienstgeschiedenis," 86.





## Chapter 3

# Destination: The Nature of Theology

One might argue that it is superfluous to treat the relation of the history of religions to theology, because they are so different in character, that collision is practically excluded. It seems to me, that there are two arguments, which justify an inquiry into this issue. First, the practical consideration that in some universities the chair of the history of religions is located in the faculty of theology. The professor who occupies that chair is therefore forced to state his attitude towards theology. In the second place theology also claims to offer a scientific treatment of religious facts. How to define the difference in method and to draw the borderline between the two sciences?<sup>1</sup>

### I. Between Orthodoxy and Modernity

Karl Barth once remarked that theologically speaking, the nineteenth century belonged to Schleiermacher. Inspired by *the* "church father of the nineteenth century," virtually all nineteenth century Protestant theologians were in some sense "mediating theologians" (*Vermittlungstheologen*) — seek-

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<sup>1</sup>C. J. Bleeker, "The relation of the History of Religions to kindred religious Sciences, particularly Theology, Sociology of Religion, Psychology of Religion and Phenomenology of Religion," *Numen* I (1954), 142.

ing to reconcile Christianity and culture, theology and contemporary philosophy. Beyond this general characteristic of nineteenth century Protestant theology, however, the designation "mediating theology" also describes a particular nineteenth century theological school.<sup>2</sup> This school and its agenda constitute part of the broad theological milieu in which the young van der Leeuw was born and educated. Hence, a few words about it — of an ideal-typical nature — are in order here.<sup>3</sup>

The chief conviction of mediating theology was that simple Biblical faith and the spirit of scientific inquiry should penetrate one another. In its consequent desire to overcome the alternatives of unscientific ecclesiasticism and unecclisial scientism, it assumed three things: 1) that theology's point of departure is to be found in Christian pious self-consciousness, in which the divine spirit and the human spirit coalesce 2) that the religious is strongly connected to the ethical, which in turn is connected to the idea of the kingdom of God — construed not eschatologically but morally, and 3) that Christianity is to be understood historically as the consequence of the religio-moral impulse which went out from the person of Jesus Christ to

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<sup>2</sup>See: Karl Barth, *Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert. Ihre Vorgeschichte und ihre Geschichte* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1981), p. 379; Felix Flückiger, *Die protestantische Theologie des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), p. 44.

<sup>3</sup>On mediating theology, see: Flückiger, *Die protestantische*, pp. 44-61; Gottfried Hornig, "Die Vermittlungstheologie" in *Handbuch der Dogmen- und Theologiegeschichte*, ed. Carl Andresen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), III, pp. 164-73; E. Schott, "Vermittlungstheologie" in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3rd ed., ed. Kurt Galling (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1962), VI, col. 1362-4.

human consciousness. Mediating theology thus sought to uphold the validity of both confessional theology and liberalism. Inspired not only by Schleiermacher but also by Hegel, it wished to remain simultaneously contemporary and traditional: it desired neither to accommodate Christian doctrine to contemporary science nor to accommodate contemporary science to Christian doctrine. Rather, it sought a synthesis of the two. In the belief that the essence of Christianity becomes ever clearer throughout its historical development and that revelation is an event mediated by the Holy Spirit and experienced in faith, mediating theology envisioned the theological task as one in which the Bible is scientifically interpreted in order to give an account of Christian doctrine (confession) for the period in question. In the nineteenth century, execution of this theological task meant overcoming the polarities of supernaturalism and rationalism.

Mediating theology was very much a German child. However, it had a close cousin in The Netherlands known as "ethical theology."<sup>4</sup> The be-

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<sup>4</sup>On ethical theology, see: J. van den Berg, "Chantepie de la Saussaye, Daniël" in *Biografisch Lexicon voor de geschiedenis van het Nederlandse Protestantisme*, ed. D. Nauta (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1983), II, pp. 118-21; R. H. Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck als dogmaticus* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1961), pp. 65-114; "Ethischen" in *Christelijke Encyclopaedie voor het Nederlandsche Volk*, ed. F. W. Grosheide (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1925), II, pp. 122-3; H. G. Groenewoud, "Ethischen" in *Christelijke Encyclopaedie*, 2nd ed., ed. F. W. Grosheide and G. P. van Itterzon (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1957), II, p. 652; T. L. Haitjema, *De richtingen in de Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*, 2nd rev. and expanded ed. (Wageningen: H. Veenman & Zonen, 1953), pp. 17, 46-101, 224-40; Hallencreutz, *Kraemer*, pp. 50-99 *passim*; O. Noordmans, "Ontwikkeling en toekomst van de ethische theologie" in *Geestelijke perspectieven* (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, [1930]), pp. 125-77; Obbink, "Pierre Daniël Chantepie de la Saussaye," pp. 100-20; J. J. Stam, "Van de ethische theologie naar Barth" in *Ernst en vrede. Opstellen rondom de ethische theologie* (The Hague: Boeken-centrum N. V., 1951), pp. 32-61; J. Veenhof, *Revelatie en inspiratie. De openbarings*

ginnings of ethical theology go back to two thinkers who were critical of Enlightenment rationalism and who sought to locate religion in the realm of the heart, feeling, experience and consciousness: Schleiermacher and the Swiss theologian Alexandre Vinet (1797-1847). Drawing on the work of Schleiermacher, Vinet and German mediating theology, Daniël Chantepie de la Saussaye (1818-74) — the father of Dutch ethical theology — sought to face the problems facing Dutch Protestantism in the nineteenth century.

Chantepie studied theology at the University of Leiden. Upon completion of his education, he became a pastor. In his work as a pastor, he keenly sensed the titan struggle taking place in nineteenth century Dutch ecclesiastical life between orthodoxy and modernity, between supernaturalism and rationalism. Deeply inspired by the efforts of Schleiermacher, Vinet and the German mediating theologians to meet the theological needs of the day, Chantepie sought a "Christological-anthropological reorientation" in theology so that it would once again be possible for Christianity to make known the message of the gospel in the modern world. Such a reorientation in theology, he thought, meant finding a way to relate Christianity and culture, revelation and reason, theology and science — for one-sidedness in either direction would not do. Christology constitutes the key to this mediation: in the God-man Jesus Christ can be seen the paradigmatic rela-

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*en schriftbeschouwing van Herman Bavinck in vergelijking met die der ethische theologie* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn N. V., 1968), pp. 7, 60-93, 669-78.

tionship between the divine and the human. Chantepie called this proposed reorientation and mediation in theology "ethical." By this term, he did not primarily have "morality" in mind. Rather, by "ethical" he meant an existential, non-intellectualistic attitude to theology and indeed all of life. This in turn implied that theology's point of departure and criterion of truth is to be found in Christian experience and conscience (i.e., experience of the person of Jesus Christ to whom the Bible bears witness).

In conjunction with others of like mind, Chantepie sought to gain public voice for his views. To this end, he sought to establish a journal in 1853 called *Ernst en Vrede* (*Earnestness and Peace*), which became ethical theology's chief organ. The last term in the name of this journal perhaps expresses the chief tenet of Chantepie's theological position: the hope and trust that the struggle of mediation will come to an end. Apparently, Chantepie the pastor and contributor to *Ernst en Vrede* slowly acquired a reputation as a theologian: in 1872 he was called to a chair of theology at the University of Groningen. However, he died two short years after taking up this post.<sup>5</sup> After his death, the leadership of the ethical movement fell to J. H. Gunning (1829-1905).

Gunning studied theology at the University of Utrecht and like Chantepie,

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<sup>5</sup>On Chantepie, see: van den Berg, "Chantepie," pp. 118-21; Bremmer, *Bavinck*, pp. 65-72; "Ethischen" in *Christelijke Encyclopaedie*, pp. 122-3; Haitjema, *De richtingen*, pp. 46-65; Hallencreutz, *Kraemer*, pp. 89-90; Noordmans, "Ontwikkeling," pp. 125-77 *passim*; Veenhof, *Revelatie*, pp. 61-72.

became a pastor upon completion of his studies (also, like Chantepie, later in his life he became a professor of theology — first at the University of Amsterdam and subsequently at the University of Leiden). Gunning also struggled against both orthodoxy and modernism (i.e., intellectualism and the domination of reason). In order to find a way between the polarities of the right and the left, he too turned to Christology: in the Incarnation can be seen the proper mediation between the divine and the human. Theology must hence begin with the living person — and not the doctrine — of Jesus Christ. As Gunning expressed it: "Placing him, the person of Christ in the centre, that is the ethical principle."<sup>6</sup> For Gunning, then, what mattered most is the heart, life, feeling and experience — and not doctrine, system or reason.<sup>7</sup>

Chantepie and Gunning were the chief representatives of what was later called "the older ethical theology" or "first generation ethical theology." Their attempts to mediate between orthodoxy and modernism inspired several members of the next generation of Dutch Protestant theologians — what came to be called "the younger ethical theology" or "second generation ethical theology," whose chief representative was Pierre Daniël Chantepie de la Saussaye (1848-1920), son of Daniël Chantepie de la Saussaye and teacher of

<sup>6</sup>Gunning, cited in Bremmer, *Bavinck*, p. 81.

<sup>7</sup>On Gunning, see: Bremmer, *Bavinck*, pp. 72-5; "Ethischen" in *Christelijke Encyclopaedie*, pp. 122-3; Haitjema, *De richtingen*, pp. 65-79; Hallencreutz, *Kraemer*, pp. 90-2; Veenhof, *Revelatie*, pp. 73-81.

van der Leeuw. Chantepie, it will be recalled, began his career as a historian of religion at the University of Amsterdam and in 1899 left Amsterdam for a chair of theology and ethics at the University of Leiden.<sup>8</sup> As such, he in a sense broadened the classical ethical dilemma: he wished to overcome not just the polarities of orthodoxy and modernism, Christianity and culture, faith and science — but also theology and the study of religion. It was his conviction that theology must enter into dialogue with other sciences — and especially the study of religion — in order to help it meet the needs of the day.<sup>9</sup> In his inaugural lecture at Leiden in 1899 entitled “De taak der theologie” (“The Task of Theology”), Chantepie — very much animated by the spirit of Schleiermacher — expressed the ethical standpoint by arguing that theology can neither ignore the present situation nor go along with it. Theology is not justified in merely attempting to maintain and transmit the truths of tradition. Such a conception of theology does not recognize new questions and the need to answer them. But neither is theology to be equated with the study of religion. “Christian theology has its own domain, its own presuppositions, its own particular task; it does not allow itself to be simply incorporated into general science.”<sup>10</sup> Attempting to incorporate the-

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<sup>8</sup>On the younger Chantepie's intellectual biography and career as a historian of religion, see Chapter Two, section Ia above.

<sup>9</sup>See: Chantepie, *Het belang*, pp. 5-32 *passim*; Chantepie, “Die vergleichende,” pp. 340-7; Plantinga, “In the beginning,” 24-30.

<sup>10</sup>P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye, *De taak der theologie* (Haarlem: De Erven F. Bohn, 1899), p. 9.

ology into science in general results in the misconception of theology's object — God: "The kernel, the essence of religion is the relation with God — and whoever says God also says: not to be explained in terms of this world."<sup>11</sup> God (or the absolute) cannot be an object for science because God is hidden from investigation and description. Yet, Christians confess that this object is not hidden, that the mystery has been revealed, that God has been made known in Jesus Christ. How to solve this dilemma? Chantepie responds that knowledge of God and scientific knowledge are different in nature:

If science tries to express inner, spiritual certainty in a system, the scientific concepts will always remain incongruous with the eternal content. Yet the task of theology is the constant renewal of these attempts. It must seek to render for reason and the world what the heart has understood of the mystery [of revelation] and thus wrestle to find the least defective, the most living, the most pure expressions of what can never be completely expressed.<sup>12</sup>

The theologian must therefore "be penetrated by the paradoxical character of faith."<sup>13</sup> For theology is a science bound by the laws of reason in an area where reason ultimately falls short. As a result, the theologian is like a pilgrim — always underway in search of full knowledge of God. The end result of the theologian's quest is not in doubt, for the harmony between the divine and the human does exist — as revealed in Jesus Christ.<sup>14</sup>

Young third generation ethical theologians (such as van der Leeuw) can

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<sup>11</sup>Chantepie, *De taak*, p. 10.

<sup>12</sup>Chantepie, *De taak*, p. 12.

<sup>13</sup>Chantepie, *De taak*, p. 14. Chantepie was very impressed with the example set by Kierkegaard, as this statement indicates.

<sup>14</sup>See Chantepie, *De taak*, pp. 5-18.



be said to have learned the following from their ethical forebears (in van der Leeuw's case, his pastor J. H. Gerretsen and the younger Chantepie are especially significant as his ethical teachers): 1) a love for the "ethical principle" of the elder Chantepie and Gunning (i.e., the desire to mediate between Christianity and culture, etc., and the desire to be relevant and up to date) 2) an openness to culture and science 3) an emphasis on the heart, feeling, subjectivity and experience as opposed to cold reason, doctrine, objectivity and intellectualism 4) a personal, existential conception of revelation, truth and faith (along with an emphasis on experienced communion with the person of Jesus Christ, which makes both the certainty of faith and theology possible) 5) a respect for German theology and philosophy (especially Schleiermacher, mediating theology, Ritschl and Baden neo-Kantianism). In addition to the above, students of the younger Chantepie learned to take the problems raised by the study of religion seriously (and to regard Christianity as the fulfilment of all human religious striving).<sup>15</sup>

Quite clearly, the young van der Leeuw was deeply immersed in the ethical tradition and considered himself to be an ethical theologian of the third generation. As I noted earlier, he even served an organization of third generation ethical theologians (the *Ethische Vereeniging*) as president for some

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<sup>15</sup>See: "Ethischen" in *Christelijke Encyclopaedie*, pp. 122-3; Groenewoud, "Ethischen," p. 652; Haitjema, *De richtingen*, pp. 46-101; Hallencreutz, *Kraemer*, pp. 81-97; Veenhof, *Revelatie*, pp. 60-93.

time.<sup>16</sup> The ethical character of his theological writings up to roughly 1925 is very clear.<sup>17</sup> In his inaugural lecture at the University of Groningen (1918), van der Leeuw points out early on in the address that in principle, much of what he plans to say has already more or less been said by J. H. Gunning — but nonetheless bears repeating.<sup>18</sup> The “in principle” naturally refers to the desire to relate Christianity to culture, which in his particular case meant the desire to relate theology to the study of religion. The conception of theology with which he works in the inaugural address is strikingly similar to that of Schleiermacher and the fathers of ethical theology (i.e., theology conceived as the description of the pious consciousness — or faith — of the Christian community past and present).<sup>19</sup>

Van der Leeuw's ethicalism is also clear in his *Historisch Christendom* (1919), in which he seeks to explore the relationship between faith and history. His desire in this volume is to overcome the polarities of ahistoricism

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<sup>16</sup>In the early 1920s, van der Leeuw wrote several articles about the ethicalists in which he refers to “we ethicalists,” the “ethical principle,” the “ethical task” and the great ethical theologians (i.e., the elder Chantepie, Gunning, the younger Chantepie — as well as Pascal, Vinet, Schleiermacher and Kierkegaard). See: van der Leeuw, “De vergadering der Ethischen”; Gerardus van der Leeuw, “De taak der Ethischen,” *Bergopwaarts*, October 29, 1921; Gerardus van der Leeuw, “De Ethischen, die wij zijn,” *Bergopwaarts*, January 28, 1922. See also the article that van der Leeuw co-authored with F. W. A. Korff on ethicalism near the end of his life entitled “Ethische richting” (in *Winkler Prins Encyclopaedie*, 6th ed., ed. E. De Bruyne and others (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1950), VIII, pp. 331-2).

<sup>17</sup>As I shall argue momentarily, in the mid-1920s ethical theology began to lose force and identity (due in large measure to the growing influence of dialectical theology in The Netherlands). After this time, van der Leeuw moved off in a direction of his own — although he never entirely shed his ethical character.

<sup>18</sup>See *PT*, p. 25, note 2.

<sup>19</sup>See *PT*, pp. 14-8.

(supernaturalism) and historicism (rationalism).<sup>20</sup> This is, it should be clear by now, precisely the ethical agenda. This agenda is also clearly expressed in the title of van der Leeuw's *Ethisch: modern of orthodox? (Ethical: Modern or Orthodox?)* (1923). In this book, van der Leeuw sought to defend ethical theology against accusations of half-heartedness. In so doing, he argued that ethical theology is neither modern nor orthodox; rather, it wishes to take both orthodoxy and modernism, Christianity and culture, revelation and experience, God and man ~~deadly~~ seriously — and to hold these together paradoxically (like his ethical forebears, van der Leeuw appeals to the exemplary significance of the Incarnation in this regard).<sup>21</sup>

The fact that van der Leeuw wrote a book defending ethical theology against its detractors was a sign that all was not well in the ethical camp. In fact, attacked from the outside and beginning to splinter from within, ethical theology began to lose its identity and cohesion in the 1920s. A catalyst in this process was the new and powerful theological presence which had made itself known throughout Europe: dialectical theology. To some ethical theologians, dialectical theology was not discontinuous with the aims of ethical theology. To others (such as van der Leeuw), dialectical theology

<sup>20</sup>See: van der Leeuw, *Historisch*, especially pp. 1–6; ten Ham, *G. van der Leeuw*, pp. 9–16.

<sup>21</sup>See: Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Ethisch: modern of orthodox?* (Utrecht: G. J. A. Ruys, 1923), *passim*; ten Ham, *G. van der Leeuw*, pp. 17–9. Elsewhere, van der Leeuw wrote: "Whoever was a true student of [the younger] la Saussaye never remained merely modern or orthodox." Van der Leeuw, "Chantepie" in *De Nieuwe Courant*.

was too one-sided a *theological* venture (which, moreover, was not benevolently inclined to the study of religion). By World War Two, in terms of a well-defined and identifiable movement or school, ethical theology was a thing of the past.<sup>22</sup> Van der Leeuw, meanwhile, moved away from his strict ethical moorings in the latter half of the 1920s and began to go his own way theologically (i.e., he did not remain a resolute member of the ethical camp nor did he become a dialectical theologian; true to his investigative spirit, he went beyond "acceptable" boundaries and camps and began to fashion his own theological position).<sup>23</sup> However, it is important to note that van der Leeuw took several key ideas from his ethical past with him into his theological future: 1) a boundary-seeking style, a desire for synthesis and a need to find ways beyond and boundaries between extremities of various kinds, in which Christology and the Incarnation play a key role 2) an openness to culture, science and "the other" 3) a focus on subjectivity and human experience (which, as I noted in Chapter Two above, forms the basis of his method of understanding) 4) a respect for German theology and philosophy, and 5) an apologetic tendency (i.e., a desire to make Christianity a living force in the twentieth century). How exactly the "servant of God and professor in Groningen" proceeded theologically on the basis of these principles

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<sup>22</sup>Ethical theology can be seen as "microcosm" of modern Protestant theology insofar as it reflects the theological development from Schleiermacher to Barth. See Veenhof, *Revelatie*, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup>See: Groenewoud, "Ethischen," p. 652; Haitjema, *De richtingen*, p. 234; Hallencreutz, *Kraemer*, p. 96; Veenhof, *Revelatie*, pp. 86-9.

is the subject of the remainder of this chapter.

## II. Pilgrimage: Towards the Pyramid

As I noted in Chapter One above, van der Leeuw was already wrestling with the question of the nature of theology as well as the problem of the relationship of theology to the study of religion during his days as a student at the University of Leiden.<sup>24</sup> When he took up his professorship in Groningen a few years later, hence, he had already given serious thought to the problem which he sought to address in his inaugural lecture (i.e., the place and task of the study of religion in theology) and which he returned to again and again throughout his career. As he said in a reflective moment near the end of his life:

I was never tempted to forget that I am a theologian and naturally I sought to make theology profit from the phenomenological method. I did not, certainly, want to turn theology into the science of religion. On the contrary, I wanted to allow theological method, which in my opinion is absolutely autonomous, to better stand out.<sup>25</sup>

In the inaugural address, van der Leeuw notes early on that theology

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<sup>24</sup>Appended to van der Leeuw's dissertation (*Godsvoorstellingen*) are a series of theses about a variety of subjects. Theses number XXII and XXIII read, respectively: "History and psychology of religion can never, despite their importance and indispensability for fruitful theological practice, occupy a central place in the encyclopedia of theological sciences." "The systematic branches, particularly dogmatics, must be placed in the foreground as regards the academic teaching of theology, if this teaching wants to be able to attain its goal (cf. Schleiermacher, *Zur Darstellung des theologischen Studiums*, paragraph 5)."

<sup>25</sup>Van der Leeuw, "Confession," 13.

and the study of religion are indeed different: while the former studies and defends one religion, the latter studies all religions and has a levelling effect. Despite this difference, however, the study of religion does have a place and task in the encyclopedia of theology.<sup>26</sup>

Its place: Without explaining why, van der Leeuw asserts that any and all study is best undertaken after choosing a norm. The study of religion is no exception.<sup>27</sup> Because theology provides such a norm (van der Leeuw does not address the question of rival disciplines with rival norms), the study of religion is best undertaken within its borders. Van der Leeuw thus proposes that "the science of religion be conceived as the general basis of and introduction to theology proper."<sup>28</sup> Adherence to such a norm, he hastens to add, does not mean submission to authority, lack of freedom and "unscience." Rather, theology conceived as description of the pious consciousness (or faith) of the Christian community past and present makes it a fitting host for the study of religion (i.e., theology gives the study of religion a norm: the faith of the Christian community). Theology's heart is its systematic part; it is here that its norms are formulated. Historical and systematic studies in theology thus presuppose one another (i.e., the two are dialectically related): historical theology (which includes the history of reli-

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<sup>26</sup>See *PT*, pp. 3-5.

<sup>27</sup>It is for this reason that the study of religion — an independent field of inquiry seen from its own point of view — is destined for theology from the point of view of the theologian.

<sup>28</sup>*PT*, p. 15.

gion) provides systematic theology with material; and systematic theology provides historical theology (which includes the history of religion) with a norm by which it can sift through and order its material.<sup>29</sup>

Its task: the study of religion helps Christianity understand itself — what it was, is and will be — *vis-à-vis* other religions. Christianity will come to see its own character (as a community founded on God's revelation) more clearly — and how this character differs from the character of other religions. Other religions also profit from this arrangement: instead of being regarded as pseudo-religions, they will be understood according to their essences. Other religions will also be understood in the light of general revelation — as anticipations of what God fully revealed in Jesus Christ, who forms the point of departure as well as the goal of Christian theology. Van der Leeuw concludes that theology can never become a part of the study of religion. Rather, the study of religion forms the front porch of theology.<sup>30</sup>

The two-tier conception of theology which van der Leeuw sets forth in his inaugural address is very much a product of his ethical theological training. In a sense, what he does in the inaugural address is no different than what he does in *Historisch Christendom* — that is, attempt to find a connection

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<sup>29</sup>See *PT*, pp. 14–9.

<sup>30</sup>See *PT*, pp. 19–22. Van der Leeuw stressed the indispensability of the study of religion for the theologian again and again in his writings. See for example: Gerardus van der Leeuw, Review of H. T. Obbink, *Godsdienstwetenschap in Bergopwaarts*, June 26, 1920; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Het belang van de studie der godsdienstgeschiedenis, I," *Bergopwaarts*, May 24, 1924.

between faith and history. In the latter work (which was published after the inaugural address but mostly written before it<sup>31</sup>), he operates with a two-tiered conception: first he treats the subject in question historically and then systematically. Eventually he was to see the need for a third tier: he later interposed phenomenology between history and systematics. The building of this three-tiered pyramid slowly took place in the 1920s as he developed his phenomenology of religion (see Chapter Two above). This three-tiered conception can be regarded as a merger of van der Leeuw's work in theology and the study of religion. It is clear that his work in the study of religion very much influenced his theology — and it is also clear that his theology very much influenced his work in the study of religion. This bears stating here because the former of these propositions has not been sufficiently recognized by scholars who have studied van der Leeuw.

Just as he had written an important article about the significance of structural psychology for the study of religion in the 1920s,<sup>32</sup> van der Leeuw wrote a parallel article about the significance of structural psychology for theology at about the same time (entitled "Strukturpsychologie und Theologie"). For it was his firm conviction that the isolation of theology means the end of theology: without the help of the human sciences, theology is

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<sup>31</sup>Van der Leeuw wrote *Historisch Christendom* during his years as a pastor (1916-18) but he published it in 1919.

<sup>32</sup>See *UNE*.



incapable of addressing the human situation.<sup>33</sup> These *two* articles about the importance of structural psychology, aimed at *two* different fields of inquiry, make clear van der Leeuw's view "that the science of religion and theology are two independent disciplines." No matter how similar and intertwined they may be from the point of view of praxis, they "must remain strictly separated from the point of view of method."<sup>34</sup>

In "Strukturpsychologie und Theologie," van der Leeuw reviews the method of understanding employed by what might be called "phenomenological psychology." Theorists such as Dilthey, Jaspers and Spranger, he says, have taught us how to re-experience a whole as such, how to put ourselves into an object as an organic whole.<sup>35</sup> This method of understanding considers the object under scrutiny and attempts not to break it down but to see it in its essence (i.e., see what is essential to it by purifying it and purging it of the non-essential). When the object is revealed as such, the investigator must decide how the elements which make up the object relate

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<sup>33</sup>See Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Wat is theologie?" *Stemmen van waarheid en vrede* 62 (1925), 729-43. This essay also contains some criticisms by van der Leeuw of dialectical theology: among other things, he thought dialectical theology to be insufficiently "earthly" and overly "heavenly" (i.e., it seeks to remain unconnected to science and culture generally — how then can it address the human?). Theology, van der Leeuw argued, must take *both* God and man, heaven and earth seriously. Moreover, he thought that dialectical theology too easily assumed that it is possible to stand over against the past in order to choose this or reject that from it. See: van der Leeuw, "Wat is theologie?" 729-43; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Geloofszekerheid en openbaring bij Karl Heim, II" *Stemmen des Tijds* 16 (1927), 212-33; van der Leeuw, "Het nieuwe," 220-9.

<sup>34</sup>ST, 321.

<sup>35</sup>Van der Leeuw's method is only briefly recapitulated here. For a fuller discussion of it, see Chapter Two above.

to one another. He or she does so not in causal but in structural terms: comprehensible relations (*verständliche Beziehungen*) — and not causal links — are sought. That which is consequently revealed has an ideal-typical nature. The fundamental condition of this method is experience: in examining the expressions (or “signs”) which indicate the original experience in question (that which lies behind the words or other expression being examined), the investigator himself or herself experiences something. This experience is not the original experience or mere re-experience of the original experience but an independent experience in its own right — the experience of comprehensible relations and thus of the phenomenon under investigation. Such ideal-typical experience of the phenomenon on behalf of the investigator leads to understanding, which, van der Leeuw points out, is the object of this method.<sup>36</sup>

How, van der Leeuw asks, can this method be of service in theology? First and foremost, he says, it is useful in thinking about the matter of theological encyclopedia: Historical studies form the basic level or beginning of the theological enterprise and thus anticipate a second level of theological study. Historical theology focuses on facts. Systematic theology, on the other hand, does not focus on facts but on final meaning and absolute value. What is required is another level, a transition between these two: this level

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<sup>36</sup>See *ST*, 321–3.

can be called the study of religion or phenomenological theology, which seeks to understand the facts.<sup>37</sup> The study of religion within the theological encyclopedia is "more" than historical theology (it seeks to do more than just interpret facts) but "less" than systematic theology (it does not raise the questions of truth and reality — it practices "bracketing"). Van der Leeuw's expanded three-tiered conception of theology looks, in sum, like this: 1) historical theology, which studies the history of Christianity and the history of other religions and which focuses predominantly on the factual level 2) the study of religion or phenomenological theology, which tries to understand the material presented by historical theology, and 3) theoretical or eschatological theology (dogmatics and ethics), which crosses the boundaries of the two previous levels in an effort to find a final meaning.<sup>38</sup> This view of theology, it should be noted, is in rough form what van der Leeuw would spell out more carefully and in more detail in his *magnum opus* on the subject: *Inleiding tot de theologie*.

Theology conceived in such a way so as to include the study of religion helps the theologian, van der Leeuw goes on, to gain clarity about a host of theological subjects: the place of Christianity among the religions of the world; the person of Jesus Christ; Christian experience; revelation; eschatol-

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<sup>37</sup> "In other words, we have to do here with structural psychology in a Diltheyan sense." Van der Leeuw, *ST*, 325.

<sup>38</sup> See *ST*, 323-6.

ogy; the sacraments; the interpretation of scripture.<sup>39</sup> From the theological examination of these subjects, he says, one begins to note how phenomenological theology reveals the boundaries of understanding. In fact, he goes on, all human inquiry and all science have limits. Van der Leeuw calls the existence of such limits the "eschatological" character of science: each science points to a final meaning beyond itself. This final meaning is the fundamental condition of all understanding. All understanding is hence finally possible only on the basis of having-been-understood. Dogmatic theology, building on historical and phenomenological theology, tries to understand the being who first understands: it attempts to think God's thoughts after him.<sup>40</sup>

With the completion of "Strukturpsychologie und Theologie," van der Leeuw was well on the way to his mature view of the nature of theology. In the years between the publication of "Strukturpsychologie und Theologie" (1928) and the first edition of *Inleiding tot de theologie* (1935), his theological writings emphasize themes already dealt with earlier: theology's tripartite division (versus the earlier two-tier scheme); the necessity of a connection between theology and science (i.e., theology must not be hidden in some remote corner far from the front lines of battle — it must reassert itself, to use van der Leeuw's metaphor, as queen of the sciences); theology's bidirec-

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<sup>39</sup>See *ST*, 326–48.

<sup>40</sup>See *ST*, 348–9.

tionality (it must reckon with the way from God to man and the way from man to God).<sup>41</sup> Also interesting in this period (1932) is van der Leeuw's public exchange with his colleague at Groningen T. L. Haitjema, a dialectical theologian. The two theologians were in disagreement about a number of issues — but especially about the nature of theology and its relationship to science. Van der Leeuw was impatient with Haitjema's claim that one should begin one's theologizing with the Reformers and not with Schleiermacher. All contemporary Protestant theologians, van der Leeuw argued, begin with Schleiermacher and his agenda — even though one can be critical of Schleiermacher's theology. One cannot simply opt for the Reformers over against Schleiermacher. With a certain amount of passion and impatience van der Leeuw writes:

Naturally, one can orient oneself toward the Reformers; one can also orient oneself toward Schleiermacher. But one cannot simply follow one of them and throw the other one away. For both are historical phenomena that live on in our flesh and blood, both in negative and confirmatory ways. Whoever says: "I follow the Reformers" must add at once: I translate into the language of my time that which seems to me to be the essential point of their teaching. One who is based on Schleiermacher must say the same. And vice versa, one who opposes the Reformers or Schleiermacher must immediately add: apart from that which has become, in the course of past history since these men lived, the general possession of science and theology. We do not speak

<sup>41</sup>See: Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Het laatste oordeel," *Jaarboek der Ethische Vereniging* (1929), 50-5; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Cultuur en Christelijke theologie," *Van Tijd tot Tijd* 3 (1929), 7-11; Gerardus van der Leeuw, Sermon on Romans 5:5 in *Voor den Zondag* 38/52 (1932), 10-1. Also noteworthy are the scattered remarks van der Leeuw makes about theology in his *Phänomenologie der Religion*. See *PR*, pp. vi, 3, 208, 353, 382, 501-3, 634-7, 640, 736-8, 762-3, 781-7.

from the point of view of the Reformers or of Schleiermacher but from the point of view of our own time. We can do no other. We can only speak in *this* moment, for *this* moment, in the *kairos* that is given to us.<sup>42</sup>

One can be critical, van der Leeuw goes on, of the tenor of Schleiermacher's theology (and he, like his colleague Haitjema, is critical). But one cannot oppose Schleiermacher — or the Enlightenment or the French Revolution. To do so is to stand over against oneself, for all these historical currents live on in our lives. In short, van der Leeuw argues, it is necessary to stop pretending that Schleiermacher — and modern culture generally — can be so easily dismissed and exorcized.<sup>43</sup>

Haitjema in turn chided van der Leeuw for his Romantic conception of history and his dependence on Paul Tillich. Haitjema expressed his fatigue about being told that he was unable to oppose this or that because it is a historical phenomenon living in him. Moreover, Haitjema responded, van der Leeuw has fallen victim to his phenomenological method: he forgets truth questions in an effort to understand. As a theologian and not a phenomenologist of religion, Haitjema expressed his desire to be critical of Schleiermacher and modern culture. In spite of his colleague's criticisms of Schleiermacher, Haitjema concluded, van der Leeuw has remained depen-

<sup>42</sup>Van der Leeuw, "Het nieuwe," 222-3. Consistent with the view of theology expressed in the above quotation, van der Leeuw in another writing (*Dogmatische Brieven*, p. 5) defines dogma as "the living speech of the church."

<sup>43</sup>See van der Leeuw, "Het nieuwe," 220-9. Further on the view of history espoused by van der Leeuw in this exchange, see his *Historisch Christendom*, pp. 62-86.

dent on the church father of the nineteenth century, which is consistent with his dependence on Dilthey and Romanticism generally.<sup>44</sup>

The above summary of van der Leeuw's theological upbringing and development up to the mid-1930s was intended as a context — a context for understanding his key text about the nature of theology. This text — *Inleiding tot de theologie* — is also the key work for understanding van der Leeuw's view of the relationship of the study of religion to theology. It is to this text that the discussion now turns.

### III. The Three-Tiered Pyramid Text

Van der Leeuw's original teaching assignment in Groningen included, it will be recalled, responsibility for theological encyclopedia. His years of teaching and research in this area came together in 1935 and resulted in one of his most significant books: *Inleiding tot de theologie*. After the publication of the *Inleiding*, van der Leeuw continued to teach courses about theological encyclopedia and to do research in this area. Hence, when the demand arose for a second edition of the *Inleiding*, he was not prepared to simply reprint the 1935 edition. The second edition, published in 1948, is some twenty percent larger than the first edition.<sup>45</sup> The second edition is

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<sup>44</sup>See Haitjema, "Nieuwe' orthodoxie," 230-9.

<sup>45</sup>The most significant addition to the second edition is the insertion of an article (pp. 163-75) that van der Leeuw had published in a journal in 1941 entitled "De twee wegen

thus van der Leeuw's mature verdict on the nature of theology — and it is hence the argument of this edition that I will present here.

Van der Leeuw begins the *Inleiding* by noting that we “live in a time in which every science is reflecting on its foundations.”<sup>46</sup> Such critical self-reflection can be a good thing from time to time. For theology it is a necessity in order to re-establish lapsed relations with the other sciences. Reflection of such a nature requires that an introduction to theology be of a formal and not a material nature: “What is theology? Is it a science? This will be our line of questioning.”<sup>47</sup> Van der Leeuw says that before he addresses the question of what theology is, he will first address the question of what science is: his actual procedure moves from the general to the particular. But in fact he thinks that this procedure ought to be reversed and hopes that his book will convince the reader of the necessity of this reversal. Van der Leeuw thus hopes that the *Inleiding* will show the inadequacy of its own method — and this can only be shown by choosing the “wrong” order and demonstrating its wrongness (which, he points out, will not be easy — moderns are so accustomed to the idea that particular sciences must justify

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der theologie” (*Vox Theologica* 13/2 (1941), 17-22).

<sup>46</sup> *IT*, p. 5. A few years earlier, van der Leeuw had written (“De godsdienstgeschiedenis in de crisis,” 80): “All science in our time resembles a large city in which an earthquake has taken place and which is now being rebuilt from the ground up. All the foundations lay bare.”

<sup>47</sup> *IT*, p. 12. Van der Leeuw takes this capsule statement of his agenda and expands it into a host of questions which he seeks to address in the book. In these introductory remarks, he also notes that Schleiermacher's *Zur Darstellung des theologischen Studiums* is still the point of departure for reflection on the nature of theology. See *IT*, pp. 12-3.



themselves in light of a general idea of science).<sup>48</sup>

The *Inleiding* is divided into two main parts. The first part, which van der Leeuw calls the "General Part," contains two chapters. The first chapter is entitled "Science" and the second "Theological Science." The second part, which van der Leeuw calls the "Particular Part," contains three chapters. The first chapter is entitled "Historical Theology," the second "Science of Religion" and the third "Dogmatic Theology."

Van der Leeuw begins his reflections on science (*wetenschap*)<sup>49</sup> by examining modern history of science. Science since the Enlightenment has become, he interestingly observes, an entirely profane matter: science is not a meeting with God but a meeting of man with himself in the world. Science is knowing oneself and that which surrounds one. Knowing is hence seeing, doing and speaking. "Science is thus Word, that is, image and sound, which demarcates a new, truly human world from the large, unknown world. Through the Word the human being rules the world, finds access to it and

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<sup>48</sup>See *IT*, pp. 12-3. Van der Leeuw indicates that the current approach, which he takes in his book and whose inadequacy he hopes to demonstrate, is now being questioned. He thus writes that his book attempts "in coming from the way that was fully in the sun yesterday, but where today shadows creep closer, to arrive at the way where the sun will shine tomorrow — without forgetting that also there again a shadow will approach." *IT*, p. 13. On van der Leeuw's view of the genesis of modern (post-Kantian) science, see his "Het vermageringsproces in de wetenschap," *Eltheto* 95 (1941), 78-82.

<sup>49</sup>It should be noted that the Dutch *wetenschap*, like the German *Wissenschaft*, is not entirely exhausted by the English "science." By *wetenschap* is meant not just what English speakers would call natural science and social science but also "human" science. One speaks, for example, of *taalwetenschap* (that is, linguistics or philology). *Wetenschap* is thus a way of knowing or knowledge — or more exactly, ordered knowledge of the whole.

can do something with it."<sup>50</sup> The Word that is the result of science reflects itself in the act of knowing in a two-fold way: as *mythos* and as *logos*. Both terms mean "word" but in different senses. *Mythos*, van der Leeuw asserts somewhat cryptically, points to that which is outward; *logos* points to that which is inward. One might also think of the *mythos-logos* distinction in terms of the distinction between knowing, which is directed to material and is objective, and understanding, which is directed to form and is conceptual. No science, van der Leeuw says, can do without *mythos* or *logos*. Western science, however, under the influence of ancient Greece and Rome, has become more and more theoretical in character: human knowing has become atrophied and intellectualized. In the process, action and experience were excluded from the conception of science. Alternately expressed: whether in the form of idealism or materialism, *mythos* was swallowed by *logos*. Modern science, van der Leeuw goes on, has been damaged most by idealism, especially since Descartes and the triumph of theory over action, *cogitare* over *mythos*. Descartes made mathematics the model of all science. Following Descartes in the rationalist tradition, Kant was primarily interested in experience-free "*a priori* Anschauungen." More and more, the concept came to be taken for reality itself; Hegel is the apex of this development.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> *IT*, p. 19.

<sup>51</sup> See *IT*, pp. 17-21. Van der Leeuw's comments in his "Confession" (11) are instructive in this regard: "I found myself in the impossible situation of trying to understand religious life ... in departing from modern thought such as it had been formulated by Descartes and Kant."

The modern conception of science, however, is not the only one available consideration. The ancients too had a conception of science — one which is quite different from the modern one. The difference between the ancient conception of science and the modern conception of science becomes clear, van der Leeuw argues, the moment one compares the Hebrew and Greek conceptions of knowledge with modern Western conceptions. The ancient account of knowledge stresses the unity of subject and object (and thus the description of sexual intercourse as “knowledge”). The difference in the two conceptions of science and knowledge is a clue to the difficulty of the relationship between theology and the sciences. Theology operates with a conception of science in which everyday knowledge, aesthetic knowledge and intuition play a key part. Modern sciences operate with a conception of science in which theory is uppermost. For science to prosper as science, however, the different sciences must work together to form an organic unity. Different conceptions of science and different sciences (or disciplines) operating on their own assumptions and in light of their own principles is destructive of this unity. Van der Leeuw writes: “There is no greater enemy of science than the ‘discipline’.”<sup>52</sup> The different sciences must hence confront one another; without contact and stimulation, science ceases to be science. But given the modern, atrophied state of science, is it possible to speak of

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<sup>52</sup>*IT*, p. 23. Van der Leeuw’s search for unity in life, of which I spoke in Chapter One above, illustrates itself here.

science as one? Before this question can be answered, van der Leeuw says, it is necessary to investigate another question: what kinds of science can there be? To answer this question, he explores a number of theories about the division of the sciences.<sup>53</sup>

First of all, van der Leeuw examines Schleiermacher's distinction between positive (applied) and theoretical science. The key to the former is a practical task and its execution (for example, medical science — versus philology or history). The key to the latter is its disinterested and theoretical character. This distinction was also made in medieval universities, which distinguished between "faculties" (i.e., the positive sciences of divinity, law and medicine) and "arts" (i.e., philology, philosophy, natural science) and which saw the latter as a preparation for the former. For the medievals, the positive sciences are most important. Schleiermacher, however, turned the medieval relationship around: the real sciences are the theoretical sciences. Many twentieth century thinkers, van der Leeuw observes, share this point of view with Schleiermacher, namely, that application is the corruption of science.<sup>54</sup> Van der Leeuw contests such elevation of principle over practice. A non-principled practice, he says, may be unscientific; but a non-practiced

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<sup>53</sup>See *IT*, pp. 21–4.

<sup>54</sup>A similar point has been argued (after van der Leeuw's time) with great conviction by Hans-Georg Gadamer in *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, 3rd ed. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1972). Readers familiar with Gadamer's work will recognize several Gadamerian emphases (if some anachronistic license is permitted here) in van der Leeuw's *Inleiding*.

principle is sterile. Science to be proper science must be both theoretical and practical. Schleiermacher and his followers saw theology's unity only in its practical task of church government. But the notion of church government, van der Leeuw points out, is so broad and general a conception that it includes those who work in the least practical parts of theology (i.e., dogmatic theologians working in their studies). This fact makes Schleiermacher's distinction between positive and theoretical science questionable. Schleiermacher wanted to protect the theological character of practical activities. But such theological church government needs a theological norm — and the formation and application of such a norm can never be a practical matter. "Thus, while recognizing the moment of truth in Schleiermacher's division of the sciences, we cannot regard his conception as definitive."<sup>55</sup> For Schleiermacher's scheme breaks down in too many places.<sup>56</sup>

Next, van der Leeuw turns to Baden neo-Kantianism's division of the sciences.<sup>57</sup> More specifically, he examines Wilhelm Windelband's thesis that the sciences can be divided into two groups. The natural sciences and the human sciences, Windelband argued, differ methodologically. The natural sciences emphasize the general, the unchanging, "what always is"; they can

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<sup>55</sup> *IT*, p. 29.

<sup>56</sup> See *IT*, pp. 24–9.

<sup>57</sup> On Baden neo-Kantianism, see: Lewis White Beck, "Neo-Kantianism" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1967), V, pp. 468–73 (especially pp. 472–3); Thomas Willey, *Back to Kant: The Revival of Kantianism in German Social and Historical Thought, 1860–1914* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978), especially ch. 6.

be described as *nomothetic*, as *Gesetzwissenschaften* (law-giving sciences). The human sciences emphasize the particular, the unique, "what once was"; they can be described as *idiographic*, as *Ereigniswissenschaften* (sciences of the unique event). Corresponding to the two sciences are the methods of causal explanation and individual description. Van der Leeuw finds this division of the sciences very important. If the *nomothetic-idiographic* distinction was the final word, he says, one would have to regard theology as an *idiographic* science. But without saying specifically why, he simply notes that this distinction is not the final word.<sup>58</sup>

Van der Leeuw was not yet finished with Baden neo-Kantianism, however. After dealing with Windelband, he examines Heinrich Rickert's distinction between natural sciences and cultural (human) sciences. The latter, according to Rickert, point to the importance of value. Without attaching meaning to things, there can be no history (for human beings would be no more important than plants). Without evaluation, Western civilization would lose all significance (*vis-à-vis* other civilizations). This focus on evaluation in the cultural sciences, in Rickert's view, is not found in the natural sciences. Natural sciences can calculate and observe — but they do not understand and evaluate. Cultural sciences, on the other hand, must proceed from norms in order to evaluate. If theology had to choose between

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<sup>58</sup>See *IT*, pp. 29-31.

Rickert's two possibilities, van der Leeuw says, it would classify itself as a cultural science. For theology is, with all respect to Copernicus, Ptolemaic: it believes in the importance of a standard of judgment (or norm) in giving an account of who man is. Hence, theology cannot be practiced apart from anthropology (in the sense of giving an account who man is naturally and culturally). But like Windelband's helpful distinction, Rickert's too is not the final word. For a distinction between natural and cultural sciences does not adequately cover all the terrain: What of mathematical and logical sciences? Is not a third division necessary? Nor does Rickert's scheme properly divide up the terrain: Can theology be satisfied with its assignment to the realm of cultural sciences (especially in view of the predominance of history in this realm)? Can theology agree that part of the terrain has been closed to her (especially in view of the fact that theology has to do with natural man, man as created)? Van der Leeuw's answer to the last two questions is "no": Rickert's distinction cannot be accepted by theology.<sup>59</sup>

The three German scholars thus far examined by van der Leeuw failed to provide him with an acceptable answer to the question of what kinds of sciences there are. His next candidate for examination he finds not in Germany but in his own homeland: the Reformed theologian Abraham Kuyper. In presupposing the distinction between natural science and human science,

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<sup>59</sup>See *IT*, pp. 31-5.

Kuyper argued that the latter ought not model itself after the former. Human science is different; it does more than merely establish empirical facts. It has a subjective character; it reckons with the fact of human sinfulness, which breaks the power of human thinking and darkens human consciousness. For sin is in essence a lack of love — and knowledge is possible only through the love with which the subject gives itself over to the object. Profane science thus demonstrates the alienation of subject and object — because it does not reckon with sin. Up to this point in Kuyper's argument, van der Leeuw agrees wholeheartedly. However, he questions Kuyper's next move. On the basis of the foregoing, Kuyper distinguishes two kinds of science. The first kind is "natural": those who practice science uprightly and with good intention — but who deny or ignore the fact of sin and who are unregenerate in their lives. The second kind is as "natural" as the first. But this second kind has had a new branch added to it; it is hence new, regenerate. Those who practice this kind of science do not *do* things differently but *are* different — and because such scientists are different, things are different for them. For a regenerate person, science has a different character and leads to different results. While there may be some common terrain and agreement among unregenerates and regenerates, the postulation of the unity of science is a denial of rebirth. It may not always be crystal clear what the difference between unregenerate and regenerate science is — but



regenerate scientists will always be able to recognize one another in their common confession, which will eventually lead to common practice and distinctive character. Kuyper's distinction between the sciences, according to van der Leeuw, is problematic for more than one reason. It implies that regenerate man exists in a different way than natural man — but regenerate man is most often unable to speak clearly about what this difference means for science. The hidden workings of the Spirit of God in creation, van der Leeuw counters, are not objects for science — nor can they function as the directive for science. "The science of the regenerate may be different than that of natural man, but there is no way of checking this."<sup>60</sup> Kuyper's analysis proceeds from the assumption of the possession of a regenerate state. But such regeneration is not a possession, a fact; it is only something that the Church can preach, something that is sought. Thus, says van der Leeuw, Kuyper's distinction between unregenerate and regenerate science misinterprets regeneration, which can never be introduced and used in a methodological exposition. In the final analysis, therefore, Kuyper's distinction is useful for neither theology nor science.<sup>61</sup>

Given human science's inadequate view of science (i.e., the views of

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<sup>60</sup> *IT*, p. 41.

<sup>61</sup> See *IT*, pp. 36–42. It should be noted that van der Leeuw did not wish to deny the distinction between unregenerate and regenerate man. Nor did he wish to deny that the two practice science differently. He only wished to deny that this difference can be scientifically seen and determined. Furthermore, he thought that Kuyper's conception of theology lacked a proper conception of the church, which is crucial for theology.

Schleiermacher, Windelband, Rickert and Kuyper), van der Leeuw investigates how natural science envisions science.<sup>62</sup> To this end, he turns to a discussion of the view of Emil Dubois-Reymond, whom he takes to be a typical representative of the method of natural science. Dubois-Reymond's scientific goal was to reduce everything (including things of the spirit) to the mechanics of atoms. But reduction, Dubois-Reymond argued, is not the same thing as explanation; there is always something which remains beyond our ken. In fact, the two chief concepts of modern science (matter and energy) are abstract and infathomable. Nor can one grasp how atoms arrange themselves and form a conscious whole. Despite these limitations, however, no harm is done to the ideal of mastery of the world, viewed in a mathematico-mechanical fashion (which conception of the world swallows up human science). The ideal may not be reached — but this is not an excuse for not striving for it.<sup>63</sup>

Such a conception of natural science, van der Leeuw sighs, is the product of a long development.<sup>64</sup> "Nature" no longer has anything to do with the usefulness of things and the feelings they engender in human beings. Rather,

<sup>62</sup>In passing, van der Leeuw notes the dominance of natural science over human science and the tendency of the latter to justify itself to the former and emulate its methods.

<sup>63</sup>See *IT*, pp. 42-7.

<sup>64</sup>For van der Leeuw's commentary on this development, see van der Leeuw, "Het vermageringsproces," 78-82. In this essay, he argues that science has become profane in being reduced to abstraction ("modern mentality" — see Chapter Two above), which has led to an intolerable situation (i.e., God has disappeared from science; and the science that speaks of God along with him). Modern science hence needs to be rethought and changes must be made as required to restore theology to its rightful place among the sciences.

"nature" has to do with things' weight, height, thickness and number. In this sense, natural science is an abstraction. Everything is reduced to a mathematical formula. One must take care, van der Leeuw warns, not to attribute objectivity to natural science so conceived: the natural scientist undertakes a great abstraction in going about the work of investigation; he or she ignores his or her "natural" relationship to nature. Recent developments in scientific theory point to the questionability of the mathematico-mechanical view of nature. Yet, natural science marches on, unaffected. It continues to try to understand nature from one point of view. To do so, van der Leeuw insightfully observes, requires a voluntary self-limitation of the person. Seeing, acting and speaking, which is essential to science, is thus limited in natural science: seeing is limited to seeing similarities, acting to experiment and speaking to ciphers. The price for exactitude is extreme self-denial. Moreover, the idea of the world as an exact and measurable entity is a fiction.<sup>65</sup>

All ways of knowing, van der Leeuw argues, are necessarily one-sided — including that of natural science. But this does not mean that science is invalid or unimportant; the one-sidedness of natural science only means that natural science should be seen for what it is: an abstraction. "It is only its [natural science's] pretention that it allows us to know *the* reality

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<sup>65</sup>See *IT*, pp. 47-50.

that must be protested."<sup>66</sup> For this it cannot do. In fact, it does this relatively less than other ways of knowing because it reduces everything to mathematics and mechanics, which have little to do with reality as such. "In any event, next to the knowing of the natural scientific kind, other ways of knowing are possible. Attempting to understand nature can also be otherwise ventured."<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, there is also myth in natural science — its own self-understanding notwithstanding. Moreover, it cannot tell us about the boundary of life — that is, death — or the reality of sin, which is so important in life.<sup>68</sup>

To understand the inadequacy of the natural scientific account of nature, van der Leeuw continues, it is helpful to examine other conceptions of nature. First of all, he says, consider the view of the ancient Greeks, who saw divine regularity in the events of nature (i.e., in the eternal cycle of birth and death). In such a conception of nature (in which human and divine beings live with one another and in which reality is not expressible in formulas and ciphers), seeing, acting and speaking come much more into their own. Secondly, van der Leeuw continues, consider the view of the medieval scholastics, who also emphasized the regularity of natural events. Because all events in the natural world proceed from God, they have a necessity

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<sup>66</sup> *IT*, pp. 50-1. This point has also been forcefully and provocatively argued by G. B. Madison in *Understanding: A Phenomenological-Pragmatic Analysis*, Contributions in Philosophy 19 (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982).

<sup>67</sup> *IT*, p. 51.

<sup>68</sup> See *IT*, pp. 50-1.

about them. (Human action, however, is free.) The medieval thinkers thus attempted to see nature from the point of view of God, the origin and end of all creatures. This procedure is very different, van der Leeuw says, from the procedure of both the ancient Greeks and modern natural scientists, who *ascend* to the ideas of regularity and law from nature itself. Versus the ancient Greek and the modern natural scientist, the medieval scientist continually felt the attraction of the other world in this world<sup>69</sup> and saw the hand of God in nature's (better: creation's) regularity in its obedience to the will of God. The medieval view of nature, van der Leeuw argues introducing an interesting twist into his presentation, is important for methodology — especially that of theology: nature is not a closed whole or an open arena. It is an opening toward its Creator. This conception of nature provides points of contact for fruitful dialogue between natural science and theology.<sup>70</sup>

The modern natural scientific account of science, van der Leeuw concludes, is unacceptable for theology. He continues his search for an acceptable understanding of science (although he in a sense tips his hand in his comments about medieval science) by examining a science which lies on the boundary between natural science and human science: psychology. First and foremost, he has structural psychology in mind. More specifically, he

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<sup>69</sup>Van der Leeuw often refers to the Christian life with a metaphor borrowed from Novalis: seeking the sun-rays of the other world in this one. See: Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Twee werelden," *Omhoog* 2/4 (1915), 100-7; van der Leeuw, "Romantische studiën," p. 200.

<sup>70</sup>See *IT*, pp. 51-7.

focuses on Jaspers' distinction between causal relations and comprehensible relations. This distinction, van der Leeuw says, gives Windelband's distinction new meaning and also gives us a way out of the unhappy divisions of modern science. In the life of the spirit, one cannot speak of direct causes but only of conditions: if A insults B and B hits A, A's insult is the comprehensible relation of B's anger — not the cause of B's blow, for it is possible that B might not have hit A. In other words, the causal method quantifies the phenomenon while the understanding method qualifies it. The former experiments so that it can quantify while the latter "enters into" so that it can understand. Take for example, van der Leeuw says, an example from the history of religion: animal worship. One can causally explain animal worship by enumerating the factors which make the people in question dependent on the animal in question. But this explains the why of the people's dependence — and not why they worship. The why of their worship cannot be explained but only understood: one can understand how the people in question experience the otherness and mysteriousness of the animal and its power. Jaspers' approach thus presupposes a conscious "entering into" the subject by the investigator: the object must cease to be an object and become a subject as much as possible. This art of "entering into" or empathy (*Einfühlung*) demands of the investigator a rich inner life and a large measure of openness to all human thoughts and feelings. Consequently, many

find this approach exacting and difficult. But it must not be forgotten that every investigator, no matter how talented, can only attain knowledge of the other's spiritual life by seeking to understand life through its expressions.<sup>71</sup>

How useful is Jaspers' division of the sciences (i.e., into causal-explanatory sciences and understanding sciences)? Van der Leeuw tests the Jaspersian hypothesis with another example. Take, he says, the physicist standing over against his or her object — and a biographer standing over against his or her object. The latter, unlike the former, must enter into the object and attempt to re-experience (*nacherleben*) the life of the object. There are hence two different methods at work here. The physicist seeks to grasp (*erfassen*) while the biographer seeks to do more than this: to understand (*verstehen*). The *erfassende* method and the *verstehende* method thus complement one another. And as a boundary science, psychology needs both methods; applying only the *erfassende* method or only the *verstehende* method leaves much of life unexplored.<sup>72</sup>

Recent scholarship, van der Leeuw goes on, has come to recognize the importance of understanding in science. Once again, the whole — which is always more than the sum of its parts — is being emphasized. One need only think of the concepts of totality (*Ganzheit*) and structure in structural (*Gestalt*) psychology. For whoever wishes to understand cannot remain fo-

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<sup>71</sup>See *IT*, pp. 59-63.

<sup>72</sup>See *IT*, pp. 63-4.

cused on oneself or on the object of one's comprehension. One is not alone in the world with an object. Rather, one understands an object in a context of objects; one also understands oneself in such a context. Comprehension is only possible when there are contextual structures and connections — what Dilthey called "objective spirit," without which understanding of ourselves or others is not possible. According to Dilthey, we are surrounded by a commonness, a sphere of understandability which makes the understanding of any single event possible. Outside of this sphere of understandability, no science is possible. It is for this reason that positivists and Vedantins have difficulty in understanding one another. The broader context of understanding also includes, according to van der Leeuw, the fact that a person is a psychophysical, spatio-temporal being: "A person is not an abstract 'consciousness' or even less a functioning intellect but a life-complex."<sup>73</sup>

Structural psychology, following in Dilthey's footsteps, has made important contributions to understanding in the sciences. Besides the contribution of Jaspers, van der Leeuw also draws attention to the work of Spranger, who, in his elaboration of the notion of "structure," stressed the importance of the whole in understanding the part. In all understanding, according to Spranger, one casts a net — or structure — over reality. The causal approach to reality of the natural sciences is one — and only one — such

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<sup>73</sup>IT, p. 67.



net.<sup>74</sup> There is a plurality of ways of understanding reality, each of which depends on structure or what might be called one's pre-understanding.<sup>75</sup> By implication, no one structure or way of understanding is complete; all have limits. Making an important point, van der Leeuw writes:

In this context, the terrain of religious understanding indicates a final sense, which the person never reaches. Insofar as all understanding relates to the whole of things, we understand one another 'in God.' Here we touch the eschatology of all science. ...all understanding is only possible under the condition of the recognition of its boundary.<sup>76</sup>

Such a conception of understanding implies, van der Leeuw goes on, a hierarchy of ways of knowing. No one way is comprehensive because all sciences have boundaries (or limits to their understanding, which van der Leeuw calls the "eschatological" character of science); the various ways of knowing hence need one another. "Science is never absolute. It is eschatologically oriented."<sup>77</sup> Of the many ways of knowing, van der Leeuw singles out and distinguishes three — and in the process makes of the *Inleiding's* key moves: 1) *erfassende* science (for example, astronomy) 2) *verstehende* science (for example, psychology), and 3) science which has to do with a final sense or meaning (metaphysics or theology).<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>See Madison's relativization of the claims of (natural) science in *Understanding*. There are several points of overlap between van der Leeuw's argument in Part One of the *Inleiding* and Madison's fine book.

<sup>75</sup>The suggestion of equating structure with pre-understanding is mine and not van der Leeuw's.

<sup>76</sup>*IT*, pp. 70-1.

<sup>77</sup>*IT*, p. 71.

<sup>78</sup>See *IT*, pp. 68-71.

In order to further refine the above three-fold division of the sciences, van der Leeuw undertakes a discussion of the "third kingdom," the kingdom between subject and object: phenomenology. In the above scheme, phenomenology is a "between science" because it falls between *erfassende* science and metaphysical or theological science. Phenomenology's method, van der Leeuw goes on, consists of several steps.<sup>79</sup> First of all, one empathetically enters into the phenomenon in order to understand it from the inside out and to become one with it. Secondly, one orders and classifies in order to find the comprehensible relations that make the phenomenon a whole. Thirdly, one seeks to understand the phenomenon in ideal-typical terms. Fourthly, one observes *epoche* in order to avoid arbitrariness and to arrive at understanding of structures.<sup>80</sup>

The discussion of phenomenology raises, van der Leeuw says, an important matter which demands discussion: objectivity and subjectivity. This has to do with the question of structure in Spranger's sense, of the nets which are cast over reality. There are many of these — "who tells us which net we should cast?"<sup>81</sup> How do we know which net is better and more useful in un-

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<sup>79</sup>The recapitulation of the phenomenological method can be briefly summarized here. For a lengthier discussion of it, see Chapter Two above.

<sup>80</sup>Van der Leeuw makes the following observations about *epoche*: *Epoche* is the realization that one cannot understand reality itself, which is incomprehensible and elusive. One must build a bridge between one's own reality and that of the phenomenon in question. "One enters reality from one's own reality. One can do no other" (*IT*, p. 74). "This is the paradox of phenomenology: in order to discover the world, it must first renounce the world" (*IT*, p. 75).

<sup>81</sup>*IT*, p. 76.

derstanding reality and truth?<sup>82</sup> What is needed, van der Leeuw argues, is a science which can judge each science from a higher seat and from a highest principle. In the medieval era, there was such a science: it was variously called "scholasticism," "theology" and "Christian philosophy." Indeed, he continues, theology does possess a comprehensive principle necessary for a higher authority.<sup>83</sup> But there are problems for theology in this regard: How can theology fulfill both its critical and synthetic tasks with respect to the other sciences? What is theology's relationship to subjectivity? Is it too part of the great "anthropological turn" that science is taking in our time?<sup>84</sup>

These thoughts, van der Leeuw continues, have an ancestry in Vico, Herder and Dilthey. Seeing limitations in Descartes' clear and distinct ideas, Vico blazed a trail to historical understanding. Herder continued Vico's attempt to understand reality historically and Dilthey transformed historical understanding of reality into a method. Herder thus founded the modern science of history and Dilthey the modern science of psychology. Both men did the methodology of theology a great service — for without history and psychology, theology could go no further (van der Leeuw does not explain

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<sup>82</sup>Spranger (along with Dilthey) notes that the results of inquiry are not dictated by an autonomous method as much as by presuppositions. The determinative power of presuppositions, according to Spranger, may mean one of three things: 1) that all human science is bound to and valid only for a particular time and situation 2) that all understanding is bound to the capacity and maturity of the investigator's personality, or 3) that all understanding comes, consciously or unconsciously, from a basic perspectival posture. Van der Leeuw agrees with Spranger's analysis. He seeks to derive understanding from the way that the investigator is in the world. See *IT*, pp. 76-8.

<sup>83</sup>Van der Leeuw does not say at this point what this principle is.

<sup>84</sup>See *IT*, pp. 78-9.

why this is so). On the other hand, however, theology must go beyond history and psychology. Van der Leeuw says in a statement which reveals both his ethical theological past and his boundary-seeking style: "Our task is to attempt to guard theology against unfruitful — and in the last instance — untheological isolation on the one hand; and versus historicism and psychologism on the other."<sup>85</sup>

Van der Leeuw pauses at this point to note that he has carefully rehearsed the abstract thinking of the nineteenth century in order to demonstrate (and not just assert) the importance of concrete existence for reflection about the nature of science. No division of the sciences, he repeats, according to method or material is satisfactory. None of these distinctions does justice to the criterion of all science (i.e., seeing, acting, speaking).<sup>86</sup> This is why the concept of existence is of such methodological importance for science. It helps us recognize that we do not stand above reality but are rather in the middle of it, that we are not spectators but players. In this connection, Jaspers' conception of the four spheres of reality is relevant. For Jaspers, these spheres are original, separate and irreducible; there is no transition from the one to the other. Their only connection lies in the fact that they form a series in which each of the spheres presupposes the earlier ones as conditions. These four are: 1) anorganic nature in its regularity 2) life as

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<sup>85</sup> *IT*, p. 80.

<sup>86</sup> See *IT*, p. 82 for a summary of van der Leeuw's objections to Schleiermacher, Windelband, Rickert, natural science and psychology.

an organism 3) the soul as experience, and 4) the spirit as thinking and as conscious of objects. Science orients itself to these spheres with its different methods. In the first sphere, it seeks measurability. In the second, it seeks objective efficiency. In the third, it seeks expressions of spiritual life. And in the fourth, it seeks meaning. The method of any one cannot be applied to the others. The world is thus neither a conglomerate nor an unbroken whole. What makes the world a unity lies deeper than that which is accessible to us objectively or theoretically. Knowledge of things can only be attained through action.<sup>87</sup> In fact, says van der Leeuw, the foundation of all knowing is action in the world. Science arises only when one realizes that one is in the world, that the world and oneself form a whole. And while there are sciences which seek to know parts of reality, there is also a science which seeks to penetrate the boundaries of knowledge in an effort to come to know the whole. Science is thus neither speculation nor abstraction but a phase of the human being's coming to himself; science is not a mere knowing of something but a finding oneself in the world. In this sense, existence is not a given but a possibility, a chance for man to come to know himself: he is in the world but has to orient himself and find his way in it. Science has to do with man in the depth of his being. Van der Leeuw writes: "Science passes into anthropology. The question for us is not only if man will find, but also

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<sup>87</sup>Van der Leeuw often used the following example to illustrate this point: to get to know a stream, one does not ladle the stream into buckets. Rather, one jumps into the stream and learns to swim. See: *UNE*, 6; *IT*, p. 72.

if he in this way will find not only himself but also God — or if there is a way to be found from anthropology to theology.”<sup>88</sup>

More than once in his presentation thus far, van der Leeuw has made reference to the idea of the “eschatology of science” — the idea that all sciences have limits. Seeking to explain the eschatology of science more systematically, he notes that science has a lower and an upper boundary. The lower boundary lies beneath consciousness (i.e., that which cannot be known because it is “dumb”). More significant is science’s upper boundary, where knowing passes over into “knowing as I am known.”<sup>89</sup> All sciences — including theology — point above and beyond the facts and comprehension of the facts to a total context. From the smallest bit of knowledge, we begin an unending trek which, by way of understanding, leads to knowledge of God. For theology, this is the transition from understanding to being understood. Van der Leeuw thus says in one of the *Inleiding*’s most important passages: “All science leads to God. That is the upper boundary.”<sup>90</sup> All science thus has an eschaton, which is its presupposition, boundary and end. Human knowledge lives in the realm of bounded reality but points beyond it. “All science leads to God and all science proceeds from God.”<sup>91</sup> Such a statement, van der Leeuw notes, is not religiously intended — such a statement can (and

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<sup>88</sup> *IT*, p. 87. Van der Leeuw begins here to cross the boundary from theological prolegomena to theological anthropology. See *IT*, pp. 87–90. See also *MR*, *passim*.

<sup>89</sup> See *IT*, pp. 90–3.

<sup>90</sup> *IT*, p. 92.

<sup>91</sup> *IT*, p. 93.

must if necessary) be made apart from faith. Behind the things which we know to be non-eternal is the eternal itself. For this reason, it is wrong to try to save a little piece of science for theology: such an approach is too humble and does not reckon with the eschatological character of science. Van der Leeuw writes:

It becomes clearer all the time that theology only does intentionally and exclusively what all other sciences do unintentionally and among other things, namely, reckon with *eschata*, with the beginning and end of all knowledge. ... Theology is able to do what present day science cannot, namely, begin at the real beginning — not in abstraction ... but in existence itself.<sup>92</sup>

In an attempt to sum up his lengthy discussion of science in the first chapter of the *Inleiding*, van der Leeuw offers the following definition: "Science is thus the seeing, acting and speaking of the human being about that which is given to him after he has stood before God and before he places himself before God again."<sup>93</sup> Theology is hence not a particular kind of science but science *par excellence*. "*In the reduction to theology, every scientific question is recognized as originating in creation and as answered in the recreation of God.*"<sup>94</sup> All science points to the act of God, the obedience of humankind and new life — but theology goes beyond pointing to these

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<sup>92</sup> *IT*, p. 94.

<sup>93</sup> *IT*, p. 95. Van der Leeuw adds: "He does not need to know [i.e., be conscious of] this."

<sup>94</sup> *IT*, p. 95. Van der Leeuw's careful and prolonged reflection on the nature of science is in striking contrast to Barth's lack of such reflection, for which van der Leeuw chastises him. See *IT*, p. 90.

and speaks of them.<sup>95</sup>

In the second chapter of the "General Part" of the *Inleiding* (entitled "Theological Science"), van der Leeuw reiterates that science is seeing, acting and speaking. But, he points out, one cannot see God — much less do anything with him. Can one speak of him? Is the name theology justified? Is there a *logos* about God who is unspeakable and incomprehensible? If it is the case that all science proceeds from God and returns to him — and if it is true that all science is eschatological in character, it would seem that a science of God is impossible, since any science cannot treat its own eschaton. One cannot, van der Leeuw notes, jump over one's own shadow. Not all contemporary theologians seem to feel the weight of this impossibility. Van der Leeuw especially singles out for criticism that conception of theology which takes theology to be the quest for knowledge of God, whom man must attempt to understand with the use of reason. This conception of theology is both incomprehensible and unacceptable. By what right does one accept the Church's declarations about revelation as scientific axioms? And even if these declarations had divine authority, what would allow one to treat them as empirical data? This is too heavenly a conception of theology without a relationship to the earth. In other words, this conception of theology does not reckon with the eschatological character of science. Nor

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<sup>95</sup>See *IT*, pp. 95-103.



does it sufficiently recognize that science is more than knowledge. God is thus not theology's proper object.<sup>96</sup>

Before going on to discuss the proper object of theology, van der Leeuw makes a short excursus. He argues that the difference between scientific knowledge and other knowledge, between the scientific word and words in general, is not as great as is often thought. In the present case, this means that there is not a great difference between theology and preaching. Theology has always been a form of proclamation; as a science, it has always sought to witness about its object. But God is not the object of proclamation in theology, for God is not a given. "We preach not God but God's Word."<sup>97</sup> But theology is not exhausted by its task of preaching. It must also criticize and correct the Church's talk about God.<sup>98</sup> Both the preacher and the theologian recognize the questionability of the human word's ability to bear the divine word; but the theologian inquires into the conditions under which a person can speak in general and seeks the proper choice of words for preaching. Van der Leeuw writes:

*Theology is science which preaches and Preaching which reflects. It preaches that God has addressed himself to this world. It reflects on the forms which this deed of God has taken in the life of the world.*<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup>See *IT*, pp. 104-6. In passing, van der Leeuw also notes that religious experience cannot be theology's object either — without explaining why at this point.

<sup>97</sup>*IT*, p. 107.

<sup>98</sup>Van der Leeuw adopts this conception from Barth.

<sup>99</sup>*IT*, p. 108.

Theology as preaching and as criticism and correction, van der Leeuw goes on, proceeds from one fact: revelation. The fact of revelation makes the theological enterprise one: the theologian does not speak of God on Sunday and of oneself and one's ability to know and speak on Monday. Christ, the divine-human revelation of God defines the essence of theology as well as its object.<sup>100</sup> In order to perceive this truth, one must have faith:

In Jesus Christ, man and God, the essence of theology (and implicitly of all science) is given. Whoever wishes to find Him must take the way to Nazareth, the way of criticism and reflection, of correction and of understanding. But one will only reach this goal when one proceeds from the holiness where God seeks man, when one confesses Jesus as Lord.<sup>101</sup>

With respect to God, van der Leeuw says, we can only say what he has done for us. Theology is not talk about God as a given object or talk about religion or religious experience — it is talk about God's deeds, or talk about revelation.<sup>102</sup>

In van der Leeuw's scheme, theology looks like a three-tiered pyramid. (One ought not forget that van der Leeuw was an Egyptologist by profes-

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<sup>100</sup>It bears mentioning at this point that van der Leeuw's ethical theological background can be seen throughout the *Inleiding*. Two things especially stand out: the desire to relate theology to the other sciences ("culture"); and the emphasis on Christology and the Incarnation as the key to the relationship between theology and science. This latter point will become clearer as the discussion continues.

<sup>101</sup>*IT*, p. 110.

<sup>102</sup>"Revelation," van der Leeuw writes, "is ... audible in human words, visible in human form. But it is visibility of heavenly power, audibility of the divine word" (*IT*, p. 110). The correlate of revelation is faith: "Faith is a human disposition ... [a] human deed and a gift of God" (*IT*, p. 110). One might thus describe theology as "'philosophy' of revelation and 'psychology' of faith" (*IT*, p. 110) — provided one recognizes the eschatological character of science. Each science, it must not be forgotten, has its own eschaton. For example, biology's eschaton is life, psychology's is the soul and theology's is God.

sional training!) At the base of the pyramid is history, which is concerned with fact. Above it is the study of religion (or phenomenology), which is concerned with understanding. These two tiers of the pyramid, van der Leeuw says, are the biggest part of it: much of theology's work is done on these levels. The third and top tier, finally, is dogmatics, which is concerned with faith. Although the top part is the smallest part of the pyramid, it makes the pyramid what it is. Consistent with his plea for reversal of order in the *Inleiding*, van der Leeuw says that the pyramid really ought to be turned upside down: the top is the real foundation.<sup>103</sup>

In order to clarify his own position further, van der Leeuw critically reviews three current conceptions of theology. First of all, he examines Ernst Troeltsch's protest against dogmatic method in theology. Troeltsch sought to replace theology with philosophy of religion. In the process, dogmatic theology was relegated to the realm of the practical disciplines. This is unacceptable, van der Leeuw argues: in such a scheme, theology (and Christianity) is relativized. And any conception of theology which degenerates into historicism (i.e., relativism) will not do.<sup>104</sup> Secondly, van der Leeuw examines C. A. Bernouilli's conception of theology as an "ecclesiastical practice." Bernouilli does not take theology to be a science and hence limits it to an account of the Church's action. This conception is also unacceptable to

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<sup>103</sup>See *IT*, pp. 113-4. Van der Leeuw says more about theology's three-tiered nature in the "Particular Part" of the *Inleiding*.

<sup>104</sup>See *IT*, pp. 114-5.

van der Leeuw: while theology does have to do with ecclesiastical practice, it is more than this — it is a science in the fullest sense of the word.<sup>105</sup> Thirdly, van der Leeuw examines Erik Peterson's conception of theology as revelation or as a supernatural science. The problem with Peterson's conception, he says, is that one cannot simply equate theology with revelation. Over against Bernouilli's all too earthly conception, Peterson's view is all too heavenly.<sup>106</sup>

Over against the views of Troeltsch, Bernouilli and Peterson, van der Leeuw asserts that theology is "ecclesiastical science." Theology cannot be derived from human culture (Troeltsch) or from the demand of church leadership (Bernouilli). Theology must be ecclesiastical *and* scientific; it does not inquire into the significance of things for God nor is it merely the study of religion. Theology has to do with faith guaranteed by Christ in the form of the Church through the Holy Spirit. The Church is theology's subject; the theologian's task is to harvest the Church's orthodox doctrine — theology is valid only if it remains scientific and orthodox in character. The elder Chantepie, van der Leeuw notes, said much the same thing in the nineteenth century: theology is nothing if not connected to the Church. Chantepie's views, too long neglected, need to be heeded again.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup>See *IT*, pp. 115-7.

<sup>106</sup>See *IT*, pp. 117-9.

<sup>107</sup>See *IT*, pp. 119-22. Van der Leeuw also stresses the intimate connection of theology and the Church elsewhere in his writings. See for example, Gerardus van der Leeuw, "De theologische taak van de Kerk," *Vox Theologica* 6/2 (1934), 34-42.

The view of theology developed by van der Leeuw thus far has, of course, implications for the relationship between theology and science. Building on the work of J. H. Gunning, van der Leeuw makes the following observations.<sup>108</sup> If one begins with science and accords it primacy, he says, one then begins with generally valid principles of human reason and eventually decides if there is any room left for faith. If one begins with theology, on the other hand, and accords it primacy, one begins with revelation and then seeks to understand the character of science. The former of these two is the modern way and the way followed in the *Inleiding*. But the latter way is the correct way, van der Leeuw says: one should begin with the science which is intentionally and exclusively concerned with *the* eschaton (i.e., God) — and from here the goal and boundaries of other sciences can be determined.<sup>109</sup>

Consistent with his ethical theological roots, van der Leeuw desired a close connection between theology and science, as his argument in the *Inleiding* thus far clearly indicates. He thought theological isolation to be not just undesirable but wrong: theological isolation does not properly reckon with the presupposition of all theology — the Incarnation. Theology which does not or cannot draw lines to science (and culture) is not only deficient with respect to its task in the world but also with respect to its task to itself (i.e., the Church and the gospel). Theology can only fulfill its task if

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<sup>108</sup>Again, van der Leeuw's ties to ethical theology should be noted.

<sup>109</sup>See *IT*, pp. 122-3.


it preserves its Christocentric character. Among other things, this implies that theology can never be *just* the study of religion. "Only as theology of Incarnation can it [theology] be theology and simultaneously find its way to the world."<sup>110</sup>

There was a time, van der Leeuw observes, when theology was the queen of the sciences: all sciences proceeded from her and saw their task and highest honor as carrying new building material to theology's great encompassing palace. In another of the *Inleiding's* most important statements, van der Leeuw writes: "It is our deepest conviction that theology still has this position. And it is hard to see how a science that deals with the revelation of God can be anything other than the point of departure and goal of all other science."<sup>111</sup> God is not a minor event or matter, says van der Leeuw; whoever speaks of God speaks of everything — and whoever speaks of something speaks, consciously or unconsciously, of God. Theologians serve their queen in particular ways. Many seem to have lost their trust in her; such theologians seek a little corner in a remote part of the great terrain of culture. They satisfy themselves with apologetics and the assurance that theology is not that unscientific; in so doing, they seek help from philosophy (although

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<sup>110</sup> *IT*, p. 125.

<sup>111</sup> *IT*, pp. 125–6. Van der Leeuw makes these remarks against the background of his understanding of Christianity's crippled and defensive state in the modern world (versus its vibrant and offensive posture in the Graeco-Roman era as well as versus its powerful position in the medieval era). On his reading of the history of Christianity as a process of reduction (*vermageringsproces*), see *BC*, *passim*.



philosophy is not really interested in helping them). The queen thus lives in a dwelling declared unfit for habitation by scientific culture. Other theologians maintain their independence by isolation. In this case, the queen lives in jail — the walls are so high that she can see nothing of the surrounding culture. It is no wonder, van der Leeuw wryly observes, that scientists are not impressed with theology. It is time to change this image, he says. We sought to see theology in royal terms, emphasizing not only her lordship but also her absolute and total readiness to serve. The great theologians of the past (Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Schleiermacher), he observes, were also great men of culture who gave direction to science. Theology must not be afraid of culture but enter into it. It should seek points of contact which “open her for everything that appears on the market of life.”<sup>112</sup> The theologian must thus be culturally literate, which is a never-ending task. In serving culture, he or she must also be prepared for struggle and disagreement with the authority which resides in culture. Again, the harmonious relationship between the divine and the human is paradigmatically given in the Incarnation, which finds its place in the tension between creation and recreation. And this tension is mirrored in the tension between theology and culture, revelation and human life expressions. In this tension theology finds its life and terrain.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup>*IT*, p. 128.

<sup>113</sup>See *IT*, pp. 125–32. Elsewhere van der Leeuw notes that theology is a science which works at the boundaries of revelation and conceptuality. See Gerardus van der Leeuw,

Van der Leeuw's lengthy theological prolegomenon complete, he turns in the "Particular Part" of the *Inleiding* to an explication of theology's organization. He begins the first chapter (entitled "Historical Theology") by reviewing the three tier scheme touched on earlier: historical theology, which is an "event" (*Ereignis*) or *erfassende* science; the study of religion or phenomenological theology, which is a *verstehende* science; and dogmatic or systematic theology, which is an eschatological science. Van der Leeuw goes on to discuss each of these in turn at length.<sup>114</sup>

Historical theology, he begins, is not theological in itself but only by virtue of its point of view, from which it sees and conceives history and by which it chooses and orders its data (phenomenology plays a role here). This point of view lies in the third and most deeply theological part of theology.<sup>115</sup>

The history of Christianity, van der Leeuw continues, is but a subdivision of human history. History enters theology only under a certain point of view; it becomes history of the Church. The goal of historical theology is to register (*erfassen*) the facts of history and to lay bare the facts of the Christian tradition. As such, historical theology remains history within theology. If it

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"Psychologie en prediking," *Predikant en Dokter* 4 (1934), 65.

<sup>114</sup>See *IT*, p. 135.

<sup>115</sup>Like his conception of the study of religion, van der Leeuw's conception of the branches of theology also contains interrelationships. He offers the example of the three branches at work on the canon: historical theology asks about the origin and content of the canon; phenomenological theology tries to understand the place of the Bible *vis-à-vis* the holy books of other religions; and dogmatic theology builds on the results of the previous two and seeks to formulate the Church's living proclamation. See *IT*, p. 142.



were theology, it would miss its point, namely, giving theology its material and tradition.<sup>116</sup>

Procedurally, the historical theologian uses the *erfassende* methods of philology and history. These methods — and not the preaching of Jesus Christ — constitute historical theology's witness to the truth. The theological method is not applied in all other sciences even though theology is the central and normative science. As part of theology (which is an ecclesiastical science, it will be recalled), historical theology proceeds from the historical phenomenon of the Church: "*Historical theology is in essence Church history.*"<sup>117</sup> In order to fulfill its task of the writing of Church history, historical theology cannot limit itself to the boundaries of the Christian Church: the history of the Old Testament, the history of other non-Christian religions and the history of modern movements must also be examined. In other words, historical theology has to do with two principal areas: Christianity and other religions. The first of these is divided into the history of the New Testament and the history of the Church. The second of these is divided into Old Testament religions and those religions which have interacted with Christianity. The last group needs to be placed alongside of Old Testament religions on an equal footing — for if they are not so placed, they never receive an organic place in theology and hence are regarded as mere

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<sup>116</sup>See *IT*, p. 135, 140–6.

<sup>117</sup>*IT*, p. 138.

curiosities.<sup>118</sup> In order to complete its task, van der Leeuw says, historical theology makes use of the auxiliary disciplines of philology, archaeology and ethnology.<sup>119</sup>

The issue of the relationship between Christianity and other religions raises the question of natural theology for van der Leeuw. Following Paul in the letter to the Romans, he says, the Church concluded that there is sure knowledge of God in nature, which is a general introduction to and condition of the particular knowledge of God given in Jesus Christ. In the eighteenth century, natural religion came to be viewed as the the real and universal human religion. And in the nineteenth century, theology was replaced by history of religion, conceived as the science of natural religion. These developments, van der Leeuw says, should make us shudder about the schemes natural religion / revealed religion, general revelation / special

<sup>118</sup>Van der Leeuw argues that the many historical connections that exist and have existed between Christianity and other religions cannot be ignored by theologians: Christianity came to be in interaction with other religions. Van der Leeuw thus understood the relationship of Christianity and other religions in terms of "fulfilment." He saw much promise in Justin Martyr's *logos spermatikos*: what is only seminally and partially present elsewhere in the world of religion is completely present in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Christianity is thus the fulfilment of human religious striving (or other religions are a preparation for the kingdom of God announced in Christianity). The revelation of God in history is to be understood concentrically: "other" religions (forecourt), the Old Testament (holy place) and Christianity (holy of holies). All of history of religion is, from a theological point of view, Church history. See: Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Christus voor allen?" *Stemmen van Waarheid en Vrede* 62 (1925), 290-302, 321-46; van der Leeuw, "Het Christendom en de andere religies"; *IT*, pp. 146-55; Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Nieuwe godsdiensthistorische literatuur," *Nieuwe Theologische Studiën* 24 (1941), 58-9.

<sup>119</sup>See *IT*, pp. 135-9. For a compact summary of van der Leeuw's view of the place of the history of religion in theology, see van der Leeuw, "Geschiedenis der godsdiensten," pp. 81-7.

revelation, natural theology / Christian theology. As Schleiermacher said, nature and generality are abstract means of religiosity. Van der Leeuw thus rejects natural theology and the above pairs of opposites: there is not an independent nature and a supernature — there is only created reality. If theology holds that one can speak of God and the world outside of faith and revelation, it loses its character and right to existence. Says van der Leeuw:

Thus we must not only follow Schleiermacher in demonstrating the historical and psychological untenability of natural religion; we must also refuse to make the so-called "natural" the source of theological knowledge. There is no natural theology which begins with the Creator in order to proceed to the Redeemer. Theology is the thinking that begins at the cross and proceeds from there to creation.<sup>120</sup>

The proper theological order is from recreation to creation — not from nature to creation. The point of contact in humanity for announcement of the gospel lies not in something in general but in createdness, in grace. "Theology" reckons with one thing only: faith in Christ. From that faith arises the theological point of view for historical theology."<sup>121</sup>

The matter of natural theology brings van der Leeuw to a discussion of what he calls "the two ways of theology." The pages he devotes to this discussion are among the most original and interesting found in the *Inleiding*. For the theologian, van der Leeuw begins, who finds himself between the realities of revelation and the world, there are two ways to lead him to his

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<sup>120</sup> *IT*, p. 160.

<sup>121</sup> *IT*, p. 162.

goal: the way of revelation to the world (down) and the way of the world to revelation (up). These are not one way which is taken in different directions; these are two ways. Both are necessary and both lead to the place where God and things divine can be discussed. The two ways do not cross or run parallel. In taking one way, the theologian must remember the other.<sup>122</sup>

The first way, the way from revelation down to the world, is the truly theological way. No real theology can skip this way, for "theology is science of revelation."<sup>123</sup> The first way begins with God's act, the becoming flesh of the Word (which, it will be recalled, is for van der Leeuw the point of departure of all theology worthy of the name). Only when God descends to us can we speak of him; only from the event of revelation can we turn to the events of the world (if we attempted to turn from the world to the world, we would be speaking of ourselves). Theology is a matter of faith, of revelation which is believed. From this faith, it speaks of the world to the world. But this does not mean that theology speaks down to the world, for the theologian himself belongs to the world. In so following the first way of theology, the theologian must also keep an eye on the other way: culture and science cannot be ignored.<sup>124</sup>

The second way is the way of the study of religion, of human knowledge

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<sup>122</sup>See *IT*, pp. 163-4. See also van der Leeuw, "Phaenomenologie der openbaring?" 125-7.

<sup>123</sup>*IT*, p. 164.

<sup>124</sup>See *IT*, pp. 164-5.

about religion. In the second way, religion governs the conversation and for the time being there is no talk of faith. This is the way from the world up: humanity is seen proceeding in its life to a boundary, on the other side of which is perceived something of the Holy, of God, of "the other world." As human beings and as scientists, theologians also attempt to follow the way of man to God, from the world to revelation. Theologians travelling on the second way must be reminded of two things: that this way does not enable one to cross the boundary and come to God; and that as a knowing person, one exists because one is already known. On this way, hence, the theologian must seek the other way and never feel too at home on the second way. Van der Leeuw warns: "A theologian is a person who may never feel too comfortable."<sup>125</sup> The two ways belong inseparably together.<sup>126</sup>

Van der Leeuw's discussion of natural theology and the two ways of theology are quite clearly a response to dialectical theology.<sup>127</sup> Although in agreement with dialectical theology's chief representative — Barth — that theology is talk about God as well as criticism and correction of that

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<sup>125</sup> *IT*, p. 167.

<sup>126</sup> See *IT*, pp. 165–7.

<sup>127</sup> Van der Leeuw's book reviews in the late 1930s show his growing exasperation with the predominance of dialectical theology — especially of Barthian extraction. See: Gerardus van der Leeuw, Review of Hans Asmussen, *Ordnung des Gottesdienstes in Algemeen Weekblad voor Christendom en Cultuur*, June 18, 1937; Gerardus van der Leeuw, Review of Erik Peterson, *Zeuge der Wahrheit* in *Eltheto* 92 (1937), 18–9; Gerardus van der Leeuw, Review of G. Rosenkranz, *Gibt es Offenbarung in der Religionsgeschichte?* in *Theologisches Literaturblatt* 58 (1937), 200–1; Gerardus van der Leeuw, Review of Jacques Maritain, *Naar en nieuwe Christenheid* in *Algemeen Weekblad voor Christendom en Cultuur*, June 10, 1938.

talk, van der Leeuw argues that one must understand the way of human knowledge before one can engage in dogmatics. Barth fails even to attempt to do so; he thus committed a cardinal theological error in van der Leeuw's view: he ignored theology's second way. As such, Barth's theology cannot be truly Christocentric (i.e., Incarnational). For theology's two ways meet in the God-man Jesus Christ.<sup>128</sup>

In the second chapter of the *Inleiding's* second part (entitled "Science of Religion"), van der Leeuw explores the study of religion and its place in theology.<sup>129</sup> For a long time, he notes, the study of religion was closely connected to theology and the methods of the natural sciences. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, it asserted its independence and it has been striving for its autonomy ever since. However, this does not mean that the ties between theology and the study of religion are permanently severed. From the point of view of theology, the study of religion is an important part of its constitution. More specifically, the study of religion within theology treats the same data which the independent study of religion treats. In both cases, *epoche* is presupposed — as is love and an attitude of self-surrender. By study of religion within theology, van der Leeuw evidently has phenomenology of religion in mind. Such "phenomenological theology"

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<sup>128</sup>See *IT*, pp. 167-75.

<sup>129</sup>Because I outlined van der Leeuw's conception of the study of religion in some detail in Chapter Two above, my comments will be brief here.

proceeds in a psychological fashion.<sup>130</sup> But phenomenological theology is not simply psychology of religion. The latter is not a separate science but an application of psychology to the phenomenon of religion. But such application should not be underestimated; it is very important — even crucial. For psychology studies the human soul and thus always reduces itself to anthropology. For this reason, psychology is very important for theology — but only as an auxiliary science. Anthropology is also essential for theology — but again not as a separate science in theology. For *the* principle of theology remains Jesus Christ; one understands humanity from him and not vice versa. Van der Leeuw writes: “All theology is anthropological; all anthropology is theological.”<sup>131</sup> God is not understood through humanity; humanity is understood through God.<sup>132</sup>

Although psychology belongs in theology only as an auxiliary science, this is not the case with phenomenology. Phenomenology plays a crucial role in theology: it helps the theologian understand the question (or situation) to which he or she must give an answer.<sup>133</sup> The answer, van der Leeuw says, makes no sense without the question. For all theology is dialectical,

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<sup>130</sup>See Chapter Two above.

<sup>131</sup>em IT, p. 196.

<sup>132</sup>See IT, pp. 176–96. See also van der Leeuw, “Psychologie en prediking,” 65–8.

<sup>133</sup>Elsewhere, van der Leeuw writes (“Phaenomenologie der openbaring?” 125): “The task of phenomenology of religion with regard to theology can very briefly be described as follows: it attempts to see to it that the theologian knows what he is doing.” See also: Gerardus van der Leeuw, “Phaenomenologie van den geest,” *Vox Theologica* 11 (1939), 37; van der Leeuw, “Phaenomenologie van den godsdienst,” p. 190; Gerardus van der Leeuw, “Uit de godsdienstgeschiedenis,” 285–6.

conversational. Phenomenological theology thus has an intermediary character. It builds on the results of historical theology, from which it needs constant correction. And it orients itself toward dogmatic theology, which gives it its perspective and goal.<sup>134</sup>

The third and final chapter of the second part of the *Inleiding* (entitled "Dogmatic Theology") deals with the top of the three-tiered pyramid. Before discussing dogmatic theology proper, van der Leeuw considers the connections of historical theology and phenomenological theology to dogmatic theology. He turns first to a consideration of the place of philosophy of religion in theology. He argues that philosophy of religion forms a bridge from phenomenological theology to dogmatic theology. Analogous to psychology of religion, philosophy of religion is not a separate science but only philosophy applied to the phenomenon of religion. Philosophy, like theology, seeks to know and understand the whole. Unlike theology, however, it begins from below — whereas theology must always begin from both below and above. Philosophy is hence a very untheological auxiliary science for theology: it may go its own way or flow into theology — but it may not become theology, for then conflict arises. Philosophy and theology thus exist in perpetual tension.<sup>135</sup>

The connection between historical theology and dogmatic theology, ac-

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<sup>134</sup>See *IT*, pp. 196–204.

<sup>135</sup>See *IT*, pp. 205–12.



According to van der Leeuw, is made by Biblical theology and symbolic theology. Biblical theology and symbolic theology are hence neither historical theology nor dogmatic theology but connecting sciences. Biblical theology does its work of connection by placing historico-exegetical data in a relationship to the faith of the Church. Alternately expressed: it seeks to make the living Bible understood as the Word of God, as the charter of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. As such, Biblical theology is closely connected with preaching; it connects the preaching of the Bible with the preaching of the Church, scripture with dogma. Biblical theology must endeavour to show the relation of each part of the Bible to the central dogma of the Incarnation. It must ask not only what the Bible says but what it says with respect to the life of the Church and to preaching.<sup>136</sup> Symbolic theology, van der Leeuw goes on, deals with the confession of the Church as it has expressed itself in dogma. The Church's confession includes its ecumenical symbols and the symbols of particular churches — as well as catechisms, church orders, councils, liturgies, church songs and so on. In short, all writings in which the Church confesses her faith are objects for investigation by symbolic theology, which begins its task by working historico-exegetically and finishes it by relating its preliminary results to the central dogma of the

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<sup>136</sup>See *IT*, pp. 212–28. About the relationship between scripture and tradition or interpretation, van der Leeuw says (p. 224): “no scripture without interpretation, no scripture without tradition.” Further on van der Leeuw's view of the Bible, see Gerardus van der Leeuw, *De Bijbel als boek* (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1940), *passim*.

Incarnation. In this way, symbolic theology flows into dogmatics.<sup>137</sup>

Van der Leeuw begins his observations about dogmatic theology by reiterating his earlier contention that dogmatic theology is quantitatively the smallest part of the theological encyclopedia. Qualitatively, however, it is the largest and only completely theological discipline. It is the top and essence of the pyramid — but also the basis. Dogmatic theology<sup>138</sup> is not the dogmatics of a particular church but the “*scientific discovery of the movement (dynamis) of the dogma of the Church.*”<sup>139</sup> Dogmatics is essentially normative in nature because its point of departure and goal is the Church’s proclamation. This normative character is based on the normative character of dogma itself. With the help of human knowing and understanding, dogmatics seeks to discover the perpetual movement of the proclamation of Christ, which became dogma in the Church. On the one hand, dogmatics seeks to fix the relationship of each point of doctrine to the predominant (and often opposing) tendency of the contemporary situation. On the other hand, dogmatics is bound to Christian proclamation. Dogmatics is hence not dogma but the discovery of the life of dogma. As such, says van der Leeuw, dogmatics has three missions: 1) it must define the relationship of

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<sup>137</sup>See *IT*, pp. 228–33.

<sup>138</sup>Van der Leeuw prefers the designation “dogmatic theology” to “systematic theology,” although he employs both designations.

<sup>139</sup>*IT*, p. 233. This conception, van der Leeuw says, is not mere description of dogma. This conception is also different than Schleiermacher’s incorrect view of dogmatic theology, in which dogmatic theology is part of historical theology.

dogma to the consciousness of the time 2) it must define the structure of the content of faith, the context of different dogmas in dogma, and 3) it must discover the life in dogma.<sup>140</sup>

In dogmatics, van der Leeuw continues, one can see the paradoxical character of theology — or, in dogmatics one can see the basic form of the Incarnation. Science (human knowing and understanding) is touched by revelation (God's *logos*); human meaning and divine meaning meet. Here the heart of theology is reached. Truth is communicative and exists only in communion between people. We can only have communion with God if he comes down to us. Van der Leeuw writes: "In the faith that he did this rests all of theology. In it is the Truth in communication with the God become man. The theological name for communication is Incarnation. And the Incarnation is the presupposition of all human communication."<sup>141</sup> In the Incarnation — and in it alone — is the Church's dogma. For dogma is not conviction or axiom (or scripture or tradition) but the living reality of communication between Christ and his Church, which is given in the Incarnation. There is, says van der Leeuw in a very important statement, only one dogma: God became man. All other doctrines are valid only insofar as they can be derived from it. Dogmatics so conceived is an act of faith. But this act of faith is never completed; it must be constantly renewed. It must

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<sup>140</sup>See *IT*, pp. 233–4.

<sup>141</sup>*IT*, p. 235.

continue its existence of tension to be true Incarnation theology. Theology thus focuses on God and the Church at the same time (and the guarantee of contact between the two is the Incarnation): the Church proclaims the living God in a living way. Such proclamation is the essence of dogma, which is never static but dynamic.<sup>142</sup>

Winding down the *Inleiding's* lengthy presentation, van der Leeuw penultimately discusses the different aspects of dogmatic theology. Ethics focuses on the Christian life.<sup>143</sup> Church polity focuses on the life of the Church in the world.<sup>144</sup> Practical theology focuses on the doctrine of service, on act.<sup>145</sup> Practical theology has, according to van der Leeuw, four sub-disciplines: liturgics (to which van der Leeuw devoted much theological attention and which he thought to be the real heart of theology<sup>146</sup>), homiletics, catechetics and poemenics.<sup>147</sup>

In the last pages of the *Inleiding*, van der Leeuw turns to the question of the relationship of theology to the university. He argues that theology should be practiced in the university, along with other sciences. Withdrawal into a seminary or monastery involves undesirable narrowing of vision —

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<sup>142</sup>See *IT*, pp. 234–8.

<sup>143</sup>See *IT*, pp. 238–47.

<sup>144</sup>See *IT*, pp. 247–52.

<sup>145</sup>“In practical theology the Christian reminds his fellow Christians of the basis of their existence, of their being in Christ. This reminder (in word and deed) is service.” *IT*, p. 253.

<sup>146</sup>See especially van der Leeuw, *Liturgick*, *passim*.

<sup>147</sup>See *IT*, pp. 252–64.

and a resultant lack of influence on other sciences. Pregnantly, he writes: "For theology — that was the purport of everything above — is only possible in continuous community and interaction with the entire scientific encyclopedia, of which it is the centre."<sup>148</sup> Theology can only find itself by going out and distinguishing itself from science in general. Theology in the university must meet two requirements. First of all, it must be itself — and not the study of religion. Secondly, it must be for everyone (i.e., both for itself and for others). Because theology understands the eschaton of all sciences, it can and must engage in dialogue with all of them. And with these words<sup>149</sup> van der Leeuw says he hopes he has reached his goal of providing "a methodological synthesis of theology."<sup>150</sup>

The three-fold conception of theology articulated in the *Inleiding* is applied by van der Leeuw in several of his theological works. In his most important dogmatic theological treatise, *Sacramentstheologie*, the author states that the book's method is explained in *Inleiding tot de theologie*. The book is accordingly subdivided into the following parts: a "Historico-Exegetical Part"; a "Phenomenological Part"; and a "Theological Part."<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>148</sup>*IT*, p. 264.

<sup>149</sup>In the last few pages of the *Inleiding*, van der Leeuw addresses some comments to the particularities of the place of theology in Dutch universities.

<sup>150</sup>See *IT*, pp. 265–9.

<sup>151</sup>See van der Leeuw, *Sacramentstheologie*, *passim* and especially p. 12. In this work, van der Leeuw also appends a short "Liturgical Part." Van der Leeuw's three-fold conception of theology is also expressed in his *Het beeld Gods* (Amsterdam: U. M. Holland, 1939).



The theological method developed in the *Inleiding* also comes to expression in van der Leeuw's book on theological anthropology, *Der Mensch und die Religion*. Here the "two ways of theology" are clearly seen. The first part of the book is entitled "Man and God." The second part is entitled "God and man."<sup>152</sup>

It is interesting to observe that many of van der Leeuw's theological writings prior to the *Inleiding* deal with theology in a formal rather than a material way. In a sense, these formal treatises are first attempts at expressing what was maturely expressed in the *Inleiding*.<sup>153</sup> After the first edition of the *Inleiding* (1935), van der Leeuw's major material theological treatises appear: *Het beeld Gods* (1939), *Liturgiek* (1940), *Der Mensch und die Religion* (1941), *Sacramentstheologie* (1949). I do not wish to imply that van der Leeuw's theological writings prior to 1935 are of no consequence. I do wish to assert, however, that the publication of the first edition of the *Inleiding* in 1935 marks the beginning of his theologically mature work. Thus, to reiterate a point made earlier in Chapter One above, to understand van der Leeuw means to understand him as a theologian. And to understand him as a theologian means to understand the book where he carefully and systematically explains what theology is. The *Inleiding* is the key to understanding van der Leeuw's theology. It is also the key to understanding his

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<sup>152</sup>See *MR*, *passim*.

<sup>153</sup>Especially significant in this regard are *PT* and *ST*.

work in the study of religion, which is in a sense "destined" for theology, as the *Inleiding* indicates. To clarify this point a little further, the following should be observed: From the point of view of the study of religion, the study of religion is an independent field of study. It does not need theology. From the point of view of theology, however, the study of religion is part of theology. It makes its presence felt in historical theology (as history of religion with a theological point of view) and in phenomenological theology (as phenomenology of religion with a theological point of view). Theology needs the study of religion. As van der Leeuw put it near the end of the *Inleiding*, thereby summing up the novelty in his position: "Science of religion should not be practiced separately but ought to be the presupposition of all theological study, both historical and so-called systematic. In the former it provides necessary perspective and in the latter it provides anthropological presupposition."<sup>154</sup>

Van der Leeuw's view of theology, in sum, takes the agenda of his ethical theological background most seriously: he sought to mediate between theology and culture, theology and science. In his particular case, this mediation involved the effort to relate theology integrally to, among other things, the study of religion (based on the harmonious divine-human relationship revealed in the Incarnation). Unhappy with Christianity's crippled state

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<sup>154</sup>*IT*, pp. 267-8.

in the modern world and consistent with his desire to restore theology to its (in his view) rightful place as queen of the sciences, van der Leeuw attempted something heroic and seemingly impossible: to overcome several centuries of rational and secular thought. Theology must recapture its lost throne; it must once again rule — and serve — wisely. If it does so, all other sciences will prosperously work within the confines of its palace — including the study of religion. With his three-tiered conception of theology (historical, phenomenological, dogmatic) and with his two-way method in theology (from revelation to religion and from religion to revelation), van der Leeuw believed that he had pointed out the way for overcoming the modern dilemma. He also believed that he had found unity and peace in the land in which theology is queen. Had he? The next and final chapter of this study will contextualize and critically evaluate van der Leeuw's provocative work.



## Chapter 4

# Application: The Study of Religion and the Nature of Theology

To put the matter simply: any appeal to the past must not be made outside a full recognition of the present. Any use of the past which insulates us from living now is cowardly, trivializing, and at worst despairing.<sup>1</sup>

### I. Theology and Religious Pluralism

For the first time in over a millenium and a half, Christianity in the twentieth century has been forced to reckon with the reality of religious pluralism. This reckoning is still very much in infancy. It has demanded the recognition of the reality and profundity of other religious traditions. It has also demanded the recognition that millions of people have lived and live by these traditions. Christianity in this century has begun anew the work of thinking its relationship to these other traditions. But this is only the first step. In order to take the fact of religious pluralism seriously,

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<sup>1</sup>Grant, *Time*, p. 48.

the Christian theologian must come to study — and eventually understand — other religious traditions. How can this be done? What conception of theology would allow for this?

Before critically assessing the position of van der Leeuw in terms of the above problematic, I will briefly examine the views of three other twentieth century Protestant theologians<sup>2</sup> in order to construct a constellation which will bring van der Leeuw's place and originality to light. I will begin by examining the conceptions of theology of two systematic theologians who have been extremely influential in shaping the course of Protestant theology in this century and whose views represent theological types of virtually opposite extraction: Karl Barth and Paul Tillich. Next, I will examine the conception of theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg, who has carefully considered the problem of the relationship of theology to the world of religion. His views constitute a rather different theological type than either Barth's or Tillich's. Do the conceptions of theology of these three thinkers allow for serious engagement with other religious traditions?<sup>3</sup>

The problem of the relationship of theology to the realm of religion has

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<sup>2</sup>I wish to emphasize the fact that I am limiting the discussion to twentieth century Protestant theology. This in no way implies that religious pluralism is insignificant for Catholic theology.

<sup>3</sup>While one might consider the views of Söderblom and Otto in this regard, I have chosen not to consider them here for the following reasons. First of all, while both scholars were Christian theologians actively engaged in the history of religions, neither of them — to the best of my knowledge — wrote substantially on the formal nature of theology. Secondly, their liberal theological heritage is shared by van der Leeuw, whose views in a sense represent their theological type in this study.

also been heralded by non-theologians. Certain historians of religions have, in the course of their research, been led to the doorstep of theology. I will briefly review the later work of two such historians of religion: Joachim Wach and Wilfred Cantwell Smith. The presentation of their views will allow van der Leeuw's position to be further highlighted — this time from the "other side." Do the positions of Wach and Smith permit them to cross the theological threshold?

Finally, I will critically discuss van der Leeuw's view of the relationship of the study of religion to theology. In so doing, it is my intention to show the uniqueness and sophistication of his position (*vis-à-vis* the thinkers referred to above) as well as weaknesses associated with it. Does his view of the history of religion allow him to cross the theological threshold? Does his conception of theology allow for serious engagement with other religious traditions?

## II. Mutual Confrontation

### a. Karl Barth

Barth (1886–1968) set forth his conception of theology (or dogmatics) in his *magnum opus*, *Church Dogmatics*. In his view, dogmatics is the scientific self-examination of the Christian Church with respect to the content of its distinctive talk about God. Dogmatics is hence a theological disci-

pline; it is also a function of the Church. The Church talks about God in a variety of ways; because of its responsibility it must criticize and revise its God-talk. As a science, Barth says, theology is a measure taken by the Church with respect to the vulnerability and responsibility of its utterance: the Church produces theology and then it subjects this theology to examination. Theology reminds talk in the Church of its fallibility and the need for correspondence between its talk and its being, namely, Jesus Christ, God's revealing and reconciling address to humankind. Does the Church's talk derive from, lead to and conform to him? If the answer to this question is "yes," then the Church's God-talk has true content and is dogmatic. Dogmatics is thus the science of dogma; it asks what we must say in our time based on the witness of the prophets and the apostles. Dogmatics can only take place in the Church as an act of faith; it need not be overly concerned with its scientific status.<sup>4</sup>

Barth was deeply opposed to any form of apologetics in theology. Theology must be a witness of faith against unbelief; apologetics, however, is an attempt at self-vindication. Such self-vindication on behalf of theology means taking unbelief seriously, which in turn implies that faith ceases to be faith. Engagement in apologetics also assumes that the work of dogmatics is done, which in turn may lead to the assumption that dogmatics can be

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<sup>4</sup>See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. W. Bromiley, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), I/1, pp. 3-24. As I noted in Chapter Three above, van der Leeuw finds this Barthian unconcern with science objectionable.

ignored in favour of other concerns. This assumption may lead dogmatics to the mistaken conclusion that its struggle with unbelief is over. Barth wanted to hear no talk of the "other task" of theology (i.e., apologetics): theology's task is proclamation of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ attested to in scripture.<sup>5</sup>

Talk about God in the Church, according to Barth, seeks to be proclamation (in preaching and in the sacrament) of the Word of God heard in faith. Such talk, however, is human talk and hence not really God-talk. But because of divine grace and sanctification, human talk can become God-talk. When and if it pleases God, the human word becomes the divine Word. Theology reflects on such God-talk (or proclamation) and then confronts it with criticism and direction. Theology is thus a response to proclamation; theology must listen to the Word of God in faith before it speaks its word of criticism and correction. This listening, according to Barth, is where nineteenth century liberal Protestant theology fell short: it failed to listen but spoke anyway. In so doing, it spoke to itself of itself in an all too self-assured manner. For even when human talk becomes God-talk by grace, the matter of proclamation is a risky and tenuous business in need of constant examination and criticism. Theology is therefore a necessary venture for the

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<sup>5</sup>See: Barth, *Church*, I/1, pp. 25-36; Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, *Natural Theology: Comprising "Nature and Grace" by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the reply "No!" by Dr. Karl Barth*, trans. Peter Fraenkel (London: Geoffrey Bles: The Centenary Press, 1946).

Church: the orthodoxy of the contemporary kerygma must be constantly tested anew, which necessarily implies that dogmatics has not a positive and edifying but rather a polemical and critical character.<sup>6</sup>

On the basis of this conception of theology, Barth goes on in the *Church Dogmatics* to examine the central Christian doctrines of the Word of God, God, creation and reconciliation. Not surprisingly, given the above conception of theology, Barth did not have a great deal to say about religion — and what he did have to say was not very positive.<sup>7</sup> As he saw it, the revelation of God is the abolition<sup>8</sup> of religion. Revelation is solely divine — both as a possibility and as a reality. Religion, however, represents the frail human attempt to reach God. Religion must be understood in light of revelation — and not vice versa. And in the light of revelation, religion is exposed as unbelief; this is God's judgment on all religion. In revelation, God tells humanity something it cannot know on its own. Humanity must hence listen and not speak, which it does in religion, in its futile attempt to reach God. Revelation upsets and contradicts all religion; persistent resistance to revelation is unbelief, sin, idolatry. But, Barth goes on, one can speak of true religion: religion is not true but can become true. God can justify religion

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<sup>6</sup>See Barth, *Church*, I/1, pp. 47–87.

<sup>7</sup>The reader of Barth's comments on religion in the *Church Dogmatics* cannot help thinking that by "religion" Barth has nineteenth century liberal Protestant theology in mind first and foremost — and not the religions of the world.

<sup>8</sup>The German term Barth uses is *Aufhebung*. This term means both "abolition" and "elevation," which the discussion will reveal shortly.

by grace just as he justifies sinners — and he has done this in the Christian religion. Christianity is thus the true religion, according to Barth — but by virtue of grace and not intrinsic merit.<sup>9</sup>

Barth's conception of theology and his view of religion does not offer much promise in terms of serious engagement with other religious traditions. The Christian theologian, in Barth's view, remains focussed on the God-talk of the Christian Church and cares little about what goes on elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, because other religions are viewed as unbelieving and idolatrous, the Christian theologian need not bother with them. Apologetics (the "other task" of theology), after all, is not a legitimate venture for the Christian theologian. There appears to be a large and unbridgeable chasm between Barth's conception of theology on the one hand and guidance with the problem of religious pluralism on the other.

## b. Paul Tillich

The conception of theology set forth by Tillich (1886–1965) is self-consciously apologetic. As a function of the Christian Church, theology must serve two ecclesiastical needs: it must state the truth of the Christian message and it must interpret this truth anew for each generation. Theology

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<sup>9</sup>See Barth, *Church*, I/2, pp. 280–361.

<sup>10</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer's criticisms of Barth's so-called "positivism of revelation" are relevant in this regard. See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1972), pp. 279–81, 285–7, 324–9.

thus moves between the poles of eternal truth and temporal situation. Versus Barth's kerygmatic theology, Tillich's apologetic theology is a kind of answering theology: it answers the questions implied in the situation in the power of the eternal message. In so doing, theology proceeds with a method of correlation: the message and the situation need to be related without obscuring either of them. More specifically, the questions implied in the situation are correlated with the answers implied in the message. The answers are thus not derived from the questions nor are the answers elaborated without reference to the questions.<sup>11</sup> To expand this conception somewhat, Tillich says that the Christian theologian must demonstrate the universality and uniqueness of the Christian message, with which he or she is ultimately concerned. Theology is hence the methodical interpretation of the contents of the Christian faith — and by virtue of this fact theology is a function of the Christian Church. But theology cannot stop here. It must go on to demonstrate that the Christian message is valid for those not yet ultimately concerned with it. There are trends, Tillich argued, in all religions which move toward this (Christian) answer. Systematic theology<sup>12</sup> formulates this answer based on its sources: the Bible, Church history and the history of religion and culture. These sources address us through experience. Experience

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<sup>11</sup>Throughout his formulation of the nature of task of theology, one senses Tillich's deep opposition to Barth's conception, which he surely regarded as one-sided (i.e., answers are given without any attention to what the questions are).

<sup>12</sup>Tillich divides theology into three parts: historical theology, systematic theology and practical theology.



is also the medium through which the content of systematic theology is received. Both theology's sources and human experience are subjected to the criterion and norm of systematic theology: the New Being in Jesus Christ as our ultimate concern. Tillich stresses that systematic theology is not historical but constructive: it does not seek to formulate what the Christian message was in the past but rather what it is for the present situation.<sup>13</sup>

Very much in the tradition of Schleiermacher, one might say that Tillich sought to address "cultured despisers of religion" in the twentieth century. In other words, his apologetic theology was aimed at the educated, philosophical, Western "atheist." This, as he saw it, is what the situation called for. But late in his life, Tillich changed his mind. A visit to Japan and his encounter with other religious traditions (in part through his association with Mircea Eliade at the University of Chicago) made him rethink his position. One might say that Tillich recognized that the situation had changed; new questions were being asked which required new answers. Thus, theology's new interlocutor should be not philosophy and atheism but the world's religious traditions.<sup>14</sup> A few days before Tillich died, he delivered a public lecture entitled "The Significance of the History of Religions for the Systematic Theologian." In this address, he argued that in order to take the

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<sup>13</sup>See Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), I, pp. vii-viii, 3-68.

<sup>14</sup>See Mircea Eliade, "Paul Tillich and the History of Religions" in *The Future of Religions*, ed. Jerald C. Brauer (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp. 31-6.

history of religions seriously, the Christian theologian must recognize that all religions have revelatory and salvific powers. This, however, does not entail denying the possibility that there may be a central redemptive event in the history of religions which makes possible a theology of universalistic significance. While Jesus appeared in the fullness of time (*kairos*), there may be other such times as well (*kairoi*). The experience of the Holy within the finite, according to Tillich, forms the universal basis of all religion.<sup>15</sup>

Tillich's conception of theology — especially as envisioned by him toward the end of his life — allows for serious engagement with other religious traditions. This of course requires interpreting "situation" and "questions" in such a way so as to indicate the reality of religious pluralism. In light of the new situation, the "message" must endeavour to give new and relevant "answers". However, Tillich's conception does not specify how this might be done. How exactly does the theologian proceed to take the history of religions seriously? How might theology be organized in order to do so? Tillich, unfortunately, left these more specific questions unanswered. Moreover, he himself had not seriously studied other religious traditions. While he pointed out the direction that theology must go, he was not able to build the road it should take.

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<sup>15</sup>See Paul Tillich, "The Significance of the History of Religions for the Systematic Theologian" in *The Future of Religions*, pp. 80-94.

### c. Wolfhart Pannenberg

Few Protestant theologians in the second half of the twentieth century have reflected on the nature of theology and its relationship to religion in as comprehensive a manner as Pannenberg (b. 1928). In his most important work on the subject, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, Pannenberg argues that theology is the science of God, where God is understood as the all-encompassing reality. Theology understood in this way is not positivistic<sup>16</sup> — for God is open as a question and as a problem (and not closed as a dogma). God is not present to human experience as an object. The reality of God is co-given to experience in *all* objects — God is the reality which determines all things. God is thus available to theological reflection only indirectly. God-talk hence implies showing that all things bear traces of the divine. Theology as the science of God accordingly means studying the totality of the real from the viewpoint of the reality which determines all things. The totality of the real, Pannenberg continues, does not exist as complete; it is only anticipated. The reality of God is present only in the anticipation of the totality of reality.

Now, says Pannenberg, introducing an interesting twist to his argument, one finds expressions of experience of reality in religions. Theology as the

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<sup>16</sup>By "positivism" Pannenberg means taking "some fact or institution as the ultimate basis of all arguments." See Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, trans. Francis McDonagh (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1976), p. 29.

science of God is thus only possible as the science of religions — and theology is the science of religions only insofar as it is the science of God. The investigation of religions has a theological character, says Pannenberg. This means that the study of religion involves ascertaining to what degree religions give evidence of the self-communication of a divine reality. A theology of Christianity is but a branch of theology in general: to equate theology in general with Christian theology is to assume Christianity's truth or absoluteness. Furthermore, theology as the hermeneutics of Christian revelation is tenuous when Christian revelation is being questioned and other religions become well-known. Theology must hence make its claims *vis-à-vis* the history of religions — and this means that the question of Christianity's superiority must remain open. The science of religion, in Pannenberg's view, is really the theology of religion.<sup>17</sup>

Theology, Pannenberg repeats, is the science of God which can approach its subject matter only indirectly through the study of religions (since the reality of God is not accessible to direct observation). God has been the central topic of religions; consideration of God is thus historically conditioned and theology always bears the marks of history. Given such a conception, how is theology internally organized? Pannenberg first of all considers the relationship between theology's historical and systematic tasks: the inves-

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<sup>17</sup>See Pannenberg, *Theology*, pp. 297–326.

tigation of the religion of former times and its truth is both historical and systematic. The history of Christian theology, for example, is the history of systematic interpretations of Christianity. Also necessary for theology is the science of religion. In fact, says Pannenberg, the science of religion is the fundamental theological discipline: because the real thematic of all religions is the communication of the divine reality expressed in them, the science of religion (understood as the theology of religion with the help of sociology of religion, psychology of religion, phenomenology of religion and philosophy of religion) is absolutely necessary for theology. The science of religion examines communications of the all-determining reality reported by religions to see how far they actually prove to be such in the experience of the religious people in question. Among other things, this implies that the truth of any religion (including Christianity) is not assumed in advance. Such a science of religion, Pannenberg observes, is not yet fully developed in theology. Until the full development of this most basic theological discipline, its work must be done in systematic theology (an emergency solution).

In the meantime, theology is subdivided into four areas. Biblical theology studies the Biblical texts, the religion of Israel and the religion of early Christianity with an eye to their manifestations of the all-determining reality. Church history studies Christianity from the point of view of the history of religion; it examines the relationship between the experience of reality and

the Christian view of reality given to it by tradition. Church history asks: has the God of the Christian tradition manifested himself in people's experience as the all-determining reality? Systematic theology begins its work after Christianity's place has been determined in the general history of religion. Systematic theology then studies and describes Christianity understood as the history which receives its impetus from the investigation of the truth of the Christian faith. For Christianity, according to Pannenberg, is a process; its essence is its history. Systematic theology tries to penetrate the historical phenomenon of Christianity in systematic terms. Finally, practical theology concerns itself with the theory of the Church's activity.<sup>18</sup>

Pannenberg's view of theology is obviously well thought out. He has attempted to think about theology in the context of twentieth century religious pluralism and has therefore included the study of religion in theology in an integral way.<sup>19</sup> However, he does not specify how the theologian should go about the study of religion. Can theology simply adopt the methods and approaches of the study of religion as it exists as an independent discipline? Would these methods and approaches allow for the determination of the experiential presence of communications of the all-determining reality? One can only wonder for Pannenberg leaves these questions unanswered (or at

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<sup>18</sup>See Pannenberg, *Theology*, pp. 346–440.

<sup>19</sup>I do not wish to engage in a material critique of Pannenberg's position here. However, his rather philosophical conception of God — and *a fortiori* his conception of theology — is certainly open to theological criticism.

least unsatisfactorily answered).<sup>20</sup> And this points to the major weakness in his position: as a professional theologian, Pannenberg is not an expert in the study of religion — understandably, one might add. Hence, his position is, not entirely unlike Tillich's, more programmatic than actual.

#### d. Joachim Wach

The writings on the study of religion of the young Joachim Wach (1898–1955) indicate his desire to carefully distinguish this relatively new discipline from its chief rival: Christian theology. Early in his career, Wach sought to ground the study of religion in hermeneutics: its goal is to understand human religious experience through its expressions. As such, according to Wach, the study of religion is a descriptive endeavour and not a normative one like theology. Later in his life, however, Wach changed his mind about the relationship between theology and the study of religion; his years of study as a historian of religion prompted him to seek a theological basis for his work. More specifically, religious experience, which remained a constant focus throughout his life, came more and more to be seen by him as an apprehension of revelation, as an encounter with the Holy (in the Ottonian sense). The study of religion evaluates these apprehensions of revelation —

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<sup>20</sup>Pannenberg has continued to think and write about these problems. See: Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie*, Vol. I (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), especially ch. 3; Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Die Religionen als Thema der Theologie," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 169/2 (1989), 99–110.

and theology must make use of these evaluations in its effort to determine the nature and extent of God's revelatory activity in history. For this reason, the history of religions cannot remain unconnected to theology.<sup>21</sup>

The chief tenets of Wach's mature position are clearly expressed in his writings from the Chicago years (i.e., after World War II to his death).<sup>22</sup> Religious experience, according to Wach, has four characteristics: 1) it is a response to what is experienced as ultimate reality (as mysterious, energetic, powerful) and thus is characterized by awe 2) it involves a total response of one's total being to what is apprehended as ultimate reality 3) it is the most intense and profound experience of which human beings are capable, and 4) it involves an imperative, a drive to action. For any experience to be deemed religious, all four of these characteristics must be present. Such religious experience, Wach goes on, is universal: religious experience is constitutive of human nature (although in various degrees of awareness, intensity and conceptualization). For religion is an expression of awareness of the Holy;

<sup>21</sup>On this reading of Wach's development, see: Joseph M. Kitagawa, "Introduction: The Life and Thought of Joachim Wach" in Joachim Wach, *The Comparative Study of Religions*, ed. Joseph M. Kitagawa (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), pp. xiii-xlviii; Joseph M. Kitagawa, "Introduction" in Joachim Wach, *Understanding and Believing*, ed. Joseph M. Kitagawa (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), pp. vii-xviii; Joseph M. Kitagawa, "Introduction: *Verstehen* and *Erlösung*" in Joachim Wach, *Introduction to the History of Religions*, ed. Joseph M. Kitagawa and Gregory D. Alles (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1988), pp. ix-xxxiv; Joseph M. Kitagawa, "Introduction" in Joachim Wach, *Essays in the History of Religions*, ed. Joseph M. Kitagawa and Gregory D. Alles (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1988), pp. ix-xxii.

<sup>22</sup>See: Joachim Wach, *Types of Religious Experience: Christian and Non-Christian* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), pp. xi-xvi, 3-47, 228-31; Wach, *Comparative*, pp. 27-58; Wach, *Understanding*, pp. 69-86. The following account of Wach's mature position is a summary of these writings.



human beings by nature have a disposition enabling them to respond to self-disclosures of the divine. Wach writes: "Religious experience, then, is the inner aspect of the intercourse of man and the human mind with God."<sup>23</sup>

Not only is religious experience universal, its expression is also universal. One may spontaneously give a demonstration of what one has experienced (a shout of joy, for example); or one may seek to communicate one's experience to others (in so doing, one may or may not have a missionary purpose in mind). Historians of religion study such expressions — for religious experience itself remains hidden from observation. Wach writes: "The history of religions tells us of various ways in which revelation has been received and apprehended by man."<sup>24</sup> The forms of expression of religious experience are amazingly similar in structure the world over, says Wach. In fact, such expressions — which are by necessity symbolic — fall under three headings: 1) theoretical expressions, which are conceptual and intellectual in nature (myth, doctrine) 2) practical expressions, which are active in nature (rites), and 3) sociological expressions, which are communal in nature (fellowships of various kinds). All religions worthy of the name, Wach goes on, show the presence of all three forms of expression.

Such a view of religious experience, says Wach, raises the question of the meaning of religious experience — for both the Christian historian of reli-

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<sup>23</sup>Wach, *Comparative*, p. 41.

<sup>24</sup>Wach, *Comparative*, p. 44.

gion and the theologian. How should one interpret the results of the study of religion *vis-à-vis* the truths of Christianity for our time? Historicism (i.e., relativism) will not do — nor will reversion to “classical” standards.<sup>25</sup> The only solution to the problem is a creative, new solution: the history of religion must be regarded as divine self-disclosure.<sup>26</sup> Such a view makes the study of the history of religion important — indeed, necessary — for the theologian. History of religion, Wach concluded near the end of his life, has a place in theology: the nature and extent of God’s revelatory activity in history must be determined. For God has not left himself without a witness in the history of religion. Human beings have correspondingly sought for and thirsted after God throughout human history. The theologian must reckon with this fact and evaluate it using the standard of Jesus Christ, the definitive revelation of God. Theology’s recognition of extra-Christian revelation furthermore necessitates dealing with the relationship between general and special revelation, which in turn implies dealing with the relationship between the study of religion and theology. Unwilling to deny either general or special revelation (which is one way of dealing with the problem), Wach preferred to see general revelation (religious experience, the history of religion) as a preparation for the special revelation of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Non-Christian religions cannot be regarded as a *massa perdi-*

<sup>25</sup> Wach is not clear about what these standards are.

<sup>26</sup> One wonders about the novelty of this position. Its main features are as old as the *logos spermatikos* doctrine of Justin Martyr.

*tionis*. One can and must see apprehensions of the divine in them. In so doing, one evaluates these apprehensions by employing certain criteria: the presence of a moral element; the degree of awareness of the divine; and the degree of articulation of the apprehension of the divine. In sum, says Wach, the Christian response to non-Christian religions should be one of neither disregard nor contempt but of understanding.

Wach's career as a historian religion thus led him to think certain theological thoughts. These thoughts in turn prompted him to rethink the relationship between the study of religion and theology: there is a place for the history of religion within theology. Unfortunately, like his Chicago colleague Tillich, Wach died before working out the details of this relationship. Wach was, moreover, not a theologian; he was not in a position to offer a detailed conception of theology. One cannot reasonably, for that matter, expect a historian of religion to be seriously engaged in matters pertaining to theological prolegomena. But Wach did point to an interesting dilemma facing theologians — and this is why his work is noteworthy for the present discussion.

#### **e. Wilfred Cantwell Smith**

The long and distinguished career Wilfred Cantwell Smith (b. 1916) has enjoyed as a historian of religion has, like Wach, led him to think certain theological thoughts. In *Towards a World Theology*, Smith argues that the

religious history of humanity is a unity, a coherent whole. This unity is, according to Smith, both a historical fact and a theological truth. *Towards a World Theology* seeks to demonstrate these two claims and to explore the link between them.<sup>27</sup>

Historically, the unity that one sees pertains not to religion but to religious history.<sup>28</sup> The history of religious communities can only be understood in terms of other religious communities; all religious communities are strands in a complex whole. The interrelatedness, Smith says, has long existed without our awareness: we have been trained not to see it. But we can no longer ignore it. All religious traditions have developed in interaction with — and not in isolation from — others. This can no longer be denied; one cannot deny historical facts. We have always participated in a world history of religion — and now we know it.<sup>29</sup>

“Religions” are not stable systems, says Smith. They are always changing. We have had difficulty understanding this because of inadequate terms and ideas which postulate static entities — versus the actual flux of history.<sup>30</sup> For example, says Smith, Buddhists have no “religion”; to be a Buddhist

<sup>27</sup>See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Towards a World Theology: Faith and the Comparative History of Religion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981), p. 3.

<sup>28</sup>In *Towards a World Theology*, Smith reiterates his claim made in *The Meaning and End of Religion* that “religion” is an impersonal, reified term whose usage is misleading and distortive. One ought not speak of religion but of cumulative tradition and faith. See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978).

<sup>29</sup>See Smith, *Towards*, pp. 3–20. Smith illustrates his point with several examples of religious interaction in history.

<sup>30</sup>Again, Smith reiterates the thesis of *The Meaning and End of Religion*.

has meant different things at different times and places. "Buddhist" is a historical term. Buddhism is hence not a system but a religious movement — a historical involvement, a complex formed of personal faith and cumulative tradition. All Buddhists contribute to an ever-growing Buddhist movement; to be a Buddhist is to participate in a process: one's faith is shaped by one's particular place in the process in which one participates. This process must not be reified. Participation in a process means to affect it and to be affected by it. Smith offers the thesis that historical process is the context of religious life and participation is the mode of religious life. All religious people thus participate in their own religious communities — and perhaps unwittingly in the religious communities of others: religious traditions are but strands in world religious history.<sup>31</sup>

To understand the faith of the people who make up the processes of religious history, Smith continues, one must attempt to see the world through their eyes. This involves studying the people themselves (along with their cumulative traditions), for the meaning of religious traditions lies in people. The recognition of the priority of the personal in the history of religion requires methodological changes in the study of religion: one cannot study people objectively because people are not objects. One must adopt a more humane approach. What is required is humane knowledge — knowledge of

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<sup>31</sup>See Smith, *Towards*, pp. 21-44.

people by people. By rejecting objectivity, Smith does not wish to embrace subjectivity. Rather, he proposes a third possibility: "corporate critical self-consciousness." Such an approach to the religious history of mankind seeks knowledge: 1) which is available to everyone 2) which is apt for both participants and observers 3) which is rational and critical, and 4) which recognizes that to study people is to study oneself. The approach of corporate critical self-consciousness produces humane knowledge — "we" or "us" knowledge which emphasizes the idea of partnership and mutual understanding. Again, Smith says, the locus of religiousness is persons and not things. The study of religious history is only secondarily a study of things — and even then only as they relate to persons.<sup>32</sup>

Smith's historical and methodological observations lead him to theological observations. He notes that theology does not automatically mean Christian theology; Christian theology is but one theology among many. Correspondingly, Christian theology of religions is but one such theology of religions among others. But, Smith says, there really cannot be such a thing as a Christian theology of religions because "religion" (or, as Smith would prefer to say, personal faith) is not an object; it always embraces more than the outsider perceives. Faith cannot be theologized about from the outside but only from the inside; one community's faith cannot be the

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<sup>32</sup>See Smith, *Towards*, pp. 47-101.

object of another community's theology because faith transcends the empirical. Thus, the challenge for a Christian or an Islamic position is to become more than Christian or Islamic (in light of the new global historical situation and consciousness). The challenge is to reflect on faith generically and about beliefs comparatively. Faith, Smith avers, will be central to the theology of the future (i.e., as theology of comparative religion): we have faith and so do others. Theology of religions will hence not be theology about religions or Christian theology of other religions. We must think about global self-consciousness; theology is self-theology. Theology must be theology of faith in its many forms — or a theology of the religious history of mankind which includes us and our own faith. This does not imply diluting Christian or Islamic faith but transcending it: Christian or Islamic theology must be Christian or Islamic theology plus. For theology is the critical intellectualization of faith for faith. And thus the data of theology is the history of religious faith. In Smith's view, theology must ultimately be global: its task is collective and collaborative. In the meantime, it is the task of Christian and other theologies to make contributions to it. And because faith's referent is the transcendent, theology is also talk about God. A Christian himself, Smith notes that his approach to global religious faith is not Christocentric but theocentric: the transcendent has been revealed to people everywhere.

Human history is salvation history.<sup>33</sup>

Smith's theological proposals, to which his work as a historian of the world's religious traditions led him, are radical and daring to say the least. If the Christian theologian were to follow his proposals, Christian theology as we know it would cease to exist: the challenge is to practice not Christian theology but world theology. This is one way to answer the question of the relationship between Christian theology and the study of religion — albeit not a satisfactory one from the point of view of the Christian theologian. One can also attempt to merge Christian theology and the study of religion, which is another way of viewing the Smithian project. In any event, Smith's proposals are just that — proposals. As a historian of religion, he does not offer specifics as to the organization and procedure of theology. Like many twentieth century thinkers, Smith offers a vision but not a blueprint — much less a building complete and ready for use.

### III. Boundaries and Tensions

Throughout this work, I have argued that relative to his significance and his contribution to the intellectual life of the twentieth century, the thought of van der Leeuw has not been much investigated. This lack of study, the failure to situate van der Leeuw in his Dutch context and the failure to ex-

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<sup>33</sup>See Smith, *Towards*, pp. 107–194.



plore the various sides of his versatile career and vast corpus have led to much misunderstanding of his life and thought. In light of this situation, I have come to the following conclusion: Although van der Leeuw has been widely assumed to be principally a phenomenologist of religion, he should be understood first and foremost as a Christian theologian, which entails paying close attention to his virtually ignored book *Inleiding tot de theologie* (*Introduction to Theology*), where he most carefully articulates his conception of Christian theology as well as his view of the integral relationship between Christian theology and the study of religion. As *both* a scholar of religion *and* a Christian theologian, moreover, van der Leeuw's conception of theology stands out, especially in terms of his view of the relationship between theology and the study of religion, which is one of the most comprehensive and sophisticated such views set forth in the twentieth century. On the basis of the doctrine of the Incarnation, which reveals the paradigmatic and harmonious relationship between the divine and the human, and in response to his thirst for unified knowledge of the whole, he was prompted to articulate the relationship between the two endeavours which occupied him so much of his life. His articulation was intended for fellow theologians, who ignored it for the most part. Scholars of religion, on the other hand, paid attention only to van der Leeuw's work in the study of religion. In both cases, misunderstanding was the result: to understand van der Leeuw

properly, one must pay attention to both the study of religion and theology since the two were inseparable for him.

It is my contention that the proper and intended audience of van der Leeuw's articulation of the relationship between theology and the study of religion — theologians — would do well to pay attention to his work. By "theologians" I have in mind present-day theologians. As I argued above, van der Leeuw was somewhat ahead of his time (and thus misunderstood in his own time). This in turn suggests that he may be quite relevant for our time. I submit that he has something to offer theologians in our time: as I noted above, his articulation of the relationship between the study of religion and theology is one of the most comprehensive and best thought out articulations in the twentieth century.<sup>34</sup> Not only did he do serious work in prolegomena to theology (as did Barth, Tillich and Pannenberg), he also did serious work in the study of religion (as did Wach and Smith). Van der Leeuw was one of the few twentieth century scholars qualified to address the question of the relationship of the study of religion to theology from *both* sides. This fact distinguishes him from the theologians discussed above (Barth, Tillich, Pannenberg) and the historians of religion discussed above (Wach, Smith). Van der Leeuw offers a definition of religion which endeavours to take religion seriously as both a human phenomenon and

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<sup>34</sup>This point has also been made by Carman and Bolle. See: Carman, "Theology," 14-5; Bolle, "History," 251, 258, 263-5.

a more-than-human phenomenon (one which both scholars of religion and theologians may find useful). He gives the theologian a method with which to study religion. The theologian is hence in a position to take the history of religion seriously. And he gives the theologically oriented historian of religion a conception of theology in which the study of religion plays a key part. The historian of religion is hence able to cross the theological threshold. Evidently, van der Leeuw's theology had an impact on his work in the study of religion. Equally evidently, his work in the study of religion had an impact on his theology. His view of the relationship between the study of religion and theology is two-way — and not merely one-way as often alleged (i.e., the view that van der Leeuw's theology had a pronounced effect on his work in the study of religion — but not necessarily vice versa). The bi-directionality of van der Leeuw's view of the relationship between the study of religion and theology is related to his desire to find unity in all things, to balance the scale from both sides.

Van der Leeuw's articulation of the relationship between the study of religion and theology, which he intended for theologians — thus stands out as one of the most significant such articulations offered in the twentieth century. But significance in no way implies perfection. How does van der Leeuw's articulation stand up to critical scrutiny? Before I offer my critique of van der Leeuw, I should say a few words about my own standpoint.

As a student of both Christian theology and the study of religion as these are conceived in the twentieth century, I have wondered about their relationship for some time. Are the two endeavours fundamentally similar or different? Or is there perhaps a unity-in-difference? I have also become convinced that Christian theology must take the study of religion seriously in our time in order to meet the challenge of the reality of other religious traditions, whose presence and profundity are becoming ever more widely known. It struck me that the proponents of the two camps (i.e., the study of religion and Christian theology) — if I may designate them as such — do not care very much about the affairs of the other. In Gerardus van der Leeuw, however, I came upon a person who was meaningfully engaged in both pursuits at once. How did he conceive these two undertakings and their relationship? Did the two pursuits merely represent two different hats that he wore on different days? Or did he see some intrinsic connection between the two? What I discovered in van der Leeuw was a relatively rare attempt to conceive theology in such a way so as to take the study of religion most seriously. It is for this reason that I decided to undertake a study of his work. His view of the relationship between the study of religion and theology, however, while promising in certain regards, is far from perfect.

Positively, there are several things to be noted. First of all, as I noted above, van der Leeuw's view of religion attempts to take religion seriously

as a human phenomenon and as a more-than-human phenomenon. His insistence was that the scholar see religion as both at once; neglecting either half of the equation does injustice to the nature of religion. The scholar who refuses to recognize that religion is not exhausted by texts, rituals, myths, doctrines, institutions and the like is guilty of such injustice. But equally guilty, from van der Leeuw's point of view, is the scholar who refuses to recognize that religion is not exhausted by revelation. This two-sided view of religion is related to van der Leeuw's critique of efforts to locate the origin of religion in some bygone era. He was quite right to suggest that the origin of religion is not historically determinable (i.e., in animism, dynamism, totemism or some other such structure). The effort to *explain* the origin of religion, he rightly saw, is rooted in positivism, which, besides its incorrect view that religion is a stage in humanity's past, wrongly regards religion as merely a human phenomenon. This in turn is related to van der Leeuw's critique of objectivity in the study of religion. One does not and cannot study religion objectively. Presuppositionless inquiry and observation of empirical phenomena, as these are said to be practiced in the natural sciences, are not and cannot be paradigmatic for the study of religion. The study of religion (like other arts and human sciences) requires the involvement of the investigator's personality (experience, empathy, preunderstanding and so on).<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Van der Leeuw recognized, to use Gadamer's now well-nigh classical formulation, that *Vorurteile* are necessary conditions of understanding.

The study of religion further requires — if it is to be more than study of religion as a human phenomenon alone — some experiential knowledge of religion as a more-than-human phenomenon. This view is not popular today. But I believe that van der Leeuw is right in his insistence that religion is both a human and a more-than-human phenomenon. To study it properly, it follows, one must find this duality in one's own experience. Ignoring either half of the equation means being only half a student of religion. For van der Leeuw, hence, objectivity is not only not attainable but not desirable: such an approach to the study of religion is half-blind, shallow, wooden and cold.<sup>36</sup>

Secondly, van der Leeuw's insistence on the importance of primitive mentality for the study of religion is worthy of further investigation. The assumption of the normativity of modern mentality (a positivistic assumption, in van der Leeuw's view) has blinded many investigators to the possibility that others do not think like modern Westerners. The same assumption has also blinded many investigators to the fact that modern Westerners do not always think as logically (i.e., in terms of non-contradiction) as they believe themselves to think. Van der Leeuw's protest against the totalitarian character of modern mentality is a welcome breath of fresh air.<sup>37</sup> Much of the

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<sup>36</sup>Haitjema has argued that van der Leeuw's phenomenological method was developed as a reaction to positivism and the method of the natural sciences. See Haitjema, "Phaenomenologie der religie," Z22-3.

<sup>37</sup>In this connection, Madison's critique of what he calls the "rationalist" tradition in philosophy is instructive. See Madison, *Understanding*, *passim*.

life of the spirit resists reduction to logical laws and abstraction: poetry, religion, music, love — to name a few examples. Especially in the study of things premodern or non-Western, to insist on the dictates of modern mentality is an act of quasi-imperialism which borders on arrogance: one does not listen but only speaks. The failure to listen is a cardinal sin for van der Leeuw, who insisted on the primacy of listening in the study of religion. Indeed, he conceived phenomenology as the art of listening: to speak before one has listened is to do violence to the subject under investigation. Should one listen in this manner and not assume the normativity of modern mentality *a priori*, horizon-shattering and refreshing defamiliarization may result — to say nothing of new and profound understanding. The very possibility of such defamiliarization and understanding is motivation enough — for students of religion and theologians alike — to take van der Leeuw's comments about primitive mentality most seriously.<sup>38</sup>

Thirdly, one cannot help but admire van der Leeuw's eye for the "big picture" — especially in an era of increasing specialization. It is one thing for a scholar to do research in one religious tradition. It is quite another to do research in many religious traditions and to offer an overview of them all. A project such as van der Leeuw's phenomenology of religion is by late twentieth century standards an audacious and perhaps even reckless one.

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<sup>38</sup>As Lévy-Bruhl wrote in the last paragraph of *How Natives Think* (p. 386): "And if it be true that our mentality is both logical and prelogical, the history of religious dogmas and systems of philosophy may henceforth be explained in a new light."

But without some view of the whole how is one to understand the part? And who is qualified enough and bold enough to say something about the whole late in this century? One may be critical of van der Leeuw. But one cannot help admiring him simultaneously. For not only did he offer an overview of the world of religion; he went beyond this to explore the relationship of religion to art. Beyond this he explored the world of Christian theology in detail. Not only did he do all these things, he also attempted to spell out how all of them relate to one another. Van der Leeuw was, as I argued in Chapter One above, a boundary seeker in search of the unity of life which he saw exemplarily expressed in the Incarnation and in the world of the primitive. Such seekers are always open to the charge of dilettantism by the specialists in any age. But it is from such seekers that one often gains the most profound insight. Van der Leeuw is no exception.

Fourthly, van der Leeuw's solution to the question of the relationship of the study of religion to theology is praiseworthy. He saw the necessity of practicing both the study of religion and theology. He also saw the peril of obscuring either one. He therefore proclaimed that the two are independent disciplines — something not sufficiently recognized by his critics. But as a Christian theologian, he could not remain satisfied with two unrelated disciplines. He could not resist bringing the study of religion into the service of the queen of the sciences — and hence his conception of the-



ology as recorded in *Inleiding tot de theologie*. Nor could he resist bringing his theological preunderstanding to the study of religion. For he considered compartmentalization and fragmentation to be the illness of modern Western civilization. As he once wrote:

The great difficulty, indeed the tragedy of our modern life, lies in the fact that we differentiate between the things which concern us and things which do not concern us. We are musical or we are not; we are religious or we are not; we are concerned with economic affairs or we are not. We have our "job" and our "free time"; we drive off on our vacations and stare at the natives who work at the resort; and the natives come to us and cannot imagine what these people are about in their buildings. We are concerned with politics or we despise all politics as a sordid business. We dance at the ball while wondering at the evolution of the ballet; or we do not dance at all and are annoyed by the crazy acrobatics that claim to be art or entertainment. ... In a word, we have lost the unity of life.<sup>39</sup>

Van der Leeuw sought to overcome fragmentation wherever he saw it. This — and not the fact of religious pluralism — is the primary motivation for his harmonious solution to the question of the relationship between the study of religion and theology. As I noted immediately above, he did not wish to give either of the two partners short shrift — although scholars of religion accused him of too much theology and theologians accused him of too much study of religion. But the fact remains: van der Leeuw tried to bring the two together without obscuring or eclipsing either. And this attempt is laudable.

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<sup>39</sup>Van der Leeuw, *Sacred*, p. 33. Also significant in this regard is van der Leeuw's critique of Greek anthropology and his consequent desire to remain true to human life on earth. See Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Onsterfelijkheid of opstanding*, 4th expanded ed. (Assen: Van Gorcum & Comp. N. V., 1947).

Fifthly, the Christian theologian cannot but be heartened by van der Leeuw's bold view of the nature of theology. Theology is not to be done in some remote corner. Nor is it to go about its work in blissful oblivion of the world in which it lives. Nor is it to content itself with the few things left to it by the world in which it finds itself.<sup>40</sup> It must again adopt an offensive posture and recapture the throne from which it abdicated. It must provide leadership — after all, theology for van der Leeuw must always be ready to serve. Van der Leeuw's vision is courageous.<sup>41</sup> In a variation on Kant's famous definition of enlightenment, one might say that van der Leeuw challenges the contemporary theologian by saying: "Dare to be bold! Dare to speak!"

Sixthly, what is noteworthy and praiseworthy about van der Leeuw's bold view of the nature of theology is the fact that it allows the theologian to take the history of religion and the problem of religious pluralism seriously. In other words, van der Leeuw's conception of theological encyclopedia demands that the theologian study the history and phenomenology

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<sup>40</sup>See van der Leeuw's history of Christianity's modern demise in *BC*, *passim*. Cf. the following from Bonhoeffer's *Letters*: "Even though there has been surrender on all secular problems, there still remain the so-called 'ultimate questions' — death, guilt — to which only 'God' can give an answer, and because of which we need God and the church and the pastor" (p. 326). "The displacement of God from the world, and from the public part of human life, led to the attempt to keep his place secure at least in the sphere of the 'personal', the 'inner', and the 'private'. And as every man still has a private sphere somewhere, that is where he was thought to be the most vulnerable. The secrets known to a man's valet — that is, to put it crudely, the range of his intimate life, from prayer to his sexual life — have become the hunting-ground of modern pastoral workers" (p. 344).

<sup>41</sup>See Carman, "Theology," 42.

of religion. It was his firm belief that the nature and essence of Christianity is best brought to light *vis-à-vis* the study of other religions. Theologians *à la* van der Leeuw do not have the option of taking only the way of revelation (or of becoming positivists of revelation); they must also take the way of religion. So doing means that the theologian is equipped and able to meet the challenges of Christian theology late in the twentieth century — especially the problem of religious pluralism and the challenge it poses for Christian theology. This is not the case with many conceptions of theology, as I attempted to indicate earlier in this chapter.

Before going on to the negative side of van der Leeuw's work, I would like to address a few criticisms which have been made of his work which do not seem entirely justified.<sup>42</sup> First of all, there is the charge that van der Leeuw's articulation of his approach to the study of religion is too short and obscure.<sup>43</sup> While his approach is not simple or easy to apply — as I will argue momentarily in criticism of van der Leeuw — saying that it is insufficiently articulated (too short and obscure) leads one to suspect that those who have made this claim have not read van der Leeuw's key essays on method which I discussed in Chapter Two above. One suspects that too many scholars have read only the "Epilegomena" appended to the *Phänomenologie* (which

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<sup>42</sup>As I have argued throughout this work, van der Leeuw was a much misunderstood thinker. While I could go on at some length about the unjustified criticism he has received, I will briefly discuss only three such criticisms.

<sup>43</sup>See: Allen, *Structure*, p. 107; Bickermann, "A. propos," 92-108; Hultkrantz, "Phenomenology," 71-3.

are, as I noted above, *summary* in nature). If one were to make the criticism that van der Leeuw's approach as formulated in the "Epilegomena" of the *Phänomenologie* is short and less than crystal clear, there would be little about which to argue. Summaries are seldom lengthy and perspicuous. But the charge that van der Leeuw did not pay sufficient attention to questions of approach and method — period — is unfounded.

Secondly, there is the often made criticism that van der Leeuw's approach to the study of religion is too subjective (i.e., Christian and theological).<sup>44</sup> Presumably this charge amounts to saying that van der Leeuw broke a sacred academic taboo: he was not objective in his approach to the study of religion. As I argued above, van der Leeuw did not think objectivity (i.e., presuppositionlessness) to be possible or desirable in the study of religion. Understanding, in his judgment, requires the total personality (experience, intuition and so forth) of the investigator. The investigator must gaze at the object of investigation not coldly and detachedly but lovingly. In large measure, van der Leeuw's critique of objectivity stems from his critique of the fragmentary character of modern existence. Having lost the unity of life, the modern person thinks it is possible to be a Christian on one day and to be a neutral, presuppositionless scholar on the next. This idea was deeply

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<sup>44</sup>See: Allen, "Phenomenology," pp. 277-8; Allen, *Structure*, p. 101; van Baaren, "Bororo," p. 8; van Baaren, "De ethnologische," 321-53; van Baaren and Drijvers, ed., *Religion*, pp. 45-50; Kristensen, "De inaugureele," 260-5; Honko, ed., *Science*, pp. xxiii-xxiv, 108f.

foreign to van der Leeuw. To ask him to forget his Christianity while studying religion is to ask him to cease to be himself.<sup>45</sup> To accuse him of being overly subjective is also to assume the paradigmatic character of objectivity in the study of religion, which, it bears mentioning, has come under fire from various quarters in the second half of this century.<sup>46</sup>

Thirdly, there is the charge often brought against van der Leeuw that his phenomenological approach to religion ignores the historical and cultural contexts of phenomena (and the related charge that his approach is consequently not useful for empirically based research).<sup>47</sup> This is an odd criticism to make of an approach to the study of religion that is by intention not historical or context specific. To say that a synchronic approach is not diachronic (or vice versa) is not very helpful — or, for that matter, very insightful. Moreover, those who allege that van der Leeuw did not pay attention to the historical and culturally specific aspects of religion forget the fact that he undertook the editorship of and made two contributions to a large two volume history of the world's religions (*De godsdiensten der wereld*). He also wrote several books and articles about ancient Egyptian and ancient

<sup>45</sup> "Religion gives to culture again and again the command Jesus gave the rich young man: 'Sell all that thou hast.'" Van der Leeuw, *Sacred*, p. 5.

<sup>46</sup> See: Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983); Gadamer, *Wahrheit*; Madison, *Understanding*; Smith, *Towards*, ch. 4.

<sup>47</sup> See: Allen, "Phenomenology," pp. 277-8; Allen, *Structure*, p. 64; van Baaren, "De ethnologische," 321-53; Eliade, *Quest*, p. 35; Honko, ed., *Science*, p. 495; Pettazzoni, "Aperçu," 4.

Greek religion — as well as books and articles about Christianity.<sup>48</sup> Once again, one suspects that van der Leeuw was criticized on the basis of the *Phänomenologie* alone. And judging the part apart from the whole is most problematic.<sup>49</sup>

Even though some of the criticisms that have been made of van der Leeuw seem to be off the mark, there are nonetheless several criticisms to be made of his work. The first group of criticisms concerns his conception of the study of religion. First of all, van der Leeuw's view of religion and indeed his phenomenology of religion was too oriented to primitive religion<sup>50</sup>; he was fascinated by the religion of non-literate peoples and of the ancient world. References to Asian religion are comparatively rare. Moreover, he was most interested, it would seem, in religion of the past. References to living, twentieth century religion are rare. One wonders why. More than once, van der Leeuw was "accused" of being a Romantic.<sup>51</sup> He was deeply inspired by the Romantic tradition (Novalis, Goethe, Schleiermacher, Dilthey). But was van der Leeuw a Romantic? Did he pine for some past golden era because of fundamental dissatisfaction with his own era? Did he desire wings to fly to an idyllic past time and place? His writings on Romanticism indicate that

<sup>48</sup>See *PRPS*, pp. 555–638 *passim*.

<sup>49</sup>Van der Leeuw once wrote (*De Bijbel*, p. 1): "If one wishes to understand and know an author, one must read an author in entirety."

<sup>50</sup>This point has been made by some of van der Leeuw's Dutch critics. See: van Baaren, "De ethnologische," 321–53; Bleeker, "Phenomenological," 108–9.

<sup>51</sup>See: Haitjema, "'Nieuwe' orthodoxie," 232–6; van der Leeuw and Sierksma, "Nihilisme," 3–5, 7.

he was, in the final analysis, ambivalent about it.<sup>52</sup> He profoundly admired the Romantics. But he also was critical of the monism and pantheism that was characteristic of so many of them. His hermeneutics, furthermore, are not just reconstructive in character. As he once wrote: "We do not speak from the point of view of the [the past] . . . but from the point of view of our own time. We can do no other. We can only speak in *this* moment, for *this* moment, out of the concrete situation, in the *kairos* that is given to us."<sup>53</sup> Van der Leeuw was, one might say, keenly aware of the truth of Gadamer's dictum that the essence of the historical spirit consists not in restoration of the past but in thoughtful mediation with the present.<sup>54</sup> In sum, van der Leeuw's alleged Romanticism does not provide the answer to why he was so focused on certain religions of the timeless past. The answer may be much more simple: in his conception of religion and in his phenomenology, he primarily drew on the traditions he had studied and knew well. That this leads to a certain one-sidedness he was well aware.<sup>55</sup> To take a further step backward and to ask why van der Leeuw chose to focus on the religions that he did in his own primary research is a complex biographical question that cannot be answered here.

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<sup>52</sup>See especially van der Leeuw, "Romantische," pp. 161-200.

<sup>53</sup>Van der Leeuw, "Het nieuwe," 223. Also instructive is the following comment about the primitive: "The primitive is not much further away from us than our neighbour: both experiences, both religious experiences can only be interpreted in a re-experiential manner." *UNE*, 43.

<sup>54</sup>Gadamer, *Wahrheit*, p. 161.

<sup>55</sup>See *PR*, p. vi.

Secondly, one wonders about van der Leeuw's claim that animism, dynamism, primitive mentality, modern mentality and so on are permanent structures and not historical phenomena. Van der Leeuw's reader cannot help thinking that these atemporal structures — which he designated as such in reaction against evolutionary approaches to the study of religion — are nonetheless associated with a historical order for him.<sup>56</sup> In the *Phänomenologie* and in *Wegen en grenzen*, one gets the impression of an account of the development of religion and of religion and art, respectively. Especially in the latter book, whose method van der Leeuw proclaims to be phenomenological, one senses that one is being offered a view of the development from the unity of art and religion among the primitives to their division in the modern West. Van der Leeuw's point in emphasizing structure, it seems to me, was this: he wished to avoid the conclusion that certain phenomena are *merely* past curiosities (such as animism or primitive mentality). In his desire to help modern people attain authentic existence in the face of fragmentation and nihilism, he sought to demonstrate that such structures are not foreign to one's own experience — if one will but take the time to look.<sup>57</sup> Where he erred is in his denial that phenomenology is historically or temporally concerned. As such, the clandestine relationship between history and structure persists as an unresolved tension in his

<sup>56</sup>See van Baaren, "De ethnologische," 321-53.

<sup>57</sup>Van der Leeuw once wrote: "Our profane life is a museum of more or less sacred survivals." *WG*, p. 46.



work.<sup>58</sup>

Thirdly, one wonders about van der Leeuw's predominantly psychological approach to the study of religion.<sup>59</sup> He was, as I attempted to demonstrate in Chapter Two above, fundamentally interested in human religious experience and that which underlies it. In order to gain access to this experience — and assuming the psychological unity of the history of religion<sup>60</sup> — van der Leeuw developed a psychologically refined method which would enable the investigator to reconstruct and re-experience the experience in question.<sup>61</sup> Van der Leeuw called this approach "phenomenology." This term has caused endless confusion. As Sierksma once complained about van der Leeuw's use of the term: "Phenomenology is at bottom nothing other than a psychologically refined method for understanding the phenomena of human life before judging them."<sup>62</sup> Many scholars have wrongly assumed that van der Leeuw

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<sup>58</sup>There are bound to be unresolved tensions in the work of someone such as van der Leeuw, who was constantly seeking the boundaries in a quest for unity. The presence of such tensions has also been noted by other scholars. See: Carman, "Theology," 41-2; Sharpe, *Comparative*, pp. 230-1.

<sup>59</sup>Van der Leeuw's "over-orientation" to psychology has been noted by some of his critics. See: Bickermann, "A propos," 92-108; C. J. Bleeker, "The Phenomenological Method," *Numen* VI (1959), 108-9. Also noteworthy in this regard is Sierksma's charge that van der Leeuw was heavily indebted to structural psychology (Jaspers, Spranger, Binswanger) but that he unjustifiably ignored depth psychology (Freud, Jung). See Sierksma, *Freud*, pp. 27-32, 228-3.

<sup>60</sup>See *PT*, p. 5. One wonders if this psychological unity of the history of religion is not really theological for van der Leeuw.

<sup>61</sup>Hermelink and Waardenburg have furthermore questioned van der Leeuw's approach in terms of the justice it does to the self-understanding and the self-evaluation of the religion in question. According to Waardenburg, van der Leeuw does not adequately distinguish between the to-be-understood experience and the reconstructed experience of the investigator. See Hermelink, *Verstehen*, pp. 102-32; Waardenburg, "Religion Between," 174-6.

<sup>62</sup>Sierksma, Review of van der Leeuw, *Wegen*, 114.

applied Husserl's phenomenology to the study of religion. This is simply not the case. While he borrowed the term *epoche* from Husserl, other than this van der Leeuw's debt to Husserl is virtually non-existent. He never wrote anything about Husserl; and he infrequently mentions him — and then only in passing. As I noted in Chapter Two above, the scholars standing behind van der Leeuw's phenomenology are his teachers Chantepie and Kristensen as well as the philosopher Dilthey — not Husserl.

Van der Leeuw's psychologically oriented approach to the study of religion raises further questions. He seems to assume that experience is "raw" in nature; one encounters power and later gives expression to this experience. In other words, the relationship between experience and language is unilinear for him. This view of the relationship between experience and language is open to question. As many theorists in this century have argued, language does not merely reflect experience; it also creates it.<sup>63</sup> Experience is — at least to some degree — linguistically conditioned and mediated. Likewise, language is experientially conditioned and mediated. The relationship between experience and language is thus not unilinear but dialectical.<sup>64</sup> Van der Leeuw's unilinear view of this relationship is undoubtedly related to his

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<sup>63</sup>See for example, Madison, *Understanding*.

<sup>64</sup>The question of the relationship of experience and language is very much at the center of the so-called "Yale-Chicago debate." See for example: George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post-Liberal Age* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983); David Tracy, "Lindbeck's New Program for Theology: A Reflection," *The Thomist* (1985), 460-72.

individualistic view of religion and experience. As he sees it, the individual is confronted with power in some form — and then the individual gives expression to this experience.<sup>65</sup> Individuals who have had such experiences then band together and form a religious community. This is not a particularly strong view of the social nature of religion. Van der Leeuw did not seem to have a place for sociology of religion in his conception of the study of religion.<sup>66</sup> In all likelihood, his rather unsocial view of religion was a reaction to the tendency of the French sociological school (i.e., Durkheim *et al.*) to dissolve religion in the social.

Furthermore with regard to van der Leeuw's psychologically oriented view of the study of religion, one wonders about its general applicability. As his method stands, it is very taxing: it requires a wealth of human experience, knowledge, intuition and empathy of the investigator. Does every student of religion (especially beginners) possess these in the required doses? Van der Leeuw was a brilliant person blessed with an almost incredible capacity for understanding. As Sierksma once wrote: "He had fabulous intuition and an equally astonishing universality, with which he was able to survey and see through the entire terrain of the science of religion."<sup>67</sup> He thus crafted an approach to the study of religion which fit his own per-

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<sup>65</sup>One wonders if this individualistic conception is a function of van der Leeuw's Protestantism.

<sup>66</sup>See *DGHG*, p. 54.

<sup>67</sup>*DGHG*, p. 53.

sonality. But few of us are Gerardus van der Leeuws. Few of us possess his intellectual abilities. One is left with the following conclusion: Van der Leeuw's approach to the study of religion is noble and lofty — and, one might add, often productive of astounding insight. In the final analysis, however, it is a method for virtuosos. Perhaps the virtuoso is capable of interpolating far removed and foreign phenomena into his or her own life. Perhaps for the virtuoso the writings of the ancients are no more obscure than the letters of a friend. For the majority of twentieth century people, however, this is hardly the case. In fact, in an increasingly secularized culture dominated by the idea of progress, religion and the past seem increasingly alien. Even if van der Leeuw is right about his questionable assertion that nothing human is foreign to a human being, that we carry the germ everything inside ourselves, he is not justified in assuming that everyone is capable of gaining access to this inner sanctum of humanity and of giving an account of it. What is required in the twentieth century is a strategy for overcoming the sense of estrangement *vis-à-vis* religion and the past — and not views which assert that this estrangement does not exist. One wonders why van der Leeuw did not see this — especially since he was painfully aware of the brokenness and profanity of much of twentieth century life.

Van der Leeuw's psychological and understanding approach to the study of religion also raises the question of the possibility of judgment and criti-

cism in history and especially phenomenology of religion. Because loving and understanding were much the same thing for van der Leeuw<sup>68</sup>, can the historian and phenomenologist of religion ever get beyond *mere* understanding *qua* loving to judgment and criticism? Is understanding abstractable from interpretation and application?<sup>69</sup> In other words, can the historian and phenomenologist of religion ever get beyond the limitations imposed by *epoche*? Or, more accurately, precisely *when* do the brackets represented by *epoche* get removed? The answer for van der Leeuw is that the brackets get removed in philosophy of religion and theology. If one remains a historian or phenomenologist of religion, then, one cannot judge or criticize. This is a problematic position. While one can understand the intent of van der Leeuw's position — the desire to make sure one listens before one speaks, the need to understand before one judges — as it stands historians and phenomenologists are not allowed to be critical. This paralysis may prove costly. What happens in the case of human sacrifice? Does the investigator conclude that he or she has understood (and loved) — period? Are loving and understanding much the same thing? It would seem that such an approach to the study of religion short-circuits the necessity of application (i.e., judgment and criticism, when they are required). Not every scholar of religion, after all, will move beyond history and phenomenology of religion

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<sup>68</sup>See Pettazzoni, "Gerardus van der Leeuw," p. 5.

<sup>69</sup>See Gadamer, *Wahrheit*. Gadamer argues, rightly in my view, that understanding, interpretation and application are one in the hermeneutical *Vorgang*.

to philosophy of religion or theology.

The second group of criticisms to be made of van der Leeuw's work concerns his conception of theology (and, by implication, his view of the relationship of the study of religion to theology). First of all, van der Leeuw boldly proclaims that theology should cease its timid existence in a faraway corner and reassert itself as queen of the sciences. But he does not offer a strategy for the recapture of the throne; theology's royalty remains a vision for him. Admittedly, he does seek to show the inadequacy of the modern approach to the question of the relationship between theology and science, which begins with science (the general) and moves to theology (the particular). This is a step in the direction of a solution — but no more. Furthermore, despite van der Leeuw's protestations about the modern approach, he constantly seeks correspondence with modern science.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, in connection with his constant desire for understanding, one wonders if van der Leeuw reduced theology's duty of criticism and contradiction to conversation and dialogue.<sup>71</sup> At what point in the ongoing discussion between the sciences does the queen stand up and make a ruling? One might also express this point by asking if van der Leeuw's conception of theology contains too much phenomenology and too little (dogmatic) theology. Asking these questions naturally raises the criticisms levelled at his phenomenology

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<sup>70</sup>See Huysmans, "Een nieuwe," 472.

<sup>71</sup>See Noordmans, "Wat."

immediately above: can one judge and criticize? If so, at what point? To put the matter yet another way, one wonders if there is too much continuity in van der Leeuw's view of the relationship between science (including the study of religion) and theology.<sup>72</sup> Can the study of religion be fitted into the theological encyclopedia easily and without any fundamental alterations? Apparently the boundary seeker in search of unity of life thought so. I am not quite as sanguine about the smoothness and non-problematic nature of this merger.

Secondly, van der Leeuw's conception of historical theology is problematic. As he outlines it, historical theology is too neutral an affair: its chief concern is the ascertainment of facts (what ? when? where?). Is this an adequate view of historical theology? Does the historical theologian merely report that Thomas Aquinas lived in the thirteenth century and wrote the *Summa Theologiae*? What — aside from the selection of data — is the precise nature and function of the theological point of view with which the historical theologian operates? One gets the impression from van der Leeuw that this point of view does not amount to much. In the end, he says, the historical theologian is a historian — subject to the same canons of authority and criticism as the historian — directed to the life of the Church. Such a pursuit seems, to borrow a phrase from Nietzsche, all-too-human. The

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<sup>72</sup>See Kraemer, *De plaats*, pp. 26-31.



*erfassende* nature of historical theology as van der Leeuw conceives it does not do justice to understanding, which, it should be noted, is absolutely necessary in order for one to ascertain what is factual and what is not. Once again, van der Leeuw's tendency to assume the possibility of abstraction in the process of understanding is suspect. Just as application cannot be neatly separated out of the hermeneutical event, *erfassen* cannot be so separated either.

There is another aspect of van der Leeuw's conception of historical theology which seems inadequate. Historical theology, it will be recalled, has as part of its task the investigation of the religions with which Christianity has come into contact throughout its history. Such religions include ancient Israelite religion, ancient Near Eastern religions, ancient Greek religion, ancient Roman religion, Gnosticism, Judaism and the like. However, in terms of the contemporary twentieth century dilemma referred to at the beginning of this chapter, where does the historical theologian study, say, Hinduism or Confucianism? It would seem that the theologian does not study these and several other religions — unless one were to argue in defence of van der Leeuw that Christianity has come into significant contact with these religions in the twentieth century. But this defence of van der Leeuw is weak and a little far-fetched. Hence, the very conception of historical theology which forces the theologian to study other religions and take them seriously



— a positive aspect of van der Leeuw's conception of historical theology — is flawed. In terms of the contemporary situation, which theology must address, the most important religions are left out of the picture.

Thirdly, van der Leeuw's conception of theology and his view of method as developed in *Inleiding tot de theologie* are not consistently followed in his post-*Inleiding* theological works.<sup>73</sup> He often crosses the boundaries between the three kinds of theology (i.e., historical, phenomenological and dogmatic) when putatively at work in one of them.<sup>74</sup> In a sense, then, van der Leeuw's own actual procedure indicates that the three kinds of theology cannot be so neatly distinguished, which I argued above. One wonders why he did not address this matter, for he surely realized that historical, phenomenological and dogmatic theology were interdependent.<sup>75</sup>

Finally, I can best sum up my evaluation of van der Leeuw's impressive work by noting that a thinker of his nature — in search of unity and the "big picture" — is bound to end up with a series of unresolved tensions. He was, at bottom, more of a visionary and an intuitive spirit than a systematic and methodical thinker.<sup>76</sup> Because of his vision and thirst for knowledge of the

<sup>73</sup>See Carman, "Theology," 27–31.

<sup>74</sup>Hermelink correctly notes that in the *Phänomenologie*, van der Leeuw often goes beyond the limitations imposed by *epoché* and takes a "leap into witness" (*Sprung ins Zeugnis*). This demonstrates in a general way that van der Leeuw did not rigorously observe the boundaries that he himself set up. See Hermelink, *Verstehen*, p. 130.

<sup>75</sup>I say "surely" here because van der Leeuw's conception of the study of religion indicates his awareness of the interdependence of the branches of such study (see Chapter Two above). He must have realized that the branches of theology are likewise interdependent.

<sup>76</sup>See: Hubbeling, "Das Symbolbegriff," 100; Waardenburg, "Theologian and Phenomenologist," p. 245. This in no way, however, implies that van der Leeuw was a sloppy or

whole, he saw things many others do not. But visionaries more often point the way and perhaps begin building a road than they construct finished four-lane freeways. Van der Leeuw is no exception. He saw the way that theology would have to go given the development of twentieth century history. He also did some important building. As such, his work is both instructive and inspiring for latter day theologians. In the words of one sympathetic observer:

To me ... van der Leeuw's theology seems a heroic effort to develop a radically Christocentric position which at the same time can be the basis for wholehearted participation in the world of culture. Whatever its weaknesses, it should challenge us to the same effort, and this challenge is the more compelling because it has behind it, not only the thought, but also the life of a man in whom scholarship and faith were united in a remarkable whole.<sup>77</sup>

"A silence has fallen around the name of Van der Leeuw," Sierksma wrote not long after van der Leeuw's death.<sup>78</sup> That silence has gone on too long with too few interruptions. May the foregoing make a small contribution to overcoming it.

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poor thinker. Nothing is further from the truth.

<sup>77</sup>Carman, "Theology," 42.

<sup>78</sup>Sierksma, "Voor en na," 23.

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The following bibliography represents only works cited in the footnotes. Because I have read much more than I have referred to, the following bibliography is incomplete as regards both the extent of my research and the extent of van der Leeuw's literary output. For a well-nigh complete bibliography of van der Leeuw's writings, the reader is referred to W. J. Kooiman and J. M. van Veen, ed., *Pro Regno Pro Sanctuario* (see below in section "F"), pp. 555-638.

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