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Essays in Honour of Willem B. Drees

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Chapter 15
The Fading of Philosophy from the Study of Religion

Albert de Jong

Abstract When the study of religion emerged in Leiden in the nineteenth century, there was a brief moment in which history and philosophy of religion were combined. When this union, which brought the study of religion in conversation with philosophy, came to an end, the two fields drifted apart. Philosophy of religion lost touch with the study of religion, and the study of religion lost touch with philosophy *tout court*. The place of philosophy at the centre of the study of religion was taken over first by a hybrid field known as 'the phenomenology of religion' and, when that tradition was demolished, with an equally hybrid field known as 'method and theory'. Building on this very local history, this article supports those philosophers of religion who wish to engage with the study of religion and calls upon students of religion to recover an interest in philosophy.

Keywords *Duplex ordo* theology · History of scholarship · Method and theory in the study of religion · Phenomenology of religion · Philosophy of religion · Study of religion

With the exception of a few decades in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (when the two fields were the responsibility of a single chair), the philosophy of religion and the study of religion in Leiden (and in the Netherlands more generally) have largely been siloed fields characterized by radically different orientations on their supposedly shared subject, 'religion', and by an almost total absence of intellectual exchange. Philosophy of religion was a central field in the Leiden Faculty of Theology, since it was assigned the role of teaching students of theology how the various departments, fields and disciplines cohered. In a somewhat

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awkward nineteenth-century usage that otherwise only survives in the Law Faculty, this teaching bore the name of 'encyclopaedia of theology'.

The study of religion (or 'science of religion', Dutch *godsdienstwetenschap*), in contrast, was a marginal field that was severely hamstrung right from the start by the tacit agreement that its supposed object of research and teaching, 'religion(s)', could not include Christianity and Judaism. Christianity was covered by all other departments in the faculty, including philosophy of religion, and there was never any place in Dutch Faculties of Theology for the teaching of Rabbinic and post-Rabbinic Judaism (De Jong 2022: 96–97). That subject was left to the Faculty of Arts. This tacit agreement, with its abhorrent roots in Christian supersessionism in what was supposed to be a 'secular' academic institution, *de facto* undermined the one thing that the study of religion had always managed to get right: its principled rejection of canonical selection in the definition of its subject matter. Here, too, there is a wide gap between principle and practice, but the principle at least has always been clear and uncontroversial. If the goal of the study of religion is to study 'religion' as a special domain of human culture, it is inadmissible to illuminate the field through a pregiven limited selection of salient instantiations.

The study of religion shares this principle with historical and descriptive linguistics, but the two fields were clearly unusual in this respect within the larger context of the humanities in the twentieth century (and beyond). Many of its sister disciplines were radically canonical in the demarcation of their fields: musicology was almost wholly restricted to the study of Western classical music; comparative literature was dominated by a small selection of literary production in a small selection of European languages; art history made some room for 'forerunners' in the Ancient Near East, but again largely restricted its focus to a canon of European/Western art; and the same is true for philosophy. The way this was done, most often, was through the construction of special fields that were always seen and treated as 'optional' (and therefore rarely even present in most universities) to deal with (and thus dispose of) the majority (but 'non-canonical') subjects. The clearest case is that of ethnomusicology, but similar versions of these special fields exist for most other disciplines in the humanities (non-Western or world art, world literature, comparative and global philosophy). This was never an option for the study of religion, which suffered from the reverse situation: that it could *not* concern itself with the 'canonical' exemplars of Christianity and Judaism.

These observations should serve as some kind of antidote to the current academic consensus that the study of religion before the 1970s was essentially (and intentionally) a branch or manifestation of liberal protestant Christian theology (Platvoet 1998; Molendijk 2005). There is a lot of truth in this consensus, but it fatally relies on a confusion between the ideology of the nascent field with its eventual outcomes. If we attempt to figure out what the early representatives of the study of religion themselves believed they were doing (in other words, why they thought they were right; Strenski 2015: ix), a different interpretation becomes possible.

For this to emerge clearly, it is proposed to review here briefly the two 'charter myths' that have governed most interpretations of the development of the study of religion in the Netherlands: the rise of 'phenomenology of religion' in the late

nineteenth and early twentieth century, and its sudden demolition in the 1970s. We will pay particular attention to the relations between the 'new' field of the study of religion – legally mandated by the Dutch Act on Higher Education of 1876 – and the equally new field of the (non-confessional) philosophy of religion that accompanied it. Once we have unravelled some of these threads, we shall attempt to understand the virtual disappearance of philosophy of religion from the study of religion, both in its particular setting in the Netherlands and, building on that, in more global contemporary configurations. I shall try to argue that the 'parting of the ways' between the two fields was inevitable in their local setting, but that in the long run we need to find ways to reconnect the fields in order for both of them to survive.

Two Charter Myths: The Rise and Destruction of Phenomenology of Religion in the Netherlands

In conventional narratives of the history of the study of religion in the Netherlands, two turning points are always present. The first of these is the establishment of the field, by an Act of parliament, in 1876. This came into effect in 1877, with the appointment of Cornelis Petrus Tiele (1830–1902) to the Leiden chair of the General History of Religions, followed by that of Pierre Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye (1848–1920) in Amsterdam in 1878. Accompanying this newly created chair, a second new chair marked the changing status of the Theological Faculties in Dutch universities. This is the chair in Philosophy of Religion, Ethics, and Encyclopaedia of Theology. This chair was essentially the 'secularized' replacement of the chair in dogmatic theology and was thus, together with the chair in the general history of religions, the centerpiece of the newly created, nominally secular/scientific *duplex ordo* faculties of theology. The history of this second 'secularized' Leiden chair has recently been written by Wim Drees (2023), to whose penetrating insights the present work owes very much. Initially, the teaching of the three fields of this new chair in philosophy of religion was divided over three professors who were already there, and the first two decades saw a constant exchange of teaching duties in these fields, with the accompanying feelings of unease over what it was, exactly, that the new chair had to accomplish. This was not made easier by the personality of Tiele, who combined seemingly boundless energy with an almost obsessive interest in establishing his own reputation as the founder of a new, modern, scientific field.

Things came to a head in 1889, when J. H. Gunning (1829–1905) was appointed professor of the Philosophy of Religion. In his inaugural lecture (titled 'Philosophy of Religion from the principle of the faith of the community'; Gunning 1889), Gunning explicitly claimed the right to ground his philosophy of religion in faith – a flagrant betrayal of what most of his colleagues believed the chair was supposed to accomplish. For this, he used an extraordinary interpretation of the Act on Higher Education in combination with an equally extraordinary interpretation of his own philosophy of religion as an academic discipline that was not conditioned by any specific confession, or by any religious *a priori*, but was grounded in *religion itself*.

The legal and mental elasticity this required soon turned out to be too much even for Gunning himself: in what Tiele clearly saw as an acknowledgement of intellectual defeat, Gunning gave up the duties of teaching philosophy of religion and relinquished them to Tiele, of all people, in 1891. Tiele immediately set out to denounce his colleague in an astonishing piece of programmatic writing (Tiele 1892).

This was the beginning of a short period in which both the academic study of religion and philosophy of religion were taught by the same person (Tiele and his successor William Brede Kristensen). They tried to develop philosophy of religion (building on the earlier teaching of 'natural theology') into a field that concerned itself with fundamental or systematic questions of the academic study of religion, the discipline they attempted to establish.

The clearest expression of the relations between the history of religions, the phenomenology of religion and the philosophy of religion, however, was provided by P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye, who had been appointed to the chair in the study of religion in Amsterdam in 1878, but moved to Leiden in 1889 to take up the chair in 'Encyclopaedia of Theology, the History of the Doctrine concerning God and Ethics' (one of the various permutations that led, eventually, to the 'regular' chair in Philosophy of Religion, Ethics and Encyclopaedia of Theology). In his highly influential manual on the History of Religions (Chantepie de la Saussaye 1887–1889), La Saussaye distinguished three core components of the study of religion: history of religions, phenomenology of religion, and philosophy of religion. It is not entirely clear what he meant by 'phenomenology of religion'. In the most recent in-depth discussion of this question (Molendijk 2005: 117–122), Arie Molendijk has suggested that La Saussaye's use of phenomenology should not be seen as a direct reference to Hegel, but was inspired by Eduard von Hartmann's *Phänomenologie des sittlichen Bewußtseins* (Von Hartmann 1879). Although La Saussaye refers to both Hegel and von Hartmann, this suggestion is very plausible. For La Saussaye as for Hartmann, 'phenomenology' occupied a middle ground between 'history', which gathers contextual facts that illustrate concrete religions, and 'philosophy', which deals with problems and essences. Phenomenology shares a descriptive nature with history, but it departs from history in ignoring boundaries and grouping together elements that share certain characteristics. These phenomena can then be studied or thought through as separate types that together form the building blocks of 'religion' in the singular, and thus give the philosophy of religion enough material to do its proper work in thinking through the category 'religion' itself.

This union between the study of religion and philosophy of religion in Leiden ended in 1922, when Kristensen changed the title of his chair to 'History of Religions and Phenomenology of Religion'. He abandoned the teaching of Philosophy of Religion to K. H. Roessingh, who was thus the first to combine philosophy of religion, ethics and encyclopaedia (unfortunately, he died at a young age in 1925). From then on, the two fields were served by separate professors. This made it possible for the two fields to drift apart, and that is precisely what happened. The fate of the two fields was to be very different, however: largely due to a series of unfortunate appointments, the study of religion declined notably in Leiden under Kristensen's successors H. Kraemer and K. A. H. Hidding, whereas philosophy of

religion flourished and managed to claim a central role in the Leiden Faculty of Theology. It could only play this central role by developing a markedly Christian philosophy of religion in conversation with an equally circumscribed canon of European philosophy and protestant (and, in some cases, Jewish) thought.

Kristensen was succeeded by Hendrik Kraemer, who had a background in Southeast Asian studies and in Christian mission. He was a combative thinker and writer, who explicitly denounced Tiele's programme for the study of religion and told the Leiden students in his inaugural lecture at the university (his only contribution to the study of religion; Kraemer 1937) that it was the task of the theologian 'to act as witness to the truth of God, to the truth of man, and to the truth of the world, and how these three truths are related to each other' (Kraemer 1937: 27). This could only be done 'when our cardinal act of life consists in an uncompromising submission to Christ and His cause in this world, and when through this the need emerges, in freedom of mind and an open quest for truth, to think through and attempt to understand the religious life of mankind and the way God acts in it' (Kraemer 1937: 28). With Kraemer's appointment, the fledgling project for a 'scientific' study of religion that had started exactly 60 years before his arrival in Leiden essentially came to an end, in favour of a return to missiology and *theologia religionum*. Kraemer's *magnum opus*, published in the year following his appointment, bears the telling title *The Christian Message in a non-Christian World* (Kraemer 1938).

The practical disappearance of the study of religion from Leiden was counterbalanced by the very strong rise of the field in Groningen, in the person of Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890–1950; Plantinga 1990; Hofstee 1997), who took the field in a much more explicitly theological direction than Tiele or Kristensen ever wanted. There has been some debate over the philosophical underpinnings of Van der Leeuw's core conceptions of phenomenology of religion (Davidsen 2021: 259–261). Essentially, his notion of phenomenology continued that of Chantepie de la Saussaye via Kristensen, but meanwhile, phenomenology had acquired a much higher profile in philosophy due to the influential work of Edmund Husserl. It has by now been accepted by all that Van der Leeuw's phenomenology only made strategic use of Husserl's reputation by borrowing a number of fashionable notions (*epochē*, *eidetic vision*) that Van der Leeuw used in ways that cannot be harmonized with Husserl's work (Gold 2003: 131–133; contrast Tuckett 2016).

Van der Leeuw did not aim to restore the connection between history of religions, phenomenology of religion and philosophy of religion, but replaced 'philosophy of religion' (in which he showed little interest) with theology. This emerges most clearly from his *Introduction to Theology*, which was based on his teaching of Encyclopaedia of Theology in Groningen (Van der Leeuw 1935). In his vision of theology as an academic field, Van der Leeuw proposes a structure of theology that rests on a separation between historical theology, dogmatic theology and the study of religion. What is remarkable in this structure is that the history of religions is not part of the study of religion but of historical theology. The study of religion is identified with phenomenology alone, and it leads to Dogmatic Theology through the intermediary of Philosophy of Religion, which Van der Leeuw sees as a non-theological 'adjunct discipline' (Van der Leeuw 1935: 175–178). He is willing to

accept the necessity of philosophy of religion, but essentially places it *outside* theology, while drawing phenomenology of religion wholly into that field and beyond any attempt at contextual understanding.

Thus, the one person who almost embodied the study of religion in the Netherlands had removed himself drastically from the initial conception of the field as a 'scientific' study of religion(s). No help was forthcoming from the other Dutch universities in the 1930s and 1940s, either. We have already mentioned the end of the study of religion in Leiden with the appointment of Kraemer. In Amsterdam, the chair in the study of religion was held by Heinrich Hackmann, an outstanding and very productive specialist in Chinese religions who published little to nothing on more general questions in the study of religion. Following his retirement in 1935, the chair was left vacant until 1946. In Utrecht, the most conservative of the theological faculties in the Netherlands, the chair was held by H. Th. Obbink and then by his son H. W. Obbink, both of whom worked mainly on ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, largely as context for the religion of ancient Israel. To the extent that they contributed to the study of religion at all, their work was derivative and deeply theological. Phenomenology of religion thus had at best a residual existence, being taught mainly on the basis of Van der Leeuw's *Religionsphänomenologie* (Van der Leeuw 1933), but hardly in a state of being developed further. Philosophy of religion developed in a strongly theological direction and never managed (or desired) to reconnect with the study of religion.

The second core narrative about the study of religion in the Netherlands concerns the act of academic parricide performed by the Groningen professor Theo van Baaren on the merits of the work and approach of his predecessor Van der Leeuw (Platvoet 1998, 2012). The locus of activity was the 'Groningen working-group for the study of fundamental problems and methods of science of religion' that had been set up by Van Baaren in 1968, almost two decades after Van der Leeuw's early death in 1950. Its most tangible result was the volume *Religion, Culture and Methodology* (Van Baaren and Drijvers 1973) that is of interest to us for its first two articles: one written by the Groningen professor of Philosophy of Religion, H. G. Hubbeling, and the other one written by Van Baaren himself.

In his contribution to *Religion, Culture and Methodology*, Hubbeling attempted to cut the Gordian knot that had entangled the fields of theology, philosophy of religion and the study of religion, especially in the work of Van der Leeuw. In unravelling the various threads, on the basis of a complicated analysis of systems of language and logic, he sketched the chief distinction between the study of religion and the philosophy of religion thus: '*Philosophy of religion* can best be described as science of religion plus the study of the truth and value of the various religious statements' (Hubbeling 1973: 10). He restricts this interpretation (of the study of truth and value) by declaring any appeal to a religious 'final authority' inadmissible: this is, in fact, where he draws the line between philosophy of religion and (dogmatic) theology. Hubbeling thus assigns the philosophy of religion a central place in academic theology as the one discipline that holds together the two 'outliers': the study of religion, which he sees as almost exclusively descriptive, and theology.

Because the chapters in *Religion, Culture and Methodology* emerged from meetings in which papers were discussed by a variety of colleagues from distinct fields, Hubbeling must have known that this interpretation of his own field was not likely to be shared by those who were interested in establishing the 'science of religion' on a new footing. The one thing on which all students of religion agreed was precisely the fact that the *truth* and *value* of religious claims could not be part of any reasonable, or principled, science of religion.

In his programmatic 'position paper' on the 'Science of religion as a systematic discipline', Van Baaren immediately made this clear, by stating that 'Philosophy of religion is a different discipline which cannot be assimilated by science of religion as defined in this paper' (Van Baaren 1973: 44). In his paper Van Baaren essentially unfolds a vision of the field of the study of religion (which he calls the 'science of religion') as a systematic science that absorbs and reworks the findings from a variety of sub-fields: the history of religions, the anthropology of religion, the psychology of religion and the sociology of religion. In actively denying a place to philosophy of religion in his 'systematic science of religion', and replacing its integrating potential with anthropological theory, Van Baaren's vision of the field foreshadowed what I shall argue below is the current situation of the field: a proto-discipline that is held together by an entity most often referred to as 'method and theory' that is largely pragmatic and surprisingly low in philosophical weight. The question this raises is whether that is enough for the field to develop.

It has generally been accepted that Van Baaren's programme for a systematic science of religion never became a reality (Stausberg 2009: 268). It is true that phenomenology of religion effectively ceased to exist after the early 1970s, but it is unclear what came instead. This was pointed out with great urgency by Markus Altena Davidsen, who published a provocative piece in the *NTT Journal for Theology and the Study of Religion* under the title 'Theo van Baaren's Systematic Science of Religion Revisited: The Current Crisis in Dutch Study of Religion and a Way Out' (Davidsen 2020). The article was published with a short introduction and a series of rejoinders by various colleagues, almost of all whom were harshly negative. In his article, Davidsen sketches the second core narrative mentioned above, about Theo van Baaren, and shows that the potential breakthrough that Van Baaren announced never materialized. On the contrary: Davidsen sees a fragmentation of the field in favour of particularism (i.e., the withdrawal into the historical-philological study of particular religions), an aversion to comparison and to theorizing more generally, and what can probably best be described as a crisis in confidence in the study of religion as a discipline. The chief manifestation of this crisis of confidence is probably the almost obsessive deconstruction of the whole concept of 'religion', which is understood by many as an ethnocentric category with an unpleasant history rooted in protestant triumphalism and colonialism that does not refer to any actually existing reality 'out there'. If we have no 'subject' we believe in, Davidsen asks, how can we have a 'field', let alone a 'discipline'?

The *de facto* Disappearance of Philosophy of Religion from the Study of Religion in the Netherlands

Davidsen's programmatic article was characterized by his detractors as a wish to 'return' to an academic state of affairs that never existed. Clearly, that was not at all what Davidsen argued, but the collection of articles suitably illustrates the confusion or even rudderlessness that characterizes the study of religion in a new Dutch setting. That new setting was forced upon the field by a large-scale (and ongoing) process of restructuring of the former Faculties of Theology in the Netherlands that started in the late 1990s. The end result of this process was the disappearance of three of the four *duplex ordo* Faculties of Theology (Leiden, Utrecht, Amsterdam, with only Groningen remaining) that had earlier acted as the backbone of academic theology and the study of religion in the country, and the consolidation of a new field of 'theology and (or as) religious studies' in confessional universities, who held on to their programmes in theology because they mattered to the confessional identity of their universities. Teaching programmes in (academic, *duplex ordo*) theology in Leiden, Utrecht and Amsterdam were discontinued. The only teaching programmes that continued in these universities were those in the study of religion, each with a slightly different orientation. None of them include philosophy of religion and all positions in this field that existed in Leiden, Utrecht and Amsterdam were either discontinued or renamed into something more generic. Likewise, most positions in Biblical Studies and in the history of Christianity (the fields that constituted the core of Theological faculties together with Philosophy of Religion) ceased to exist. All these positions are maintained, to a certain extent even in their traditional centrality within teaching programmes, in the confessional universities. With the sole exception of Nijmegen, however, these confessional universities (the Free University in Amsterdam, Radboud University Nijmegen, the Protestant Theological University in Utrecht, the Tilburg School of Catholic Theology and the two small Reformed Theological Universities in Utrecht (formerly Kampen) and Apeldoorn) do not have chairs, or even positions, in the study of religion and do not teach the study of religion in their programmes. All of them have a strong representation of Philosophy of Religion, which thus continues its traditional role of restricting its focus and attention to Christianity and remains of little interest or use to the study of religion.

These are only the bare bones of a spectacular story that urgently needs to be written. It is a tragic tale, which can be summarized as follows: the only possible *locus* for the development of the (academic/scientific) study of religion in the Netherlands was the *duplex ordo* Faculty of Theology. The confessional faculties of theology never experienced the need for such a field and never really developed it, and the much bigger Faculties of Arts and Letters (and, later, Social Sciences) never felt the need for a special field of the study of religion either. At the same time, the *duplex ordo* Faculties of Theology were built on (explicit and implicit, ideological and pragmatic) assumptions that made the development of the study of religion impossible. When the theological faculties disappeared, the study of religion

remained, but it has struggled, thus far, to build a credible case for itself as an indispensable field within the new setting of very large Faculties of Humanities (Hanegraaff 2019). No one denies that 'religion' is a crucial subject within the Humanities and Social Sciences, but there is widespread uncertainty over the need for a special discipline to make sense of religion in human culture, let alone of special teaching programmes (all of which struggle to find enough students to remain viable). On the contrary, the vast majority of contemporary scholars who work either on 'religion' in the abstract (e.g., in law, sociology, psychology, education) or on concrete 'religions' (with their extensive textual, material, philosophical, legal, historical and contemporary documentation) are found outside departments for the study of religion. They seem to be able to do their work, and do it well, without ever feeling the need to read up on historical or contemporary discussions on the study of religion.

From the (Very) Local to the Global

The Dutch case sketched above is unique in many respects, and some of the problems that have been outlined may have been produced by what is sometimes known as 'first-mover' disadvantage. The relative speed with which the study of religion was launched in some universities in the Netherlands, together with the expectation that in combination with a renewed philosophy of religion it would establish a secular (or 'scientific') theology, created a distance between Dutch theology and the dominant protestant theology of the time, which was located in Germany. It also created a distance between Dutch theology and the needs of the Dutch Reformed Church. Some of the developments can plausibly be understood from this background, and from the desire of the majority of Dutch theologians to be taken seriously in the German-speaking world, where the study of religion did not (and could not) develop within a similar theological setting. The person who reshaped German academic theology, Adolf von Harnack, famously interpreted the development in the Netherlands as a dissolution of the theological faculties by the state (Harnack 1901: 7). But in spite of the inevitable parochialism of the Dutch case, there are three elements that speak to broader concerns in the study of religion and the philosophy of religion that are felt today.

The first of these is the contrast between the claim that research on 'religion' should rest (in principle) on evidence drawn from every religion imaginable (and that the subject matter is therefore boundless and beyond the capacity of a single scholar, or even a team of scholars) and the *de facto* sequestration of Christianity and Judaism (and largely also Islam). Until late in the twentieth century, the contribution of scholars working on Christianity, Judaism, and Islam to the study of religion has been negligible. The field as a whole was dominated initially by scholars who worked on ancient religions and on (most often second-hand missionary and anthropological accounts of) the traditional small-scale religions of the world. The background to this was a double one: on the one hand, it had its roots in the

assumption that understanding a phenomenon was best served by studying it in its earliest traceable manifestations. On the other hand, more importantly, the dominance of these religions had its roots in a cynical double notion of *praeparatio evangelica*: the religions of antiquity (in the Dutch case almost exclusively ancient Egyptian religion, although Tiele was a self-taught specialist in Zoroastrianism and La Saussaye worked on ancient Germanic religion) were always there, because their study was deemed useful for a better understanding of the Hebrew Bible. Small-scale traditional religions were of interest both on the assumption that they would have preserved the earliest possible examples of 'religion' and because knowledge of them could be useful for missionary work. The rapid development of anthropology in the Netherlands led to a quick and efficient demolition of these assumptions (by J. P. de Josselin de Jong and his students in Leiden, and by J. J. Fahrenfort in Amsterdam), but this did not have the impact on phenomenology of religion it truly deserved. In a similar development, Ancient Near Eastern studies rapidly developed and emancipated, which resulted in increasing demands on philological competence. These were largely met, especially in Egyptology, but they contributed strongly to increasing specialization, which inevitably came at the cost of a strong focus on developing the study of religion itself.

In a similar way, the study of Islam and of the religions of China, Japan, and India flourished and strongly developed outside the theological faculties. This led to the situation which is still strongly felt today: that the overwhelming majority of work done on the religions of the world is not located in departments for the study of religion, but outside them. It is only rarely that scholars working on these individual religions feel the need to acquaint themselves with more general questions about 'religion', or with the development of theory on religion. Even more rarely do they aim to contribute to more general questions in the study of religion. We can take up the position that their work does therefore not qualify as a contribution to the study of religion, that 'at most, it might be classified pragmatically as exemplifying 'the study of [those human traditions which happen to be conventionally, intuitively referred to as] "religions" (plur.)' (Hanegraaff 1999: 337). But we also need to acknowledge, as Hanegraaff certainly does, that without this work, we would have nothing on which to base our theorizing. We need to worry, therefore, why so many of these colleagues have not turned to more general questions in the study of religion to help them with their work.

Part of the reason for this situation may have to do with the second more generalizable point. As we have seen, the original triad of history – phenomenology – philosophy, all three 'of religion', was abandoned early on in the development of the study of religion, through a parting of the ways between the study of religion and philosophy of religion. This separation came from both sides and although the specific configuration sketched above was certainly particular to the Dutch (or even the Leiden) situation, similar processes took place in most European academic contexts. Once again, they were partly driven (certainly on the side of philosophers of religion) by the wish to be taken seriously by peers, in this case either in philosophy (which failed in many cases because of the contempt in which religion was held in many philosophy departments) or in theology. This reduced the triad to a

dyad – history and phenomenology – and with the slow process of rejecting phenomenology (which took longer in several other European countries) this slowly morphed into the current situation, of a division of labour between, on the one hand, scholars working on individual religions and 'types' of religion, defined according to chronological categories ('ancient religions', 'new religious movements') or in a vaguely geographical/ethnographical way ('Japanese religions', 'African religions', etc.), and on the other, scholars working on 'method and theory'. Although most people with a job in departments for the study of religion will be required to take up the teaching of 'methods and theories' courses, many of them restrict their efforts in these fields to teaching only. Conversely, many scholars known for their important contributions to theorizing religion are often suspected of having no specialist knowledge of any particular religion. Although this is most often a very unfair interpretation, there are not very many examples of which one can easily think of scholars who have a very strong reputation both as theorists and as 'area specialists'. This has brought the lack of communication between area or tradition specialists (often philologists and historians) and 'systematic' students of religion into departments for the study of religion themselves. This was part of the analysis Davidsen made of the Dutch situation, but it is easily generalizable to European and American departments of religious studies (with or without theology).

What is certainly true is that in spite of these problems, which have only rarely been addressed properly, method and theory in the study of religion has become a very lively field. But it has also become fragmented, and although there may be a solid foundation to the field in broadly shared principles of ('expansive') methodological naturalism and 'maximal accessibility' (Schilbrack 2023), there are also deep divisions. In some cases, these divisions have led to the rise of self-contained paradigms. The most important of these are what is nowadays sometimes called 'critical religion' on the one hand (McCutcheon 2018; cf. Watts and Mosurinjohn 2022; Fitzgerald 2023) and the cognitive science of religion on the other (e.g. Barrett 2022; Strenski 2018). These two approaches are in most cases mutually exclusive: critical religion deconstructs 'religion' (almost) to the point of evaporation; the cognitive science of religion reaffirms it, but proposes radically new ways of explaining it. The one thing they share is that they have met with a lot of suspicion (and neglect) from most other colleagues, who have generally not been convinced of the one requirement one can make of theoretical approaches: that they are helpful.

This leads to the third generalizable point. The whole field of 'method and theory in the study of religion' (and by extension the whole field of the study of religion) is disconnected from the philosophy of religion, and largely from philosophy as a whole. Whereas teaching programmes in theology traditionally reserved a large space for the history of philosophy, for philosophy of religion, and for ethics, most programmes in the study of religion that I know of do not. Some reasons for this are well-known. The first and doubtless most important reason is the eternal suspicion that philosophy of religion has little to offer to anyone *not* interested in Christian theology. I believe many European countries have gone through a shift from an earlier situation where the study of religion defined itself against theology to a new

one where theology defines itself against the study of religion (e.g. Wood 2021). Philosophy of religion has opened up to a (very limited) number of other philosophical traditions (chiefly Buddhist), but this has not yet led to a notable change in the core questions asked in the field (Schilbrack 2014; Lewis 2015). A second reason once again has to do with specialization and with canonical selection. To begin with the latter: both in analytic and in continental philosophy of religion, the number of 'key thinkers' with which philosophers engage is fairly limited, almost exclusively male and almost exclusively Euro-American. Work on many of these philosophers has become so voluminous and specialized that it is impossible for scholars in neighbouring fields to keep up with developments. So apart from the suspicions about selectivity in the 'canon' of important thinkers, there is the real risk that students of religion whose core activity lies in other fields rely on second-hand piecemeal information about individual thinkers, or about whole schools of philosophy. There are many parallels for this. Perhaps the clearest is the fate of Max Weber, who remains fundamental to most students of religion, very few of whom read Weber in his entirety (let alone in German), and even fewer of whom are acquainted with the ocean of Weber scholarship that exists to make sense of his work. This has led to an endless stream of work that attributes to Weber ideas and core notions that real Weber specialists would not accept or even recognize (see, e.g., De Jong 2021: 268–269, on legitimation). It is almost certain that the same will be true for Hegel, Wittgenstein, Gadamer, Dilthey and Heidegger, to name but a few. Philosophy of religion could play a role of central importance if it could manage to connect its expertise in the various streams of philosophical thought with questions of the study of religion. Students of religion have been good at pointing out where, exactly, Western philosophy has impeded rather than enabled understanding (e.g., Hanegraaff 2012: 77–152; Habermann 2020), but this has not yet led to a real conversation between the two fields.

We are currently witnessing a lot of movement in this direction from philosophers of religion (e.g., Schilbrack 2014; Lewis 2015; Jensen 2020), many of whom insist on the necessity of a change in their field. Although recent years have also witnessed new proposals for rethinking the study of religion that engage with philosophical questions (e.g. Hanegraaff 2016; Josephson-Storm 2021; Day 2023), we still lack an in-depth engagement between the two fields. There is, in other words, a philosophical void in the heart of the study of religion as much as there is a blindness to (the actual work done on) religion in philosophy of religion.

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