The Phenomenological Approach In Islamic Studies: An Overview of a Western Attempt to Understand Islam

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> Religion is not a departmental affair; it is neither mere thought, nor mere feeling, nor mere action; it is an expression of the whole man.
>
> Muḥammad Iqbal[1]

The statement cited above is a good starting point for a discussion of the phenomenological approach in Islamic studies. In his statement, Iqbal addresses two important presuppositions that are widely discussed in circles of phenomenologists of religion; that human beings are naturally religious and that a religious phenomenon is as complex as human nature itself. These premises lead scholars to sympathy and humility when he or she tries to explain a religious phenomenon. In the context of Islamic studies, since the second half of the twentieth century, the sympathetic view has become the general trend as opposed to the imperial prejudices and misconceptions of the Western scholars critiqued by Norman Daniel in *Islam and the West*[2] and Edward Said in *Orientalism*.[3]

The purpose of this article is to discuss the distinctive features of classical phenomenology of religion, its parallel with important conceptualizations of the phenomenological approach among Western Islamicists, and the critical responses thereto by some important Muslim scholars. Hopefully, this discussion will highlight the contributions of Islamicists to the phenomenology of religion.

What is the Phenomenology of Religion?

In an article published in 1970, Hans Penner maintains "Anyone who desires to find out what a phenomenology of religion is, and how the ap-

proach is applied, will find the search a frustrating experience."[4] Fifteen years later, Sanford Krolick refers to Penner's statement and suggests that to deal with the problem, "one must review the tasks of the phenomenology as presented in the works of representative figures, and then reconstitute the 'phenomenology of religion' in a new and more rigorously philosophical way."[5]

In this section, we will look at certain studies that try to deal with this problem, that is, to find the distinctive features of the phenomenological approach through the works of its classical figures. Some of the studies also include analyses of the social background during the emergence of the phenomenological approach and propose some critical ideas regarding its development.

According to Michael Pye, there are two main issues connected with the emergence of the phenomenological approach in Holland: "to free the study of religion from the control of Christian theology. . . . [and] to grasp the significance of complex of religious data from the point of view of the believer or participant himself."[6] These primary concerns are mainly the results of tensions between the secular (read: positivistic) approach on one side and the theological approach on the other. George Alfred James describes the social background during the emergence of the phenomenological approach in Holland:

> In the nineteenth century, the influence of Calvinism in social and political life was mitigated by a number of liberating and secularizing tendencies both in theology and in government. By the middle of the century, a new historical consciousness, increasing awareness of other forms of religion, the development of critical methods for the study of scripture, and the emerging prestige of the natural sciences presented a challenge to Holland's historical religious traditions. In 1857, religious instruction in public schools was eliminated, and in 1876 faculties of theology in state universities were officially converted to what came to be known as "faculties of comparative religion," or "faculties of the science of religion."[7]

Thus, the phenomenological approach tried to mediate between the dry and unsympathetic attitude of the positivistic approach to religion and the conservative nature of theology.

To find the middle way is not, however, a precise task. Different scholars propose different ways of walking the narrow path. There are, however, some studies that clarify the distinctive features of the phenomenology of religion. Arvind Sharma is one of the scholars who tries to define the phenomenological method by analyzing the definitions proposed by classical phenomenologists of religion such as Brede Kristensen (1867-1953) and

Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890-1950). Following his analyses of the works of these classical figures, Sharma concludes that "the phenomenology of religion is that method of religious studies which is characterized by a search for structures underlying comparable religious data that does not violate the self-understanding of the believers."[8] In another article, Sharma argues that if we look at van der Leeuw's work, we will find that, for him, the parallel between various religious traditions "does not arise out of the dynamics of historical interaction, but arises from the similarities of structural processes."[9] This, argues Sharma, is what makes the phenomenology of religion different from the history of religions.

In line with Sharma, James undertakes a study of three classical figures of the phenomenology of religion: Pierre Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye, W. Brede Kristensen, and Gerardus van der Leeuw to discover the familial traits within the phenomenological approach reflected in the works of these figures. In this study, James argues that there are at least three traits in the phenomenological approach: a-historical, a-theological and anti-reductive. It is a-historical in the sense that it treats the data systematically rather than chronologically, it is not concerned with the origin and development of religion, and it opposes the historicism which presupposes that "historical conditions are necessary for the occurrence of certain data, thereby reducing them to history." It is a-theological in the sense that the object of the phenomenology of religion is not God, but religious phenomena in general, and a phenomenologist should avoid the perspectives and attitudes of theologians that are based on a commitment towards his or her object of study. Finally, it is anti-reductive in the sense that it rejects "the tendency to treat the subject matter of the study of religion in such a way as to deny it the status of a distinctive object of inquiry," i.e. as a uniquely religious phenomenon.[10]

Unlike Sharma and James who give most, if not all, of their attention to the Dutch phenomenologists, Sumner B. Twiss and Walter H. Conser, Jr. study a wider range of representative figures of the phenomenology of religion. In addition, in contrast with Sharma, James and other scholars who hold that the phenomenology of religion should be dissociated from philosophical phenomenology, Twiss and Conser feel free to include the latter as a variant of the former.[11]

According to Twiss and Conser, there are three types of phenomenologies of religion: the essential, the historical-typological and the existential-hermeneutical. The first, the essential phenomenology of religion, is a study of religion that focuses on "the true nature of religious consciousness of the believing souls—the defining traits of his or her religious apprehensions, emotional states, and motivation for religious activities."[12] This kind of phenomenology is well represented by the works of Rudolf Otto

(1869-1937) and Max Scheler (1874-1928). Second, the historical-typological phenomenology of religion is a type of phenomenology developed "primarily by historians of religions interested both in the distinctive ethos and worldviews of particular religious traditions and in persistent or recurrent patterns shared by those traditions."[13] This type of phenomenology is none other than the above description given by Sharma and is effectively supported by Kristensen, Van der Leeuw, Mircea Eliade, Ninian Smart, and some others. The third type is the existential-hermeneutical phenomenology of religion. This form of phenomenology focuses its attention on the interpretation of linguistic and symbolic expressions of the existential problems of human life such as freedom, intersubjectivity, anxiety, death, etc. It is discussed by Paul Ricoeur, Merold Westphal and many others.[14]

A point of note is that as far as the above-mentioned studies of the representative figures of the phenomenology of religion are concerned, we find that they fail to consider any scholar who comes from the circle of Islamic studies. Therefore, it is important to understand how the phenomenological approach developed in that circle.

Early Development in Islamic Studies

Henry Corbin (d. 1978), a specialist in Iranian Islam, was one of the first advocates of the phenomenological approach to Islam.[15] Corbin refers to himself as a "phenomenologist of the spirit."[16] In the introduction to his *En Islam iranien*, Corbin defines phenomenology as:

> The recovery of the phenomena, i.e. encountering them, where they take place and where they have their places. In the religious sciences, this means encountering them in the souls of believers, rather than in the monuments of critical erudition or circumstantial inquiries; it is to display what has shown itself to them [the souls], namely, the religious fact.[17]

If phenomenology means encountering the religious fact in the souls of believers, then first of all phenomenology requires the scholar to participate in a spiritual experience similar to that of the believers. Second, phenomenology deals with spiritual experience outside of mundane considerations and, as a consequence, is a-historical. Third, because the experience is a-historical, it is unique in itself, and being a *sui generis* religious phenomenon, it cannot be reduced to something outside itself. Finally, for Corbin, phenomenology is hermeneutics. Properly executed, it has the potential to draw one to the esoteric side of Islam. In this regard, Corbin observes that within Islam itself, the Imams of the Shi'ite are the guides to hermeneutics.[18]

Wilfred Cantwell Smith, founder of the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University, is another important pioneer of the phenomenological approach. Although he never claimed to be a phenomenologist, his idea of the personal approach to religion is very much within the spirit of the phenomenological approach and his work has greatly influenced current conceptualizations. According to Smith, the study of religion in the West should place less emphasis on collecting external data and attempt to understand religion as the inner personal experience of a living tradition. Smith argues:

> The study of a religion is the study of persons. Of all branches of human inquiry, hardly any deals with an area so personal as this. Faith is a quality of men's lives. All religions are new religions, every morning. For religions do not exist up in the sky somewhere, elaborated, finished and static; they exist in men's heart.[19]

Thus, for Smith, the primary concern of the religious scholar is the faith that lies in believers' hearts, not the external data of religion. In this respect, Smith argues for the primacy of insiders as opposed to outsiders. Although an outsider may be an objective observer of the external data, the actual meaning that system has for those of faith is beyond the outsider's capacity to comprehend.[20] Ultimately, Smith contends that "no statement about a religion is valid unless it can be acknowledged by that religion's believer."[21] Smith indicates that an appreciation of the insider's perspective is growing in importance due to the immediate contacts between outsiders and insiders. With regard to the academic study of religion, Smith argues that academic work should always attempt to satisfy both Western academic standards and the religious tradition in question.[22]

When we compare the viewpoints of Corbin and Smith with classical phenomenology, we find first that Corbin's phenomenology and Smith's personal approach are closely related to essential phenomenology, the phenomenological activity that concentrates on understanding the religious consciousness of believing souls. Second, although Ricoeur's phenomenology is existential while Corbin's is essential, both consider hermeneutics an important aspect of their phenomenology. Third, Smith's proposal—that the academic study of religion should satisfy both Western academic standards and the believers of the religion in question—suggests the middle path, as does the classical phenomenology of religion. Finally, both Smith and Corbin argue for two important phenomenological standpoints: (1) a study of religion should focus its attention on religious experience as a unique phenomenon, and (2) in order to understand religion from its experiential realm, one must strive to consider it from the insider's perspective.[23]

To Include Islam in the History of Religion

In an article published in 1967, Charles J. Adams discusses methodological problems in the study of Islam with respect to the History of Religions. He uses the term "History of Religions" to designate the phenomenological approach because, for Adams, "until today almost every historian of religions is a phenomenologist."[24] However, in another article published in 1976, he fully accepts the term "phenomenological approach" rather than History of Religions, Comparative Religion or Religionswissenschaft "because of the dominance of a school of phenomenologists in the discipline in recent times."[25] Thus, Adams' concern is with the phenomenological approach, regardless of the terms used.

For Adams, there are two aspects within the phenomenological approach. The first is called *epoche*, that is, a method of understanding religion by suspending judgement and allowing religious phenomena to show themselves as they are. The concern of phenomenology is the elucidation of the personal experience of believers based on the categories determined by the believers themselves. In this regard, the plethora of data provided by history, philology, anthropology, sociology, literary studies, and other disciplines are interpreted through the phenomenological approach. Ultimately, the crucial question for the phenomenologist of Islam is: "Can Muslims themselves recognize as true and accept what is put forward by the scholar as a description of their faith? If this question cannot be answered in the affirmative. . . then one must conclude that the thing described is not Islamic faith."[26] This is a hard task and, according to Adams, "what is required is a flight of the soul, an outreach toward the world view and feelings of others that reshapes the personal commitments of the scholars."[27] Correspondingly, this aspect of Adam's phenomenology is in accordance with that of Smith and Corbin.

Yet, given the fact that such phenomena are necessarily personal, there are crucial problems regarding the primacy of the insiders, hence the question: which Muslims are "reliable" sources? Furthermore, when considering the past, does time isolate the insiders from historical experience and, if so, does this negate the primacy of the insiders' perspective? Adams tries to answer these questions:

> Obviously one cannot allow the unlettered peasant or the narrow-minded ʿĀlim to sit in judgement over the learned scholar with serious attention. . . . What must be taken seriously are the responses of learned and sober Muslims of good will. Similarly, it is possible to object that the criterion suggested has no relevance to the study of the Muslim past. . . . There are numerous instances in the history of scholarship to suggest that an outsider enjoys some advantages in the attempt to win a

> critical grasp of a religious tradition and its development. . . . But so far as studies of the recent past and contemporary developments are concerned, they do not weaken the point. . . . Even with respect to distance past, it must be remembered that the Muslim is the inheritor of that tradition which still lives in him; he enjoys, therefore, an initial advantage over most of those others who seek to recreate and interpret that tradition through their scholarship.[28]

Adams' answer is, no doubt, a step away from that of Corbin and Smith and, as we shall see, this issue continues to incite debate among other Islamicists.

The second aspect of Adams' theory of the phenomenological approach is "the construction of taxonomic schemes for classifying phenomena across boundaries of religious communities, cultures and even epochs."[29] In this manner, the phenomenologist tries to put various religious phenomena into several universal categories in order to find the general structure and meaning of religious experience. It is vital, however, that great care be taken. Adams observes that some phenomenologists ignore the historical structure of certain religious communities and therefore tend to move to a hermeneutic theory in order to resacralize the secular world. For Adams, this does violence to phenomenology, because such generalizations are precisely based on the theological assumptions from which phenomenology attempts to escape. He suggests that, eventually, the phenomenological approach can be directed towards a "scientific level" if the concern is to find "the laws governing the emergence and expressions of human religiousness," a goal that is similar to that of the social sciences.[30]

Adams' discussion of religious taxonomy takes him well beyond his predecessors, Corbin and Smith, and even other religionists. In general, his phenomenology is similar to the historical-typological type of classical phenomenology of religion. However, his point that phenomenology's goal is to find the laws of human religious life distances him from the phenomenology of Eliade, whose hermeneutic enterprise tends to resacralize the world. It also puts him at odds with van der Leeuw due to the latter's lack of interest in the notion of universal laws governing the emergence and expression of human religiousness.[31] Among his contemporaries, Adams' perspective might be closest to Pye's "creative and evaluative approach."[32]

Having established the basic framework of his phenomenological approach, Adams maintains that its application to Islam is very promising due to the richness of 'materials' waiting to be explored. As a former student of History of Religions under Joachim Wach, Adams' interest in Islam was strongly motivated by his expectations that "the growing insights and developing methods of the History of Religions would prove a major guide to an expanding and deepening grasp of Islamic religiousness."[33]

Unfortunately, after engaging in the study of Islam, Adams found his expectations frustrated because "the main thrust of scholarship in History of Religions in our day has little relevance, even little interest, for students of Islam" and "there has been almost no attempt to apply the methods and insights of this approach to Islamic materials."[34] He observes that the History of Religions was more interested in primitive religion. Its major themes are: 1) the relationship between myth and ritual 2) religious cults 3) sacral kingship and 4) symbolism. These themes, according to Adams, are not relevant to Islamic religiousness.[35]

In line with Adams, Richard C. Martin argues that another reason for the distance between the History of Religions and the study of Islam was the fact that since the sixteenth century, the study of Islam in the West was primarily concerned with the study of Muslim languages, especially Arabic. In the nineteenth century, European universities developed the study of Arabic as a separate discipline within philology, which came to be known as Oriental Studies.[36] In this context, the Orientalists were "Arabists who specialize in Islamic texts."[37] After World War II, the study of Arabic in North America began in universities and soon became more developed as a field of study to be known as Islamic Studies.[38] This development resulted in the exclusivity of the study of Islam and its exclusion from other studies, especially from the History of Religions.[39]

This distance between the study of Islam and the History of Religions or phenomenology of religion has shaped the debate over phenomenological issues specific to Islamic studies. The fact that the History of Religions has not paid attention to Islamic issues has motivated Islamicists to take up some relevant subject matters that can be explored by the phenomenological approach. Furthermore, the issue of Orientalism has placed unique pressures on Islamicists to confront the dilemma of the insider/outsider perspectives. The discussion in the following sections will deal with these matters.

Conceptualizing the Phenomenological Approach

In this section, we will discuss some articles written by Islamicists on the subject of the phenomenological approach to Islam. Each article not only discusses its particular understanding of the phenomenological approach, but also tries to relate it to specific aspects of Islam, namely, the study of the Qur'ān, the prophet Muḥammad, Islamic theology, and Sufism.

In an article published in 1972, Willem A. Bijlefeld begins a discussion on the phenomenological approach with a direct reference to Adams' article on "The History of Religions and the Study of Islam."[40] Bijlefeld argues that Adams' appeal should be taken seriously. Yet, his understanding of the

phenomenological approach is far different from Adams' and also from that of Bausani, another phenomenologist whom he criticizes. Bijlefeld has reservations regarding Bausani's proposal of a "historical-religious study of Islam." This method tries to integrate the phenomenological perspective into historical discipline. According to Bijlefeld, this is contentious due to its need for a comparative functional typology. The functional typology is an attempt by the scholar to find parallel phenomena from different religious traditions and to interpret them "from within the wider (historical) structures to which they belong and with cautious consideration of how 'they are functioning' in a given typological context.'"[41] For Bijlefeld, this functional typology would reduce phenomenology to a "cursory comparative study" resulting in "an intolerable superficiality."[42] Bijlefeld's critique of Bausani implies that he is located in opposition to Adams and classical phenomenology, especially the historical-typological type that tries to explore the corresponding data across various religious traditions.

What Bijlefeld proposes is a total phenomenological approach to history in which there is "investigation deliberately and consistently to the question of what religious traditions and specific data therein have meant and mean to religious communities and individual believers. . . "[43] That is to say, the phenomenological approach, for Bijlefeld, is an exploration of the insider's perspective *per se*. Bijlefeld argues that Adams' preference of using material gleaned from learned Muslim scholars (insiders) to the exclusion of the unlettered and narrowed-minded is not useful. In other words, all insiders' perspectives should be taken into account regardless of their "intellectual level."[44]

Bijlefeld mentions two specific areas of Islamic studies most suited to the phenomenological approach: the study of the Qur'ān and Muḥammad. According to him, many Western studies of both result in conclusions that totally contradict Muslim tradition because of the indifferent attitudes of Western scholars to Islam's own tradition. Through the phenomenological approach, Bijlefeld proposes an alternative perspective that recognizes the Qur'ān and Muḥammad as they were and are understood by Muslims themselves.

Where Bijlefeld suggests a phenomenological approach to study the Qur'ān and Muḥammad, James E. Royster specifically deals with the latter. In an article published in 1972, Royster surveys various approaches to the study of Muḥammad adopted in the West. Royster observes that these studies can be classified into three types: normative, descriptive and phenomenological. The normative approach is the study that uses external norms to judge history. In this respect, there are two extreme positions: first, the apologetic,

which only presents the positive side, and second, the polemical, which only presents the negative.

The descriptive approach relies only on empirical evidence in an effort to depict what actually happened. This approach suffers, however, from a dearth of primary sources and often falls into 'uncontrolled' generalization. The descriptive approach often resorts to a reductionist interpretation of history such as: naturalistic reductionism, which attempts to explain the miracles of the Prophet as natural phenomena; psychological reductionism, which attempts to interpret the success of Muḥammad on the basis of his particular personality; cultural reductionism, which attempts to place Muḥammad in a socio-economic context largely ignoring his transcendental character, and; exordial reductionism, which tries to find previous Jewish and Christian influences on Muḥammad in order to prove his falsity.[45]

The phenomenological approach relies solely on the believer's accounts. Thus, it avoids the subjectivism of the normative approach and the reductionism of the purely descriptive approach. For Royster, this is the best alternative, but it has its own problems which must be resolved. First, a phenomenologist should avoid the temptation of homogenizing Muslim perspectives. The goal of a phenomenologist is to understand the beliefs of all people, including the most controversial interpretations within the tradition. As an observer, a phenomenologist should not prefer one interpretation to another.[46] Second, unlike Bijlefeld, Royster directly addresses the problem of the difference between "what actually happened" and "what is thought to have happened." For Royster, in terms of his phenomenological approach, the differentiation is not significant. He argues that history, phenomenologically speaking, can be conceptualized as myth. Myth, for him, is "the images, meanings, understandings, beliefs, etc. of the adherents of a religious tradition, *regardless of any proof or disproof of historicity.* In other words, myth is religious truth."[47] The task of a phenomenologist is, therefore, not to find "what actually happened" as opposed to "what is thought to have happened," but to go beyond that, to understand the meaning of the myth for believers.[48]

While Bijlefeld and Royster suggest a phenomenological approach to Islamic history, Ronald L. Nettler tries to develop a phenomenological approach to Islamic theology. Nettler argues that the principal interest of the historians of religions was "the religious phenomena that are primarily non-rational," and therefore, "rationalistic thought such as 'theology' and 'sacred law,'" which are thoroughly studied in Islam, were not taken into account.[49] Nettler is motivated to fill this gap and tries to adapt the phenomenological approach to the scholastic rationalism of Islamic theology. Actually, Nettler claims that his approach is a combination of classical Orientalism

and the History of Religions. What he means by this is that he applies the Orientalists' method of textual analysis of Islamic theological texts and then interprets them according to the framework of the phenomenological approach known in the History of Religions. Through this combination, Nettler believes scholars will avoid the dry, spiritually lifeless attitude of the Orientalist to Islamic theological texts.[50]

To illustrate his approach, Nettler discusses a text called *Ilhāq al-Haqq wa Izhāq al-Bātil,* which contains a debate between Twelever Shi'ite thinkers (Ibn al-Mutahhar and Nūr Allāh al-Shushtari) and a Sunni Ash'arite thinker (Ibn Ruzbihān). Nettler focuses on specific parts of the text dealing with the problems of perception. After discussing the details of the debate, Nettler concludes that, for Shi'ites, perception is possible only under certain conditions and, therefore, perception absolutely cannot enable humans to see God, since the absolute nature of God contradicts the necessary conditions of human perception. In contrast, for the Sunni, perception, like other things, emerges under the control of God's direct, creative activity in the world. That is to say, natural law is understood as God's custom of controlling the world. Accordingly, the limitation of perception to see God is customarily impossible only because God, by His power, has made it so. Nevertheless, due to the absolute power of His will, God may change custom and enable humans to see Him. Nettler argues that this debate, phenomenologically speaking, forms two different structures of Islamic theology: the Shi'ite theology emphasizes natural necessity and the Sunnite theology stresses God's power. Both structures are, however, the result of a rational understanding, or more precisely, a rationalization of revelation. Thus, both are, by definition, religious.[51]

The last article we will discuss in this section is Hermann Landolt's "Ghazāli and *'Religionswissenschaft':* Some Notes on the *Mishkāt al-Anwār* for Professor Charles J. Adams."[52] In his analysis of Ghazāli's work *Mishkāt al-Anwār,* Landolt maintains that Ghāzali's theory of religion is similar to the phenomenological approach described by Adams. First, Adams' concept of *epoche,* to suspend our judgements on the religion that we wish to understand, is the equivalent of Ghazāli's attitude in his personal quest for truth. In his autobiography, *al-Munqidh Min al-Dalāl,* explains Landolt, Ghazāli tells us that since adolescence, he had been preoccupied with the problem of how human beings attain the truth: that is, the difference between the practices of various religious traditions and the human capacity or God-given nature *(fitra)* to know the truth as it is. Ghazāli claimed that he freed himself from the bonds of 'blind imitations' and set out on a tireless quest for the truth wherever he could find it. With regard to Julian Obermann, Landolt argues that Ghazāli's problem is actually "the most important problem of

Religionswissenschaft." Moreover, Ghazāli's open-minded attitude is very much in line with Adams' "irenic" approach to the faith of other people, that is, the first aspect of Adams' phenomenological approach.[53]

Adams' phenomenological approach in classifying religious phenomena into taxonomic schemes that transcend the frontiers of different religions and cultures is also similar to Ghazāli's. Adams' system, according to Landolt, closely parallels Ghazāli's theory of religion outlined in the veils section of the *Mishkāt*.[54] In this section, Ghazāli theorizes that veils separate God from humans in accordance with the levels of their religiosity. According to Ghazāli, there are three kinds or 'classes' of people, whom he classifies hierarchically. At the bottom are those veiled by sheer darkness, next are those veiled by light joined with darkness, and at the top are those veiled by pure light. Those veiled by sheer darkness are the atheists *(al-mulhidūn)* or materialists who do not recognize the "cause" of the universe. He includes hedonists in this category, who are veiled by carnal appetite. Those who are veiled by both light and darkness are the polytheists, idol-worshipers, fire-worshippers, star-worshippers, sun-worshippers, and the dualists, who are veiled by sense-perception. This category also includes the Monotheist Corporealists (*al-mujassima*), who are veiled by images of spatiality (the *Karāmiyya*, for example, think that God sits on His throne). The last group of this category consists of the Attributists, who are veiled by false analogical reasoning, i.e. the *mutakallimūn* who conceptualize God's attributes by drawing an analogy with their own attributes such as hearing, speaking, etc. Finally, at the top of Ghazāli's hierarchy are those who are veiled by pure light. They are: 1) those who realize that God's attributes are not analogous with those of humans, but describe Him in relation to the creature; 2) "those who think that God is the one who moves the outermost body which comprises all spheres"; and 3) those who think that the motion of celestial bodies requires obedience on the part of His servants, the angels, since the motion is not immediately caused by the Lord. According to Landolt, the three classes described by Ghazāli are simply *al-mutakallimūn, al-bātiniyya,* and the philosophers, respectively. Ultimately, at the very top of the hierarchy are the select few who are completely unveiled. Ghazāli refers to them as the attainers *(al-wāsilūn)*: these are the Sufis. Yet, when the veil actually opens for them, they still cannot see the divine, since they are instantly burned by "the Splendor of His face."[55]

Although normative in its conclusions, the important point of Ghazali's theory of the veils, according to Landolt, is that he shows a sympathetic attitude toward those veiled by both light and darkness and toward those veiled by pure light. The good will of Ghazāli, however, ends with those who are veiled by sheer darkness, because they do not yearn for the knowledge of

God.[56] In terms of phenomenology, the problem with Ghazāli's tolerance is that it is hierarchical. We'll touch upon this issue again when we discuss Seyyed Hossein Nasr's theory of perennial philosophy.

Annemarie Schimmel: a Phenomenologist *Par Excellence*

The work of Schimmel is in a class of its own and therefore deserves a section of its own. From the outset of her career as an Islamicist, she has shown a constantly sympathetic, or more precisely, phenomenological approach to Islam. This fact is acknowledged by both Muslim and non-Muslim Islamicists, such as Adams and Nasr.[57] In addition, her Gifford's Lectures in 1992 entitled *Deciphering the Signs of God, A Phenomenological Approach to Islam* is perhaps the most important work on Islam using the phenomenological approach.[58]

In the preface of this book, Schimmel explains that,

> The Lectures have grown out of lifelong occupation with the languages and values of Islam, and from innumerable discussion with Muslim Friends whether highly learned and sophisticated scholars in the Muslim lands and the diaspora, or simple, illiterate villagers, particularly women, in Pakistan, India and Turkey.[59]

Thus, Schimmel's work is a combination of a study of Islamic texts or canons and Islam as a living religion experienced by the Muslims she has encountered. Schimmel also implicitly contends in her approach that she does not feel it necessary to distinguish between highly educated Muslims and the illiterate. This is quite different from Adams' view and also marks a break with the thought of her teacher, Friedrich Heiler (1892-1967).[60]

Although Schimmel's approach focuses on the exploration of the insiders' experience, she does not think that she can study the subject objectively as the *epoche* principle implies. She observes, "Personally, I wonder if a completely objective study of religion is possible when one respects the sphere of the Numinous. . . and the personal bias of the researcher cannot be but reflected in the study—a bias which, in my case, certainly leans more towards the mystical and poetical trends inside Islam than towards its legalistic aspect. . . "[61]

In these lectures, besides the common phenomenological "trademark" of valuing the insiders' perspective, Schimmel applies at least three kinds of phenomenological approaches to Islam. First, she uses the model proposed by her teacher, Friedrich Heiler,[62] to organize and interpret Islamic religious phenomena as manifestations of the Numinous. Second, she tries to find the

structure of Islam as a living religion that provides meaning for life. Third, she attempts to explain aspects of Islam in terms of typologies, which were originally proposed by van der Leeuw.

While fully aware of subjectivity, Schimmel organizes and interprets Islamic phenomena reflected in religious texts and Muslim daily life through the three types of phenomenological approaches. First, she tries to explain them by using Heiler's model of the spheres of the Numinous. The procedure of Heiler's model is "by studying first the phenomena and then deeper and deeper layers of human responses to the Divine until he reaches the innermost sacred core of each religion, the center, the Numinous, the *deus absconditus*." Schimmel finds this approach helpful in explaining the phenomena of Islam, especially because of its affinity to the Sufi concept of different spheres of religiosity. In this regard, the Muslim understanding that everything is a sign or *āya* of God is the key point for Schimmel in the exploration of all Islamic phenomena. Six sections of her book reflect the movement from the most outward manifestation of the Numinous to the very core of the mystery of God: 1) sacred aspects of nature and culture 2) sacred space and time 3) sacred action 4) the word and the script 5) individual and society, and, finally, 6) eschatology. In the eschatology section, she contends that God, in Islam, is *deus absconditus*, the mystery only known by God and God alone.[63]

Her second approach is concerned with the structure of Islam as a living religion. In the last chapter of *Deciphering the Sign of God, a Phenomenological Approach to Islam*—"How to Approach Islam?"—she argues that, as a living religion, Islam experiences constant tensions between two sides: the normative Islam represented by theologians and jurists and the folk Islam supported by Sufism. The dynamic of Islam, argues Schimmel, lies in the continuous interplay between the two sides. A dialectic is created between *sunna* (tradition) and *bid'a* (innovation), between *'āda* or *'urf* (custom) and *sharī'a* laws, between the *zāhir* and the *bātin*, the exoteric and esoteric. The interplay between normative and folk Islam ideally results in a middle position, just as the position of Muḥammad lies between the strict legalism of Moses and the asceticism of Jesus. Schimmel goes on to argue that "'sober' Sufis often tried to strike a balance between both aspects and to show. . . that every unusual spiritual progress or event had to be weighed against the balance of the Law." In other words, Sufis are more inclusive because they are 'eros-oriented' as opposed to the 'nomos-orientation' of normative Islam. In addition, the Sufi's creed is 'the mystical No': *lā mawjūda illā Allāh* (nothing exists but God), while the theologian's creed is 'the prophetic No': *lā ilāha illā Allāh* (there is no deity but God). The former is inclusive because it "includes everything" while the latter is exclusive be-

cause it means "whatever is against the absolute truth is dangerous, sinful, and as Muslims would say, has to be cut off 'with the sword *lā*.'"[64]

Schimmel's third approach utilizes the typologies first proposed by van der Leeuw. She argues that instead of choosing a single religious typology, Islam is suitable for all of the typologies. Islam is the 'religion of servitude,' because according to the Qur'ān, one must become God's servant. '*Abdullāh,* the slave of God' is the highest rank that human beings can achieve. Islam is also the 'religion of the Covenant' because the Qur'ān elucidates the primordial covenant between humans and God. Humans have promised to acknowledge God as the Lord. Furthermore, Islam is the 'religion of unrest' because in Islam, God, as the absolute living Deity, is always "busy." Muslims should therefore imitate God in order to be close to Him. Islam is also the 'religion of Majesty and Humility,' because *Islām* itself literally means to surrender to the "Majesty beyond all majesties." Finally, Schimmel argues that "the historian of religion would probably be surprised to see that Muslims also called Islam the 'religion of love'." The Qur'ān, in Sura 3:31, clearly states that if the believers love God, they should follow the Prophet since God took him as His beloved.[65]

The last important point of Schimmel's approach is her a-historical stance. This is not uncommon among phenomenologists, but the explanation regarding her position is significant. When she talks about any Islamic phenomenon in terms of its similarity to that of other religious traditions, she avoids the diffusionist explanations commonly used by historians of Islam. This does not mean that she ignores the fact that Muslims have been influenced by other religious traditions, but she contends that "these influences are not absolute values: a religion takes into itself only those ideas, customs and tendencies which are in one way or another compatible with its innermost essence."[66] This view of the uniqueness of each religious tradition may, however, seem paradoxical with her notion of the Numinous, which is not only mysterious, but also, in a sense, universal. We will return to this issue in the next section.

Responses of Muslim Scholars

We might say that the phenomenological approach in Islamic studies is an attempt by Western scholars to understand Islam on its own terms.[67] Initially, the debate over the merits of the project was strictly between Western scholars, but during the second half of the twentieth century, Muslim scholars became professors in Western universities and this has changed the debate. The interaction between Muslim and non-Muslim scholars, between insiders and outsiders, has enriched the discourse of the phenomenological

approach in Islamic studies. In this section, we will discuss the responses of two important Muslim scholars in North America, Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988) and Seyyed Hossein Nasr.

Fazlur Rahman, professor of Islamic Thought at the University of Chicago, makes at least two important critiques of the phenomenological approach: the issue of insiders versus outsiders and the problems of the historical versus the a-historical approach. For Rahman, the forced attitude of phenomonologists to be totally uncritical of insiders is contentious. According to Rahman, facts, including religious facts, "are not private, their meanings are universal," although "this does not imply that the understanding of that meaning is also universal," because "a meaning to be 'understood,' has to become meaningful to someone."[68] Based on this proposition, Rahman argues that in terms of an intellectual understanding, both Muslim and non-Muslim can cooperate in the study of Islam. With concern and sympathy, relatively free from intellectual or cultural prejudices, non-Muslims can understand Islam, not as a religious experience but as "a quasi-scientific (intellectual) knowledge of a religious experience."[69] To clarify his position, Rahman maintains:

> I must repeat that an experience as an integral whole cannot be transferred but, through intellectual appreciation of it, the historian or social scientist can convey something of the immediate effect the experience had upon the subject or its significance for the subject. Not only that. When historian or social scientist generalizes about the experience, he can also illuminate it by making comparisons, contrasts and analyses in a way the insider cannot, unless the latter becomes a historian or social scientist.[70]

Another objectionable aspect of the preference for the insiders is, in Rahman's view, the fact that Muslims are not homogenous: "there are many statements made all the time by some insiders that are repudiated by other insiders."[71] To account for the differences, the phenomenological approach tends to be relativistic, it simply assumes that all the differences are Islamic. This relativistic tendency, for Rahman, is unacceptable because "Muslims do not claim a 'Muslim' truth for Islam, but a transcendent, universal truth." That is to say, there is a normative Islam as a frame of reference by which to 'judge' the phenomena of Muslim religious differences. Accordingly, Rahman contends, "I welcome the phenomenological approach with the provision that its users recognize the Qur'ān and Sunna as normative criterion-referents for all expressions and understandings of Islam."[72]

Rahman's second critique of the phenomenological approach is directed at its a-historical analysis. In this regard, Rahman refers to the study of the

Qur'ān in the West. He notes that the historical study of the Qur'ān in the West has developed two approaches. The first has sought to discover the influences of Jewish and Christian traditions, and the second has sought to establish the chronological order of the Qur'anic verses.[73] Much of these Western historical studies of the Qur'ān, phenomenologists observe, are not compatible with Muslim beliefs. As an alternative, some scholars propose a literary rather than historical criticism. According to Rahman, however, when the study of the Qur'ān becomes a-historical, the result is that we cannot really understand it. In fact, he argues, the literary approach contains some hidden historical presuppositions.[74] Therefore, Rahman contends that there is no real alternative. We have to study the Qur'ān historically. By so doing, Muslim and non-Muslim can cooperate. Rahman even suggests that "Western scholarship, with its background and its equipment of intellectual tools, is much more able to do this job than Islamic scholarship at the present."[75]

Rahman's desire to build bridges across the cultural divide of Orientalism is a product of his own intellectual training. His appeal for cooperation between Muslims and non-Muslims in Islamic scholarship and his insistence that Western scholarship maintain a normative reference of Islam remind us of the ideas of W.C. Smith and Adams, respectively.[76]

In contrast to Rahman, who up to a point feels at home within Western scholarship, Seyyed Hossein Nasr is very critical of it. In his article entitled "The *Philosophia Perennis* and the Study of Religion," Nasr criticizes the notion of *Religionswissenschaft* developed in the West and proposes an alternative approach derived from the Islamic traditionalist school. He refers to this as "perennial philosophy."[77] Perennial philosophy *(al-hikma al-khālida)* is "a knowledge which has always been and will always be and which is of universal character . . . contained at the heart of all religions or traditions."[78]

This philosophy, Nasr argues, is not only different from the historicism of the academic approach to religion of the nineteenth century, but also from the a-historical phenomenological approach. Nasr conceptualizes religion within the framework of a universal cosmology. Reality is hierarchically ordered from the divine to the sensual world. All genuine religions come from the divine through a vertical descent that forms its own unique path to salvation. Accordingly, unlike historicism, which presupposes that religion is determined by historical conditions, perennial philosophy presupposes that there is something beyond history. There is a universal Primordial Tradition "which constituted original or archetypal man's primal spiritual and intellectual heritage received through direct revelation when Heaven and earth were still 'united.'" Unlike a-historical phenomenology, however, perennial philosophy accounts for the historical unfolding of religious differences as

divergent traditions. In other words, there is a transcendental unity of religion in its archetypal form. This spiritual core is beyond history, but the external forms and manifestations of religion are historically contingent. Due to the relationship between the absolute and contingent aspects of religion, with reference to Frithjof Schuon, Nasr maintains that all genuine religions are "relatively absolute."[79]

In contrast to the phenomenological approach, which does not rely on any normative judgement of religious phenomena, perennial philosophy "judges between grades of Divine manifestation, various degrees and levels of prophecy, major and minor dispensations from Heaven, and lesser and greater paths even within a single tradition." In other words, religion is judged according to a cosmic hierarchy. The hierarchy is, however, only a reflection of the different levels of knowledge of 'Ultimate Reality' and therefore does not exclude the faithful in the different levels from obtaining salvation.[80] In this regard, perennial philosophy can also differentiate between genuine religion and pseudo-religion based on the truth of the *philosophia perennis*.[81]

Furthermore, this method requires complete spiritual commitment on the part of the religious scholar. Unlike the phenomenological concept of *epoche*, which entails only a sympathetic attitude of the scholar, perennial philosophy requires total engagement. It is a dedication not only of mind but also of the scholar's entire being. According to this traditional school of thought, "the study of religion and religions is itself a religious activity and of religious significance."[82] In other words, it requires a religious commitment and consequently excludes the 'secularly' minded.

Nasr's perennial philosophy is in fact similar, if not identical to, Schimmel's phenomenological approach. Both consider each tradition to be unique yet at the same time all traditions are related to the Absolute, the Numinous. There is also a great similarity between Nasr's hierarchical concept of the manifestations of the divine and Schimmel's various spheres of the radiation of the Numinous. This notion of multiple manifestations of a single truth is also to be found in Ghazāli's taxonomic schemes of religion described by Landolt. Given the profound Sufi influence upon these thinkers, however, the breadth of this common ground is only natural.

Conclusion

It is probably helpful to conclude our discussion by looking back at the familial traits of the phenomenological approach and the three types of phenomenologies of religion. One of the familial traits of the phenomenological approach is anti-reductive. Throughout our discussion, we find that

Corbin, Adams, Bijelfeld, Royster, Schimmel, and, to a point, Nasr, agree that religious experience is a *sui generis* phenomenon that cannot be reduced to historical, social and other viewpoints. Therefore, to understand religious phenomena, one should study the insiders' own understanding of the religious phenomena. In contrast, Rahman, who is not a phenomenologist, argues that facts, including religious facts, are universal and therefore insiders are not superior to outsiders in terms of their ability to understand. Rahman is very much closer in thought to W. C. Smith, who argues that the academic study of religion should satisfy not only the believers of the religion in question, but also Western academic standards.

Another familial trait of the phenomenological approach is a-theological, that is, the attitude and perspective are not influenced by a certain commitment to religious beliefs. As phenomenologists, Bijlefeld and Royster consistently hold to the principle of phenomenology that a scholar should only listen to the insiders' voice without making any value judgment. Schimmel is closest to this position, but she also believes it necessary to note the dialectic between normative Islam and folk Islam in understanding Islamic religious phenomena. Given the variety of the insiders' voices, however, Adams and Rahman move toward the criteria of selecting the representative voices of the insiders. For Adams, only learned and open-minded Muslims are valid references, while for Rahman, the normative reference is the Qur'ān and the Sunna. In line with Ghazāli, Nasr argues that all judgements should be placed within a cosmic hierarchy of truth regarding the manifestations of the divine. In this regard, it seems that Rahman and Nasr (probably because they are not phenomenologists and are committed Muslims) fall into a kind of theological commitment, while Adams' position could be maintained as an a-theological standpoint.[83]

With regard to the a-historical trait of the phenomenological approach, there are some interesting points to consider. Royster argues that we do not have to differentiate between what actually happened and what is thought to have happened, because history for believers is 'myth,' and thus we only need to understand its religious significance. Closer to this position, Schimmel argues that the historical influences of previous religious traditions on Islam do not negate the uniqueness of Islam and to reduce Islamic phenomena to mere outcomes of historical forces is unacceptable. Nasr and Rahman are, however, quite critical of this a-historical trait. Nasr contends that the historical aspects of religion should not be overlooked, though they should be studied in relation to their primordial origin, which is beyond history. Likewise, Rahman argues that the historical approach is necessary to improve our understanding of Islam.

In terms of the types of phenomenology of religion, only Adams' phenomenology can be included in the historical-typological category, because his phenomenology tries to find the similar aspects of various religious traditions, while other Islamicists only deal with Islam. Furthermore, Adams' ideal that this approach could result in finding the laws governing the religious life of mankind is something not found among the classical phenomenologists. Besides Adams, both Schimmel and Nettler could be included in the historical-typological category in their attempts to find the structure of Islam as a living religion. Schimmel finds structure within the interplay between two aspects of Islam: normative versus folk. This dialectic is expressed as *sunna* versus *bid'a*, *'urf* versus *sharī'a*. Nittler finds structure in the difference between Shi'a theology, which emphasizes natural necessity and Sunni Ash'arite theology, which stresses the power of God. In addition, Schimmel also uses various typologies of religion originating from van der Leeuw to explain Islam and argues that no specific typology can cover the whole nature of Islam. However, Schimmel's analysis of the manifestations of the Numinous can be included into the essential type of phenomenology of religion. It appears that there is no Islamicist who can be classified as an existential-hermeneutical phenomenologist. Perhaps Corbin is unique, because he is an essential not an existential hermeneutical phenomenologist.

Throughout our discussion, we have seen how the phenomenological approach is applied, developed, and debated in the circle of Islamic studies. These efforts no doubt contribute significantly both to Islamic studies and to the phenomenology of religion. Indeed, the debate is still going on among historians of religion and Islamicists.[84] Iqbal's remark at our starting point—that religion is as complex as human nature itself—seems to have been well-illustrated throughout our discussion. It is probably because of this complexity that Schimmel not only argues for the primacy of the insiders' perspective, but also acknowledges a subjective bias of her phenomenological approach.

Endnotes

1. Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: Ashraf Press, 1968), 2.

2. Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West, the Making of an Image* (Oxford: One World, [1960] 1997). After describing medieval Christian prejudices against Islam, Daniel suggests: "One particular way in which we can benefit from the new scholarship is in getting to see Islamic matters from the Islamic point of view. This is possible both by means of modern scholarship and also by simply conversing frankly, if discreetly, with Muslims. . . " (336). This sounds like the phenomenological approach!

3. Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Pantheon, 1995). This is the seminal critique of Orientalism. According to Said, Orientalists were highly influenced by the superiority of the West over the Orient, and therefore represent academic imperialism. Many specialists on Islam are now reluctant to be called "Orientalists" and prefer the term "Islamicists." In addition, some departments of "Oriental Studies" have been renamed "Islamic Studies." Indeed, the term "orientalism" continues to convey a pejorative meaning in Muslim countries and the debate about it is still going on. See Māzin Ibn Salāh Matbūqāni, *al-Istishrāq wa al-Ittijāhāt al-Fikriyya fi Tārikh al-Islām* (Riyadh: Maktaba al-Malik al-Fahd al-Wataniyya, 1995). In this book, the author criticizes the "bias" of Bernard Lewis, an 'Orientalist' specializing in Islamic history. A counterpoint of note is the recent publication of a book written in honor of Lewis that deals with the contributions made by a number of Jewish Orientalists to the study of Islam. See Martin Kramer, ed., *The Jewish Discovery of Islam* (Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 1999). For a general development of Islamic studies, see Richard C. Martin, "Islamic Studies: History of the Field," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, ed. John L. Esposito (NY: Oxford University Press, 1995), 325-31. For an analysis of the development of "the image of Islam" in Islamic Studies, see Jacques Waardenburg, "Changes of Perspective in Islamic Studies over the last decades," *Humaniora Islamica* I (1973): 248-52.

4. Hans Penner, "Is Phenomenology of Religion a Method for the Study of Religion?" *The Bucknell Review* 18 (1970): 29.

5. Sanford Krolick, "Through a Glass Darkly: What is the Phenomenology of Religion?" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 17 (1985): 193, 198.

6. Michael Pye, "Problems of Method in the Interpretation of Religion," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 1 (1974): 109-10.

7. George Alfred James, *Interpreting Religion, the Phenomenological Approaches of Pierre Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye, W. Brede Kristensen and Gerardus van der Leeuw* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 53.

8. Arvind Sharma, "Towards a Definition of the Phenomenology of Religion," *Milla wa-Milla* 16 (1976): 17.

9. Arvind Sharma, "An Inquiry into the Nature of the Distinction between the History of Religion and the Phenomenology of Religion," *Numen* 22 (1975): 95.

10. James, 47-57.

11. Sharma refers to C. J. Bleeker to support his viewpoint while Alfred James argues that, although there are some similarities, even connections, between Chantepie de la Saussaye and Husserl, the origin of the phenomenology of religion in Holland "differs completely from those whose point of departure is Husserl." See: Sharma, "Towards" 8 and James 42. In this context, Jacques Waardenburg maintains that "the classical phenomenology of religion can be seen to have been a discipline of transition." He proposes a new style of phenomenology of religion which focuses on the study of intentions, a method that is influenced by Husserl's intentionality. See his *Reflection on the Study of Religion* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978), 39, 90-137. For a specific discussion on intentionality and the phenomenology of religion, see Evan M. Zuesse, "The Role of Intentionality in the Phenomenology of Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53 (1985): 51-73.

12. Sumner B. Twiss and Walter H. Conser, Jr., *Experience of the Sacred, Readings in the Phenomenology of Religion* (Hanover: Brown University Press, 1992), 7.

13. *Ibid.*, 24.

14. *Ibid.*, 44-5.

15. Charles J. Adams and Hamid Algar have conducted critical studies on the works of Corbin. See: Charles J. Adams, "The Hermeneutics of Henry Corbin," *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, ed. Richard C. Martin (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1985), 129-50; and Hamid Algar, "The Study of Islam: The Works of Henry Corbin," *Religious Studies Review* 6 (1980): 85-91.

16. Adams, "The Hermeneutics," 142.

17. Henry Corbin, *En Islam iranian*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), xix. Cited in and translated by Algar. Algar, 90.

18. These points are explained in more detail in Adams, 142-49.

19. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Comparative Religion: Whither and Why?" *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology*, ed. Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 34.

20. W. C. Smith, "Comparative," 42. Smith applies this approach to different religions in *The Faith of Other Men* (NY: Harver & Row, 1972). For a discussion of the personal approach, see 17-18 of the present study.

21. W. C. Smith, "Comparative," 42.

22. W. C. Smith, "Comparative," 52. The composition of the first students of the Institute of Islamic Studies clearly reflect Smith's idea of the cooperation between insiders and outsiders. Adams tells us that "there were eleven students, five Muslims, five Westerners and one Lebanese Christian whom Smith considered to be half-and-half." Charles J. Adams, "The Development of Islamic Studies in Canada," *The Muslim Community in North America*, ed. Baha Abu Laban (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1983), 188.

23. It is noteworthy that in "Comparative Religion: Whither and Why?" (38 n15), W. C. Smith mentions the fact that the personal approach is epitomized by Huston Smith's *Religions of Man* (NY: Harper & Row, 1958). In his introduction, H. Smith argues that we can understand other religions if we take them seriously. "And to take them seriously, we need only do two things. One, we need to see their adherents as men and women confronted with problems like ourselves. Second, we must rid our minds of all perceptions that will dull their sensitivity or alertness to fresh insight" (13). These words appear to reflect an existential phenomenology of religion.

24. Charles J. Adams, "The History of Religions and the Study of Islam," *The History of Religions: Essays on the Problems of Understanding*, ed. Joseph M. Kitagawa (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), 180. According to Sharma, the term "history of religion" is used at least in three senses: (1) in a narrow sense, it refers to the history of individual religions; (2) in its broader sense, it is a combination between the history of religion and phenomenology of religion; and (3), in its broadest sense, it is equivalent to the German word *Religionswissenschaft* that includes history, phenomenology and the comparative study of religions. See Sharma, "An Inquiry," 6.

25. Charles J. Adams, "Islamic Religious Tradition," *The Study of the Middle East, Research and Scholarship in the Humanities and the Social Sciences*, ed. Leonard Binder (NY: John Wiley and Sons, 1976), 49.

26. Adams, "Islamic," 50-51.

27. *Ibid.*.

28. *Ibid.*, 190-91.

29. *Ibid.*, 51.

30. *Ibid.*, 52.

31. See: Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. Williard R. Trask (NY: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1959), 201-13; Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, trans. J. E. Turner, vol. 2 (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1967) 671-78; and Sharma "An Inquiry," 88-92.

32. This approach is, for Pye, based on the findings of the phenomenological approach with two additions: first, a consideration of the dynamic nature of religion, and second, a comparative hermeneutics on religion done by the scholar or both the scholar and the believer. The validity of this interpretation can only be discerned from a later historical perspective. See Pye, 121-23. Pye's idea of the later verification of the validity of the interpretation may be parallel with the "scientific" feature of the phenomenological approach that Adams suggests.

33. Adams, "The History," 178.

34. *Ibid.* See also Adams, "Islamic," 53.

35. *Ibid.*, 181-82. A similar observation by Geo Widengren also supports Adams' arguments: "That Islam so little has been utilized for phenomenological research is regrettable. To some extent, however, this is due to the fact that some highly important phenomena such as e.g. myth, sacrifice and confession of sins, are extremely difficult or even impossible to illustrate from Islam." Geo Widengren "Some Remarks on the Methods of the Phenomenology of Religion," *Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis* 17 (1968): 260.

36. Richard C. Martin, "Islamic Studies: History of the Field," *Approaches*, 327-29.

37. *Ibid.* Initially, Orientalism was a field of the study of Asian languages developed in eighteenth century in Europe. See Edmund Burke II, "Orientalism," *The Oxford*, Esposito, 276.

38. Adams, "The Development," 185-86.

39. Richard C. Martin even observes that "until recently, Islamicists have judged themselves more or less in isolation from the rest of academe." See Richard C. Martin, "Islam and Religious Studies: An Introductory Essay," Martin, *Approaches*, 11. See also Adams, "Islamic," 53.

40. Willem A. Bijlefeld, "Islamic Studies Within the Perspective of the History of Religions," *The Muslim World* 62 (1972): 1.

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*, 3.

43. *Ibid.*, 4. He calls his approach "subjective frame of reference" in the sense that the subjects' reports of their experiences "are taken as data for description and analysis."

44. *Ibid.*, 8 n3.

45. James E. Royster, "The Study of Muhammad: A Survey of Approaches from the Perspective of the History and Phenomenology of Religion," *The Muslim World* 62 (1972): 49-63.

46. *Ibid.*, 51.

47. *Ibid.* Italics mine.

48. *Ibid.*, 69-70. See also Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985). In this book, Schimmel says that she tries "to depict how pious Muslims have seen the prophet Muhammad through the centuries, even though their picture was *not always historically correct* [italics mine]" (4).

49. Ronald L. Nettler, "A Controversy on the Problem of Perception: Two Religious Outlooks in Islam," *Humaniora Islamica* 1 (1973): 135.

50. *Ibid.*, 133-37.

51. *Ibid.*, 154-56.

52. Hermann Landolt, "Ghazali and '*Religionswissenschaft*': Some Notes on the *Mishkat al-Anwar* for Professor Charles J. Adams," *Asiatische Studien* 65.1 (1991): 19-72.

53. *Ibid.*, 19-21.

54. This part of the treatise, however, is a matter of debate among scholars regarding whether it is Ghazāli's own writing or a forgery. Indeed, Landolt's arguments throughout the article indicate that the veil-section is not a forgery, but Ghazāli's own writing. See *ibid.*, 31-72.

55. *Ibid.*, 31-62.

56. *Ibid.*, 31-33.

57. Adams, "The History," 179. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (California: Aquarian, 1994), xix, 180, 182-83.

58. Annemarie Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs of God, a Phenomenological Approach to Islam* (Albany: State University of New York, 1994).

59. Schimmel, *Deciphering* vii.

60. Heiler's model of the spheres of numinous manifestation may imply the same notion as that of Schimmel. However, he seems to prefer the great religious personalities such as the mystics, the prophets, preachers, missionaries, and reformers to the lay people. In his own words: "to disentangle the inner experience that expresses itself through acts and words of worship, we must address ourselves to the great religious genius, who have revealed to us their rich and subtle creative experience. . . " Jacques Waardenburg, *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion* (The Hague: Muoton & Co. N. V., 1973), 408.

61. Schimmel, *Deciphering* xi-xii.

62. Schimmel seems very impressed with Heiler. The book in question is dedicated to Heiler. She also writes Heiler's biography in Mircea Eilade, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 9, 249-50.

63. Schimmel, *Deciphering* xii- xviii, 2-239.

64. *Ibid.*, 245-49.

65. *Ibid.*, 252-55.

66. *Ibid.*, viii, xiii.

67. It is noteworthy that a distinguished Muslim scholar from Egypt, Hassan Hanafi, is currently attempting to reform Islam in terms of the phenomenological perspective. However, Hanafi's phenomenology is not the phenomenology of the History of Religions. It is the philosophical phenomenology of Husserl that is used to reform the Islamic legal theories *(usūl al-fiqh)*. Hanafi is also interested in discussing religion in terms of Husserl's phenomenology and comparing Husserl's ideas with Muslim philosopher's views. See his articles, *"'ilm usūl al-fiqh"* and *"hikmat al-ishrāq wa al-finūminūlūjiyā,"* in his *Dirāsāt Islāmiyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Tanwīr, 1986), 55-82, 209-61. See also his article, *"finūminūlūjiyā al-dīn 'inda* Husserl," in his *Qadāyā Mu'āsira* 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabi, 1982), 283-97.

68. Fazlur Rahman, "Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies: Review Essay," Martin, *Approaches*, 191-92.

69. *Ibid.*, 193.

70. *Ibid.*, 194-95.

71. *Ibid.*, 193.

72. *Ibid.*, 194, 198. To refer to the Qur'ān and the Sunna can be vague. However, the following statement by Rahman may help us: "The basic *élan* of the Qur'ān is moral, whence flows its emphasis on monotheism as well as social justice. The moral law is immutable: it is God's 'command.' Man cannot make or unmake the moral law: he must

submit to it. This submission to it is called *Islām* and its implementation in life being called *'ibāda* or 'service' to God." See Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 32.

73. Fazlur Rahman, "Islamic Studies and the Future of Islam," *Islamic Studies: A Tradition and Its Problems,* ed. Malcolm H. Kerr (Malibu, Calif: Undena Publications, 1980), 131.

74. *Ibid.,* 198-220.

75. *Ibid.,* 131-32. Rahman applies this historical method to the Qur'ān in some parts of his *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), especially chapter 8 and appendix I. For his method of the interpretation of the Qur'ān see his *Islam and Modernity, Transformation of Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), chapters 1 and 4.

76. Indeed, Rahman mentions W.C. Smith to support his arguments. See Rahman, "Approaches," 197.

77. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The *Philosophia Perennis* and the Study of Religion," *The Need for a Sacred Science* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 53-68.

78. *Ibid.,* 54.

79. *Ibid.,* 57, 60-61.

80. *Ibid.,* 59.

81. *Ibid..*

82. *Ibid.,* 64.

83. According to Sharma, being an insider or outsider in the study of religion is only a matter of degree. There are three possibilities of the insider and the outsider in relation to the insider's tradition. First, in an extreme case, the insider rejects the tradition and becomes alienated from it, while the outsider sinks totally into the tradition, that is, converts to it. Second, in a moderate case, the insider becomes a reformer while the outsider becomes a friendly critic. Third, in the lowest degree of interaction, the insider becomes an agnostic while the outsider becomes a relativist. Arvind Sharma, "The Insiders and Outsiders in the Study of Religious Tradition," *Eastern Anthropologist* 38 (1985): 331-33. To use these categories, Rahman can be put in the second category as a reformer, while Nasr may be placed in the first category, not as an outsider, but as an insider who "sinks totally into the tradition." Most of the outsiders we have discussed may be loosely included in the second category.

84. For the debate among religionists see Ursula King, "Historical and Phenomenological Approaches to the Study of Religion, " *Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religion,* ed. Frank Whaling, vol.2 (Berlin: Mouton publishers, 1983), 29-153. For the case of Islamic Studies, see Jacques Waardenburg, "Islamic Studies and the History of Religions: An Evaluation," *Mapping Islamic Studies,* ed. Azim Nanji (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1997), 180-219.