

Philosophy of Religion

The phenomenological approach as a way to solve the problem of value neutrality

فلسفة الدين

المقاربة المبنية على علم الظواهر كطريقة لحل إشكالية حياد القيمة

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ملخص:

يتفق معظم الباحثين الذين يهتمون بفلسفة الأديان على أن الموضوعية في مثل هذه الدراسات تكاد تكون فكرة مثالية وغير قابلة للتحقيق، وذلك لأسباب عديدة لا تزال تواجهها جميع العلوم الإنسانية والاجتماعية؛ بعضها يتعلق بالموضوع والبعض الآخر له علاقة بالباحث نفسه؛ من المتعارف عليه أن غياب الموضوعية في أي دراسة يقلل من مصداقية البحث العلمي وهو الأمر الذي يجعل الموضوعية أو الحياد القيمي شرطاً أساسياً يجب استيفاؤه وهذا يؤدي بالضرورة إلى مناقشة موضوع الروح العلمية وخاصة في مجال العلوم الإنسانية والاجتماعية التي تتميز بموضوعاتها بخصائص تعقد الدراسة وتضع العديد من العوائق الإبيستيمولوجية مقارنة بعلوم المادة، وبما أن موضوع الدراسة في العلوم الإنسانية والاجتماعية يتعدد ويتنوع فقد اخترنا "الدين" في هذه الورقة باعتباره موضوعاً للدراسة الفلسفية لأن فلسفة الدين تمثل بالنسبة لنا نقطة تقاطع بين عيد العلوم الإنسانية والاجتماعية، وفلسفة الدين تجتمع بعلم الاجتماع مثلما وضح ذلك دوركهايم وبتاريخ الأديان بالطريقة التي أرادها ميرسيا إلياد، ناهيك عن علم النفس الديني بأسلوب إريك فروم. سنحاول طرح مشكلة المنهجية في فلسفة الدين. كما في هذا النوع من الدراسة، تتضاءل إمكانية تحقيق الموضوعية إلى حد كبير لتصبح ساحة للطائفية وصدام الحضارات وتصادم العوالم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الدين، المنهج، الفينومينولوجيا، الفلسفة.

Abstract:

Most researchers who have taken interest in the field of *Philosophy of Religion* all agree that objectivity, in studies related to such a topic, is almost an ideal and unattainable idea for several reasons that human and social sciences still face today. Some of these reasons are related to the topic, while others are linked to the researcher himself. It is widely acknowledged that the absence of objectiveness in any study reduces the credibility of scientific research, which makes the objectivity or value neutrality a prerequisite that ought to be satisfied. This necessarily leads to discussing the issue of scientific spirit, especially in the field related to Humanities and Social Sciences whose topics are distinguished by characteristics that make the study more complex and that engender more epistemological obstacles in comparison with the Science of Matter. Since the subjects of study in the field of Humanities and Social Sciences are numerous and varied, it was deemed important to choose religion in the present paper as the subject of philosophical study because the philosophy of religion represents for us a point of intersection between humanities and social sciences. Therefore, it can be said that a close relationship exists between the philosophy of religion and sociology, on one side, as it has clearly been explained by Durkheim, and the History of Religions, on the other, in the way Mircea Eliade wanted it to be, not to mention the Psychology of Religion that was presented by Erich Fromm. The present work aims to raise the problem of the methodology to be followed in the Philosophy of Religion. It is worth noting that in this type of study, the possibility of achieving objectivity diminishes in a significant manner and may eventually become an arena for sectarianism, clash of civilizations, and collision of worlds.

Keywords: religion, method, phenomenology, philosophy.

1–Foreword:

By the end of the eighteenth century, religion became a field of knowledge and a fertile area for research and academic studies. Since then, the mind has been trying to attain objectivity and value neutrality in this domain, the way it did in the Sciences of Matter and in various fields of Human Sciences. In addition, when we try to develop a philosophy that considers religion as its subject, we have to refer, from the beginning, to a basic principle that cannot be ignored or disregarded in any way, which means that the Philosophy of Religion is thinking about religion, not thinking with religion (Djeffal, 2013: 09). This is the only way Philosophy of Religion can fulfill Kant's requirement that places religion within the limits of reason alone. This is also the only manner this philosophy can be distinguished from Theology, Etymology, and all models that consider religion as an intellectual reference or a background due to the ideas it produces and uses to defend religion and to justify its transliterated texts.

Most researchers interested in the subject of Philosophy of Religion agree that objectivity in this type of studies is almost an ideal idea that cannot be achieved. There are numerous reasons for this, and many of them are encountered in Humanities and Social Sciences. Some of them are directly related to the topic while others are linked to the subject to be investigated. It is widely admitted that the lack of objectivity in any study diminishes the credibility of scientific research, which means that objectivity or value neutrality are prerequisites that ought to be satisfied. This indicates that a researcher needs to examine the scientific spirit, especially in the field of Humanities and Social Sciences whose areas of research are characterized by complexity, which creates many epistemic obstacles compared to Material Sciences. However, since the field of Human and Social sciences is numerous and diverse, we have chosen "*Religion*" as the subject of philosophical study for this research paper, given that the Philosophy of Religion represents for us a point of intersection between almost all Human Sciences and Social Sciences. Therefore, it can be said that the Philosophy of Religion touches the Sociology of Religion, as previously discussed by Durkheim, as well as the History of Religions in the way Mircea Eliade wanted it to be, not to mention the Psychology of Religions in the style of Eric Fromm. We will try to raise the issue of the methodology that is adopted in the Philosophy of Religion. It should be noted that the possibility of achieving objectivity in this type of study has been greatly reduced to the point that it has become a scene of sectarianism, clash of civilizations, and collision of worlds.

Logically, two hypotheses arise when carrying out research on the topic of optimal approach that allows conducting a philosophical study whose subject matter is religion. The first hypothesis is related to our ability to apply the phenomenological approach in the Philosophy of Religion, which enables us to achieve a great deal of objectivity and value neutrality. As for the second hypothesis, it is associated with the impossibility of using phenomenology in the Philosophy of Religion, which places us at a crossroads with multiple options. In this respect, it is worth citing, for example, the possibility of searching for an alternative approach, or adapting the religious topic to the characteristics and mechanisms of phenomenology, or even discrediting the Philosophy of Religion as an objective study. Nevertheless, though the second hypothesis does not provide any solution to the raised issue, it can, at the very best, lead us to either surrender to subjectivity or to explore other aspects of the dilemma. Consequently, the first hypothesis will be adopted in this research study as it pushes us to explore the eventuality of applying phenomenology in the Philosophy of Religion.

The problem of this research paper comes into view when the researcher realizes the importance of lack of objectivity in studies related to the Philosophy of Religion. It should be noted that in such studies, self-interference undoubtedly leads to conflict, intolerance and violence which all represent, at the cultural level, the main rationale that leads to exploiting the religious or theological discourse in encouraging all forms of extremism. People generally say that because they acknowledge the hypothesis that terrorism is the logical result of the lack of value neutrality, while religion is expected to be a subject of thought. Therefore, it would have been necessary to search for a possibility to achieve objectivity in the Philosophy of Religion so that this type of studies can be distinguished from the speech science, theology, and comparison of religions. Based on the above, we can then ask the following questions:

- 1) *How can we achieve objectivity and value neutrality in philosophical studies that take religion as a subject?*
- 2) *Can the phenomenological approach be applied in the field of Philosophy of Religion?*

The subject of phenomenological approach to the study of the Philosophy of Religion concerns a very important first issue that is related to universalism, because the application of phenomenology in this type of studies will undoubtedly allow us to deal with religion as an abstract idea, which means that phenomenology would make religion an indeterminate subject of philosophical study. This is what in fact distinguishes the Philosophy of Religion from

Theology which defines the religious system on which the Christian or Jewish theology is based, or even what is generally termed in Islamic studies as Theology. On account of phenomenology alone, it will be possible to attain universalism in the Philosophy of Religion, as Rudolf Otto tried to do in his book "*The Idea of the Holy*", and as Firas Al-Sawah also did in his book "*The Religion of Man*". However, the second issue that is expected to be raised here is about the capacity of phenomenology to advance philosophical studies in the field of religion in a way that allows us to surmount our problem with the other, even though we disagreed with him about belief or doctrine within the same dogma. This issue is generally viewed as a solution to the problem of religious conflict; it is the manifestation of the concept of difference rather than disagreement.

It is worth emphasizing that our research approach is going to be analytical and critical. We intend first to read and analyze the texts that utilize the phenomenology of religion by relying on the most famous literature applied to the phenomenological method in the field of Philosophy of Religion. this study will also endeavor as much as possible to criticize specifically some Arab attempts, and even some Western ones, which did not succeed in applying religious phenomenology on the philosophical level. This forced these writings to emulate the characteristics of philosophy as they cannot come out of the scope of theology in any religious system, as Max Weber did in his book "*Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*" or Hisham Djait's book: "*The Dialectical Theory of Religion and Politics*".

2–The concept of phenomenology of religion:

The philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859 AD -1938 AD) decided to undertake the task of correcting the course of the dilapidated metaphysical philosophical discourse by injecting in it the ideas of positivist thought which began to expand its authority through its accuracy and objectivity. It is worth noting that Husserl's attempt can only be considered a criticism of the classical philosophical thought which fell into several shortcomings, particularly subjectivity that caused most philosophical views to lose credibility, while taking up the *Descartes's* cogito which failed to balance between the self and the subject. According to Husserl, phenomenology can be viewed as an attempt to revive philosophy by making it rely on scientific data that had previously succeeded in addressing a lot of issues about existence, man and society in an objective and descriptive manner (Husserl, 2008: 09). It has been reported that

phenomenology cannot be seen as a new doctrine in philosophy because that would be a proof for the perpetuation of the shortcomings previously mentioned. Phenomenology is rather the approach of contemporary philosophy that Husserl coveted. In this regard, the phenomenological approach can be set in three essential steps:

- 1- **Epochè**: This term means the interruption or suspension of prejudgments so that they do not affect our view of the subject. In this case, it should be emphasized that religious phenomenology pushes people not to deal with the religion as a subject of philosophical study in accordance with our beliefs. Therefore, whether we believe in the religion under consideration or not, this must not interfere or affect the development of our perceptions. This is the reason why, at the beginning of this work, we expressed the need to avoid modeling religion and to study it from the abstract perspective. In other words, phenomenology should not study Judaism, Christianity or Islam, because if it does, then it would inevitably fail in applying its first steps. Therefore, the only way to apply Epochè is to study religion. Note that this is just a common, non-specific way that can make our thinking about religion unconditional, or in other words, objective (Antoine Grandjean and Laurent Perreau, 2012, P 08). Consequently, simplifying the subject would be the only way that can help us to interrupt or suspend our prejudgments.
- 2- **Reduction**: This is all about returning the facts that are characterized by plurality and diversity to their essence, which will enable us to reduce them to a single template. However, when it comes to religious facts, the phenomenological response or reduction means nothing but our hypothesis that we still claim, which amounts to returning religious forms and facts to one single pattern. Therefore, we cannot distinguish between religions, and all that remains to be done is to study and identify a template that reduces religion, whatever its form. At this point, we must emphasize that Husserl wants, through response and reduction, to bypass the empirical or experimental facts through the determination of the nature of the subject that makes the self-study surpass transcendental to details, that is a variable and diverse mental attitude, a self whose interest is focused on the essence of the thing, i.e. what is thought of it, regardless of its truth, that is anything that embodied from it (Antoine Grandjean and Laurent Perreau, 2012, p 18).

- 3- **Intentionality:** This is a concept that has to be made clear when it expresses an act of awareness. It is important to emphasise that intentionality does not only mean that awareness is directed towards judging the ego. This is indeed what it means when considering the judgment as the evidence for the attainment of knowledge which is viewed as the goal of every character that is related to a subject for the purpose of understanding it and being aware of it. Moreover, in its deep meaning, intentionality is not a judgment that is intended by the mind; it is rather the mind's production of awareness that will inevitably be objective because Epochè protects it from being influenced by its previous knowledge, as if it was an unconscious production (Antoine Grandjean and Laurent Perreau, 2012, P 15).

The vast majority of contemporary philosophers and thinkers consider phenomenology to be the modern name for the philosophy that emerged after Edmund Husserl. Therefore, this consideration makes phenomenology of religion the true philosophy of religion. There is no way to study religion in a manner that fulfills all the conditions and characteristics of philosophy, from question to criticism, except by relying on the phenomenological approach. With regard to the simple meaning of the phenomenology of religions, it can be found in those descriptive studies of religious phenomena. It should be noted that by description, it is meant to reveal its characteristics through the suspension of prejudgments, which is what comes with Epochè, which enables us to embody the idea of thinking about religion, not thinking with religion. In this case, this is significantly important for scholars of religions. Hence, the matter is related to the study of a religious phenomenon that has a temporary existence and that enables us to take this thought as a direct presence, which corresponds to the first phase of the phenomenological consideration (Husserl, 2007: 33). Nevertheless, those who are experienced and familiar with philosophical topics can say that philosophy does not study phenomena because the latter belong to the domain of science. It is worth emphasizing that the answer to this comment was mentioned at the beginning of the body of this section. According to many people, phenomenology is the solution in which modern philosophy is suggested. In addition, phenomenology is generally viewed, on the one hand, as a new philosophy that preserves all the characteristics of classical philosophy while intersecting with positive knowledge that could eventually be objective and accurate. On the other hand, phenomena in phenomenology do not mean the physical manifestations of material assets;

these are rather images that the mind perceives. These images are the most essential things that phenomenology means through reduction.

Based on the above, it can be concluded that in studying the phenomenology of religions, we are not supposed to give views that express a traditional philosophical contemplation. It is a study in which the philosophical parameter intersects with the scientific one in order to besiege the religious subject that remains defiant to philosophy and science which are actually two separate fields. For Edmund Husserl, all this is materialized in what is called the actual immanence of the phenomenon which represents the second phase of the phenomenological consideration (Husserl, 2007: 36). Next, we move to the criticism of knowledge based on the concept of totalitarian criticism which is the criticism that bears the meaning of Cartesian doubt and the criticism that conveys the signification of the end of controversy as previously presented by Kant. Though Husserl established a theory of general phenomenology, Rudolf Otto is considered as the pioneer who made an attempt to apply phenomenology to the religious subject, which was embodied in his book "*The Idea of the Holy*". Here, the author summarizes the phenomenology of religions as the search for the irrational factor in the "*The Idea of the Holy*" and for its relationship to the rational factor.

3–Applications of the phenomenology of religion according to Rudolf Otto:

Rudolf Otto is viewed as an eminent theologian and religious scholar because he was first to have made the attempt to apply the phenomenological approach to the religious subject. This is clearly expressed in his book "*The Idea of the Holy*" that was published in 1917 AD. This came immediately after the establishment of phenomenology by Edmund Husserl at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. Consequently, our search for the religious phenomenology of that scholar and philosopher can be achieved by following the steps and principles of phenomenology as it investigates about the truth of the religious phenomenon. Regarding Firas Al-Sawah, he believes that Rudolf Otto is one of the few writers who were able to subject the religious matter to proper phenomenological study until he became a reference for all those interested in this type of studies. This was explicitly expressed in the following statement: "*Ultimately, any discussion of defining religion must stop at Rudolf Otto, a German theologian and researcher in the history and phenomenology of religion; this is due to the great authority that he exercised in his book "The Idea of the Holy"*"

on religious studies since its publication in 1917..." (Al-Sawah, 2002: 28). It is worth indicating that the thesis of William Alston confronts Rudolf Otto in his attempt to apply the phenomenological approach. Indeed, William Alston states that the problem facing religious phenomenology is mainly related to language which is considered to be the tool that is used to describe the religious phenomenon or experience (Salamah, 2011: 404). This means that if Rudolf Otto wants to be successful in what he proposes, then he has first to find a solution to the linguistic epistemic obstacle, and then to adhere to the principles and steps of phenomenology as specified by Husserl.

It is worth emphasizing that, in his book "*The Idea of the Holy*", Rudolf Otto intended to apply phenomenology to the religious subject by trying to adhere to all the steps and principles of phenomenology as previously specified by Edmund Husserl. This suggests that by reading the intellectual project of Rudolf Otto, we will make an attempt to move from theoretical phenomenology to applied phenomenology. The first step will be with the Epochè which represents the cornerstone of the above-mentioned intellectual project in which Rudolf Otto tried as much as possible to suspend his prejudgments when he dealt with the religious subject matter. Among the texts that evidence Otto's commitment to the Epochè as a phenomenological condition that guarantees objectivity and value neutrality, we find the following writing: "*We will endeavor to mention this insignificant thing to the reader as much as we can so that he can feel it himself. There is no religion that does not live in it as if it had its most trustworthy handhold, rather there is no religion worthy of its name without it*" (Otto, 2010: 27). One may notice through this text that Rudolf Otto tries to generalize the idea of the holy or holiness to all religions; he considers that idea as essential in every religion. According to Otto, there is no way to conceive religion without the idea of the sacred which implies God. It should be noted that Otto's Christianity, not even the Orthodoxy he believes in, should not emerge in his writings, and if it does, that would be, for example, not personalization, because the emergence of Otto's religious beliefs in his writings on religion would be conclusive evidence of his failure to suspend his prejudgments, which is the issue that is diagnosed in the following text: "*Christianity has not only these notions; it also has them with unique clarity and abundance, and in this aspect, the truly irrefutable evidence is based on its supremacy, compared to religions that have other forms, and on other levels, noting that it is neither the only nor the main evidence. This must be recognized from the outset, strongly and firmly.*"

(Otto, 2010: 24). It should be noted that the body of this text is a flagrant violation of the rules of phenomenology, which brings Rudolf Otto's point of view out from the field of the Philosophy of Religion into the field of Christian theology. The text also includes an evaluation judgment that is mainly aimed to make the difference between religions in favor of Christianity to the detriment of other religions. According to Rudolf Otto, Christianity, without other religions, has an abundance and quality of concepts expressing the holy. This cannot be accepted as an example for explanation and clarification because the issue does not mean religion in its abstract and general meaning; it is rather related to Christianity. Therefore, based on the explanation provided by Rudolf Otto, the subject of thought, which in this case is holiness, will eventually settle at Christianity, regardless of the fact that the aforementioned saying contradicts the idea of ambiguity surrounding the holy, bearing in mind that Rudolf Otto relies on this ambiguity to understand the meaning of holiness. Indeed, the concept of ambiguity related to God is a fundamental part in his Otto's texts (Velasco, 1982, P 114). Hence, Otto's dissertation has nothing to do with the Philosophy of Religion; it rather defends Christianity using the science of speech and theology. However, when using the language of the Philosophy of Religion, or what is termed in this research paper as the Phenomenology of Religions, this may be considered as entirely biased and subjective because Otto never abandoned his thinking about religion. This rather allowed him to intervene in developing a point of view that violates the foundation of the phenomenological structure, which is the Epochè. The second text that proves that will be quoted from excerpts of the book the "*Idea of the Holy*", which came under the title: *History and what is essential in religion - Summary and conclusion-* This implies that: "*It is highly required that every religion must not be a mere belief in a traditional authority. It ought to be a religion that proceeds from personal satisfaction, and from inner conviction (i.e., from knowledge of its truth, an inner knowledge), as is the case in Christianity, to a unique degree*" (Otto, 2010: 203). Once again, Otto commits the same mistake, i.e., bias towards Christianity, which affects the objectivity in his proposition and his value neutrality. Here, the problem is not in taking Christianity as an example, but in preferring it over other religions by saying: *As is the case in Christianity, to a unique degree.*

Now, we turn to the transcendental response and reduction. It is worth reminding that the response and reduction are embodied in the ability of phenomenology to transcend the details and reduce them to what is holistic and comprehensive, as if it was the mathematical

abstraction that makes mathematics a science in which we do not know what we are talking about. It is worth noting that the outcome of the combination of two mathematical values is related only to the quantitative essence of the mathematical subject without any other consideration. This is similar to making the mathematical value abstract, devoid of any material physical data. This is just like water without color and without smell and taste. Moreover, it is useful to remember that the response and reduction are related to the reasonable nature of the subject, i.e., by transcending the tangible empirical facts, so that the phenomenon intended for research is the image that is perceived by the mind and not the one that is embodied in the reality, namely the phenomenon that was produced by the mental capacity. The Idea of the Holy, that is the Divinity, is the perception that expresses every religious phenomenon as was revealed by Otto. However, without tergiversation, one has to acknowledge this time that Rudolf Otto has the ability to find the point of intersection of all religions; this allows reducing the religious phenomenon. We can obviously say that because the Idea of the Holy may be considered as the common denominator among all religions. Hence, whatever the religious system, it is not devoid of the idea of holiness that can take various forms like, veneration, and reverence, and other feelings that imply religiosity in its simplest sense. On the other side, once again, Rudolf Otto's Christianity inflicted severe damage with his phenomenological reduction, as it scratched his generalization, while putting between brackets his views on religion and the idea of the holy. We say that because it was found that a lot of texts prove that Rudolf Otto thinks with religion but not about religion, and the most eloquent expression about that is found in the following text: *"We can look beyond the prophet, to a person in whom the soul is found in all its fullness, a person who has become, at the same time, in his personality and performance, the divination topic, fully and completely, a person who acknowledges that holiness is revealed in him, such a person is more than Prophet; he is the Son."* (Otto, 2010: 206). This text is nothing but evidence of Rudolf Otto's inability to embody the transcendental ego, transcendent to details, such as the incarnation of God in the Christ, which is specific to Christianity as compared to other religions. This was rejected even by some Christians themselves, such as John Heck, the author of the book *"The Myth of God's Incarnation in Christ"* which was published in 1860 A.D. This book was co-written by six other authors, called the "Seven Antichrists" (Hick, 1985: 08), led by John Heck. These are John Heck, Don Cobbett, Mikael Golder, Leslie Holden, Dennis Nineham, Morris Wiles, and Francis Young. John Heck's

article came under the title "*Jesus and the World Religions*". In this book, Heck touched on the status of the second hypostasis in Christian belief and on the role of dogma in deifying Christ as the incarnation of God (Heck, 1985: 260). Now, how can Rudolf Otto, in his study of religion, focus on the second hypostasis in Christianity at a time when he had to reduce religion to the sacred in order to be able to make abstraction of it, so that his Christianity as well as his position on other religions do not appear.

Here and now, we reach the last step in the phenomenological approach, which concerns intentionality. The question that comes to us now can be expressed as this: *what has Rudolf Otto produced for us on the level of awareness regarding religion?* We consider intentionality merely as a corollary of Epochè and phenomenological response, because what the phenomenological mind produces will ineluctably express the extent of our suspension of previous judgments, the extent of our reduction to the subject, and our transcendental thinking that should not affect or be affected by the subject under consideration. It should also be noted that the question that actually arises when reading the phenomenological project formulated by Rudolf Otto on the religious subject is the following: *What did Rudolf Otto intend through his study of religion? Or, what are the perceptions produced by his intellectual project on religion?* At this point, we all have to know that we are looking for the purpose of the subject matter, and this is what distinguishes phenomenology as a modern philosophy from the traditional philosophy that has been investigated, for many centuries, regarding causation. It should be noted that the difference between these types of philosophy is similar to the difference between those who remember and those who imagine. It is worth emphasizing that the primary purpose that Otto wanted when eliciting the issue of religion, at the philosophical level and in a phenomenological way, was to carve out a new conception of religion that challenges and contradicts the Kantian conception. Indeed, Kant wanted to put religion within the limits of reason*, which means that he tried to rationalize religion so that, for him, the authority of reason is above the authority of religion, commensurate with the enlightenment thought (Crampe, 2004, P 153). Now, going back to Rudolf Otto's intent to raise the religious issue, one may clearly understand that his primary objective was to reveal the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine in a way that does not counter the rational factor that this same author does not refute. This non-rational factor, which is termed the numinous, is a new and different perception that was engraved by Otto by revealing the psychological depth of all

religious phenomena. It is worth noting that the numinous is anything that cannot be perceived, not because of the mind's limits, as was said by Kant, but because God is the other, the different, the amazing secret that cannot be described (Otto, 2010: 209). This confirms Alston's hypothesis about the linguistic impediment that imposed on Otto the recognition of inability to express a description of the divine, using the idea of the terrible secret that mimics the Sufis' position regarding the issue of describing the religious knowledge.

Based on the above, it can be concluded that Rudolf Otto tried to use the phenomenological approach to the religious topic through the study of the idea of the divine. Unfortunately, we found out that his attempt did not abide by all the conditions of phenomenology as it was determined by Husserl, especially with regard to the suspension of prejudgments, response, and phenomenological reduction. All this leads to the failure of what Otto put forward with regard to the issue of the philosophy of religion, which is rather closer to the Christian theology than to the phenomenology of religion. The evidence for this can be highlighted in two points. The first one is the negative attitude that Rudolf Otto shows towards Islam that he considers as a religion that calls for despair, which proves the non-objectivity of his proposition because of its violation of the phenomenological Epochè (Otto, 2010: 117). As for the second point, it concerns modeling religion in Christianity, which proves Otto's inability to deal with the subject in a transcendental way, and hence confirms his commitment to response and reduction (Otto, 2010, pp. 185-191-207).

4–Applications of the phenomenology of religion, according to Mircea Eliade:

First, a very important issue is to be pointed out in the philosophy of Mircea Eliade. This concerns his phenomenological approach to the religious phenomenon. Thanks to history, the philosopher can be aware of the accumulation and cross-fertilization of civilizations with regard to the sacred aspect of human life in different cultures (Eliade, 2007, pp. 59-60). This implies that the path chosen by Mircea Eliade in studying the religious phenomenon combines phenomenology and structuralism. Now, we will attempt to extrapolate the different steps in the phenomenological approach in the philosophy of Mircea Eliade, as we did with Rudolph Otto. The purpose is to assess the ability of this thinker to apply religious phenomenology. This will inevitably allow evaluating the quality of his work regarding objectivity and value neutrality.

As a reminder, the hypothesis that we adopt and seek to prove in this work concerns the possibility of applying the phenomenological approach to the religious subject in philosophy in order to overcome the problem of subjectivity and achieve objectivity in this type of studies.

Furthermore, when talking about the Epochè in Mircea Eliade's intellectual project, we must be familiarized with his preconceived ideas and his beliefs that are concerned with the comments. Mircea Eliade is a Christian who is influenced by the writings of Honore de Balzac (1799 AD - 1850 AD) who was famous for romantic and even realistic literature. In addition, he was also influenced by Rudolf Otto whom we talked about previously. He is a Protestant Christian. In this respect, Mircea Eliade says: *"The human being knows the sacred because the sacred is manifested... It is acceptable to say that the history of religions, from the primary religions to the last ones, is an accumulation of repeated manifestations of the sacred. These are manifestations of sacred facts and incidents, which involve the most basic manifestations of the sacred. For example, the manifestation of Holiness is in one of the subjects, like a stone or a tree, until the Christian's supreme holiness is manifested, through the incarnation of God in Jesus-Christ. There is no interruption, but there is always the same secret event: the manifestation of something completely different, the manifestation of a truth not from our world in topics that are integrated from our natural world, our normal world"*(Eliade, 2009: 51). It is easy to observe that when he talks about the way man perceives holiness, Mircea Eliade mainly concentrates on the history of religions and civilizations. He tries to generalize his point of view by overwhelming all religions with examples. For him, there is no difference between holiness of the totem in the religions of primitive peoples and holiness of Jesus in Christianity, which suggests that so far Mircea Eliade has passed the Epochè test successfully.

With regard to the structure of religion, Mircea Eliade says the following: *"These expressions are characterized by frustrating ambiguity. However, their entry into the common language pushes me to use them. The expressions like "History of religions" or "Comparative religions" broadly speaking refer to the general study of religious facts, whether they are historical manifestations that are related to a specific type of religion (tribal, ethnological, national) or special structures of religious life (divine forms, perceptions about the self, myths, rituals, ...)"* (Eliade, 2007: 135). Based on this text, it may therefore be concluded that religion is the addition of several structures represented in everything that carries holiness and symbolism that require some explanation. Once again, Mircea Eliade tries to address all religions, which

proves his success in suspending prejudgments, especially with regard to his Christianity. In addition, in order not to fall into redundancy, we try to shorten the path by stating that Eliade's Christianity does not appear in his writings, not even his intellectual tributaries that all express Eliade's convictions. Finally, we can say that Eliade was successful in breaking up with these tributaries.

Let us turn now to Eliade's phenomenological responses. For this, we will try to examine his capacity to abstract religion and transcend the details that reveal the difference between various religious systems. In his book "*The Sacred and the Profane*," Eliade talks about holiness and what makes it different from anything that is mundane. He also explains the accumulation of the idea of holiness throughout history and the cross-fertilization of civilizations as well. In addition, he reveals the impacts of these civilizations on the individual's thought, feelings, and behavior, as well as on the social group. This is all aimed to address the contemporary man's tendency to irreligiousness because humans have become excessively materialistic. All of the aforementioned was accomplished by Mircea Eliade, with an elaborate structuralism that does not make a difference between peoples and races, nor between religions and cultures, which helped him to commit to phenomenological response and reduction. Moreover, Mircea Eliade uses a concept that is not familiar to the general readership. It is related to the term "*Consecration*", or to its equivalent in French "*Consécration*", which is derived from the Latin word "*Consecrationis*". This concept proves that Eliade has the ability to respond and reduce. It is worth emphasizing that by consecration or devotional qualification Eliade refers to those religious rituals that aim to induce a radical change in the religious and social status of the person being consecrated (Eliade, 2007: 225). At first glance, it may appear that by consecration, Mircea Eliade means the effect that religion can have on the individual in a way that shows his affiliation with the group. However, the matter goes beyond that point when Eliade gives consecration a philosophical meaning that makes him able to change the ontology of man. Consequently, consecration is tantamount to a transformation in the existence of the religious; it is like an alteration that occurs in his existential system (Eliade, 2007, pp. 225-226).

Furthermore, consecration is related to rituals but not to beliefs. Then, according to Mircea Eliade, the truth of religion prefers ritual to belief for a clear reason which is the fact that the reality of a ritual is a behavior that expresses or represents the individual as well as the group.

Hence, the individual can be rehabilitated through rituals. This means that the religiosity or spirituality that takes place through the practice of some rituals, which the group inherits to its members, is a new birth or an existential rebirth that, in the view of Mircea Eliade, expresses the eternal return that simulates the first metaphysical existence that was enacted by ancestors (Eliade, 1987: 70). In this regard, consecration becomes a wonderful example of rejection and reduction in Eliade's philosophy as it reduces the religious experience, whatever it may be, and grants it with the signification of eternal return.

Mircea Eliade divides consecration into three types. The first type is the consecration which includes social rituals whose primary role consists in influencing the individual's transition from adolescence to adulthood; this is the ritual of puberty. The second type includes rituals that are intended to qualify the individual to enter a secret society (like a religious sect). The third and last type concerns rituals of the Sufis (Mystics) or Soothsayers. This is a type that is characterized by a personal qualification that elevates the individual above the group (Eliade, 2007: 227). It can therefore be stated that Mircea Eliade is like talking about one religious' system. It is noteworthy that consecration is encountered in every religion and because religious rituals are present in all religions, then we can say that consecration expresses Eliade's success in adhering to the second steps and principles of phenomenology. Our research on Eliade's intellectual project may be concluded by searching for intentionality as the ultimate phase in the phenomenological approach. For the sake of completeness, it should be noted that intentionality, in its superficial sense, is the mind's judgment of the subject as a consequence of the occurrence of knowledge. However, with regard to intentionality in its deep meaning, it refers to the productive awareness of the subject. Hence, the following question comes to our mind: *What did Eliade mean when he investigated the religious subject as a phenomenological study?* Before that, one may look for the value of intentionality through the following text written by Harold Garfinkel (1917 AD): "*Our ideas, research, and theories about society, action and meaning ... etc., are of little use regarding knowledge if they cannot help us to interpret and convert our own method of dealing with the world and if they do not make us return to each other*" (Bukhresa, 2013: 237). Based on this text, we can say that it is highly necessary for us to identify the purposes of religious phenomenology according to Eliade.

It should be emphasized that, through his intellectual project, Mircea Eliade intends for placing religion within a triangle that is composed of phenomenology, history, and

structuralism. Note that, through this triangle, he tries to revive the holy (sacred) in our contemporary reality in which materialism, technology and economic expediency have overwhelmed and overshadowed everything that is valuable and spiritual. This means that Eliade wanted to produce or create a new perception of religion that restores to contemporary man the meaning of the sacred by linking it to the mundane. In addition to that, Eliade wanted to solve the problem of conflict with the other by producing a new conception of religion that can bring individuals together within the same group, thanks to the rituals of consecration. This new vision of religion unites humanity, with its various cultures and beliefs, in one civilization whose history began with primitive societies and continues to the present day.

Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that Eliade has, to a considerable extent, succeeded in applying phenomenology as an approach to study the religious subject. We say this because we consider that Eliade was committed to all the phenomenology steps as defined by Husserl. Mircea Eliade's intellectual project is highly interesting because this author stands at the same distance from all religions. Indeed, on many occasions, he takes position to defend religious systems that some people consider closer to superstition and primitiveness by disclosing their symbols and by giving them a high human meaning of significance. All the above makes us, as readers and critics, do justice to Mircea Eliade by asserting that he is the first to have succeeded in applying religious phenomenology though he was not the first to try it.

5–Applications of religious phenomenology for Firas Al–Sawah:

In his book "*The Religion of Man*", Firas Al-Sawah revealed the reason and purpose that pushed him to conduct such a study which turned out to be a valuable contribution to the phenomenology of religion. This disclosure makes things simpler for us and removes all doubts about the possibility of putting Firas al-Sawah's philosophy in the category of phenomenological attempts that targeted the religious subject through study. This implies that our search for applications of religious phenomenology in Firas al-Sawah's intellectual project does not mean that we take the texts of this thinker beyond the limits of their meaning, or that we address the phenomenological meaning of this thinker in an arbitrary manner. It is worth knowing that Firas Al-Sawah acknowledges the influence of the pragmatic philosopher William James (1842 AD - 1910 AD) on him. William James distinguishes between two ways of dealing

with the religious issue. Indeed, in his book that is devoted to the study of religion, and entitled: "*The varieties of religious experience*", William James gives two types of trials. The first one is an existential trial that relies on investigating the nature of the subject, as well as its composition, origin, and history, while the second one is a valuable trial which is about examining the importance and feasibility of the subject. Note that the first one is objective, while the second is subjective (Al-Sawah, 2002, pp. 11-12). Firas Al-Sawah shows his approval of the first trial that meets his descriptive methodological demand. This thinker asserts the following: "*Consequently, what I present to the reader in the following pages is a contribution to the phenomenology of religion*" (Al-Sawah, 2002, pp. 14-15).

As regards Firas Al-Sawah, we intend to analyze his texts and then examine them by subjecting them to the method of interpretation. Moreover, we thought it was interesting to choose Paul Ricoeur's theory of interpretation because Paul Ricoeur (1913 AD - 2005 AD) is viewed as the philosopher who owns the most mature interpretive style as he benefited from all the previous interpretive methods. He takes into account various data, i.e., epistemological, religious, psychological, social and historical, and other data, and does not neglect the ontological understanding (Paul Ricoeur, 1969, P 10-11) that is based on the cogito that emerged wounded from the battle of criticism. We should bear in mind that Husserl's phenomenology wanted to kill that cogito by criticizing it so that it will be terminated. It is worth emphasizing that our confidence on interpretation for understanding Firas Al-Sawah's goals is mainly due to the fact that this thinker relies, in all his writings, on many sciences, but most notably on archeology, history, psychology and sociology. It should be noted that the data of these sciences will be philosophically employed through the interpretation of the positivist idea in order to obtain a philosophical meaning that serves the subject. Hence, the question that arises here is: *How can Firas Al-Sawah subject the religious issue to the mechanisms and tools of the phenomenological approach?*

Furthermore, it was deemed important to choose Firas Al-Sawah's latest publication which is a book entitled *The Bible Puzzles*, in order to assess this thinker's ability to comment on his prejudgments and to test his commitment to the phenomenological Epochè. The title of this book bears two connotations. The first one is about the secrets of the Bible, i.e., *the New Testament*, and the second one is about its nonsense. Our desire is to examine the texts of this author in order to figure out the position of Firas Al-Sawah on Christianity and the extent

of his objectivity. It is worth to know that Firas Al-Sawah is a Syrian Muslim thinker and therefore he has to suspend his belief when studying religion, knowing that the Bible is the holy book of Christianity. Firas Al-Sawah starts this book with a preface through which he shows and explains the suspension of every preconceived idea about the Bible in order to achieve a sufficient level of objectivity. According to him, this book is intended for those who seek knowledge that is devoid of any purpose or bias. These are believers who are people of reason and not people of letter and transmission (Al-Sawah, 2012: 06). This means that Firas Al-Sawah targets, through this book, those engaged in the philosophy of religion as well as those who believe in difference in faith, respect the other and his sanctities, but do not consider him as equal. The ingenuity of Firas Al-Sawah in adhering to Epochè is clearly shown in the following quotation: *“and from the position of an objective researcher who sympathizes at the same time with the state of faith, except that I do not claim to have the final say in what I have presented. In addition, according to one quote of the Prophet of Islam: Whoever strives and fails will have one reward, and whoever strives and succeeds gets two rewards. In my opinion, the error is nothing but training in the right path”* (Al-Sawah, 2012: 06). This text allows us to have two arguments that both confirm the commitment of Firas Al-Sawah to Epochè. The first argument is clearly seen in his keenness on objectivity that cannot be achieved when dealing with the religious issue except through the suspension of our prejudgments, especially those related to belief. However, the second argument is about the way he formulated the noble hadith, as he deliberately suspended his belief when he said: *“And according to the quote of the Prophet of Islam.”* Now, if he said: *“The honorable hadith of the Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace,”* then, this would be a sufficient proof that he was thinking about religion.

Through our reading of Firas Al-Sawah’s book *The Bible Puzzles*, it came to our mind that he does not provide any comments and does not make judgments on the narrators. For instance, let’s consider the issue related to *“The mysteries about the birth of Jesus Christ.”* When dealing with this issue, Firas Al-Sawah raises several mysteries about the birth of Jesus, the son of Mary. These are (Al-Sawah, 2012: 37):

- 1- *The mystery of family-* Here, Firas Al-Sawah refers to the scarcity of information about Jesus Christ’s family,

2- *The Mystery of genealogy*- Here, he indicates that there is not any text referring to the genealogy of Jesus, except for the Gospel of John that talked about the paternity of Joseph the Carpenter to the Lord Christ. This led to the creation of a novel attributed to King David,

3- *The mystery of the virginal cord* - Here, Firas refers to the different biblical narratives about how Jesus was born,

4-*The Mystery of the birth story* - Here, Firas stresses on the absence of any Christ's birth story in the Gospels of Mark and John. This led researchers to consider it in an addendum and to correct it later in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

It should be clear that all the aforementioned mysteries and puzzles are not meant to degrade the value of the Bible, nor to criticize its texts, but rather, the purpose is to shed light on dark points in it that require thinking and research, because all these puzzles imply that information is complete and absent; it varies from one narration to another. Firas Al-Sawah carried this out without issuing any judgment that condemns the Biblical narrative or diminishes its sanctity. Rather, the data he presented ranged from analyzing the Biblical text to historical facts whose authenticity cannot be disputed by two. This means that Firas Al-Sawah has, to a large extent, succeeded in achieving objectivity in his discourse by suspending his prejudgments.

It is worth noting that in this brief study, we cannot touch on all Firas Al-Sawah's writings. It is important to mention that this thinker wrote thirteen books in Arabic, in addition to an encyclopedia and two books in English. These are all valuable books that do not depart from the field of philosophy of religion and mythology*. We will therefore try to summarize and concentrate on the most important things that this philosopher has written. With regard to the phenomenological rejection and reduction, one may say that Firas Al-Sawah focused on this phenomenological step in his book "*The Religion of Man*". The reader can easily observe through the title that Firas Al-Sawah avoided talking about the religions of peoples or nations. However, he rather intentionally employed the singular form, which means reducing all religions, despite the numerous differences between them, to one template that is the Religion of Man. It should be mentioned that the belief, or what is termed as the minimum religious phenomenon, is considered as the essential characteristic of religion in Firas Al-Sawah's view. Indeed, this thinker was clear in his phenomenological rejection by saying: "*Every phenomenon, no matter how complex it is, can be reduced to an essential basic structure,*

which is the minimum structure. This would lead us to study the nature of that phenomenon and its meaning. Regarding the field of religion, which is the most complex issue among all human-related phenomena, it is possible to find a minimalist structure in belief” (Al-Sawah, 2002: 111).

Based on the above, we can state that Firas Al-Sawah reduces all religions to one single and simple essence, which is the belief or faith. This leads us to a logical conclusion that no religion, regardless of its form or the era in which it appeared, is devoid of belief. It should be noted that by belief it is generally meant a set of accepted ideas that create the relationship with the sacred. Now, the problem that emerges lies in the fact that Firas Al-Sawah found out that beliefs may differ from one religious’ system to another, which is the reason why he wanted to reduce this to a minimum. He tried to search for a common essence between all beliefs. The issue is not complicated for those who master the art of mathematical abstraction. We say this because the phenomenological rejection and reduction that Husserl wanted is inspired from the mathematical art. When we talk about numbers in mathematics, we can say that a number expresses the mathematical quantity, which means that this number is an abstraction of things. Now, if we try to abstract abstraction, we ought to move from the number to what is called in mathematics: (x) or (y). At this point, we can say that we have abstracted the number; we do not know the value of (x) or (y). Going back to our topic and projecting the above on the religious issue, we may argue that Firas Al-Sawah reduced all religions to belief. Though beliefs are different, he deliberately reduced them as well. This is clearly indicated in his saying: *“We found in the religious belief that minimal limit to which the religious phenomenon can be reduced without compromising its basics. Then, we moved on to the assumption that religious beliefs, old and new, simple and complex, can be traced back to a number of fixed elements that are common to all religions... In other words, the minimalist structure of religion that I found in belief is in turn based on another structure of minimum belief, which is a single human perception on which the entire religion is based” (Al-Sawah, 2002: 311).*

Firas Al-Sawah reduces all beliefs to one feature that characterizes these beliefs and brings them together. This is all about dividing the existence into two groups, i.e., the sacred and the mundane. This means that every religion is based on belief and each belief divides existence into two worlds, i.e., a mundane world and a sacred world, which Firas Al-Sawah terms as theology and anthropology. These facts confirm that Firas Al-Sawah, compared to Rudolph

Otto and Mircea Eliade, was successful in the phenomenological rejection and reduction, because when he reduced the religious phenomenon, whatever its minimum level of belief, he carried out the phenomenological rejection, that is, the response of all religions to one principle which is the belief. He then moved from rejection to reduction, as if he differentiates one from the other, although they express the same mental act. He therefore reduced all beliefs to one principle only, which consists of dividing existence into two groups, namely the sacred and the mundane. Hence, we can say that there is no difference between all religions because the truth of religion boils down to believing in another world that is higher than our natural, tangible world. It is a sacred world that deserves veneration.

We now arrive at the third and last step of phenomenology, namely intentionality. The following question then arises: *What is the new Firas Al-Sawah's perception of religion?* It is worth indicating that careful reading of Firas Al-Sawah's texts proved, particularly to us, that this thinker was a phenomenologist par excellence when dealing with the religious phenomenon. Among the texts that confirm our point of view is the following one: *"In modern curricula for the study of any subject, a distinction is generally made between three stages of investigation. The first stage concerns the nature of the subject, the second touches on the way and the reason it originated, and the third is about its meaning, importance and role. The first two stages take on a practical knowledge character, while the third one a value-based, moral and philosophical character. Here lies the distinction between the phenomenological approach, which stands at the second stage and does not go beyond it, and the other approach that fulfills all three stages"* (Al-Sawah, 2002: 312). Then, Al-Sawah goes on adding: *"I got acquainted with the nature of the religious phenomenon through its description in a comprehensive manner. Next, I summarized it into a minimal structure that summed up its nature and essence. Then, we had to wonder about its source and origin. As for the assessment and issuance of judgments, they are not things that are concerned with our methodology, not things that we have committed to"* (Al-Sawah, 2002: 312). Based on the above, we can conclude that searching for the origin of religion is the desire that creates a new conception of religion in us.

Our search for the origin of religion in Firas Al-Sawah's texts was not an easy matter; it is rather similar to the archaeologists' search for ancient, extinct civilizations. However, to shorten the distance, it can be asserted that, for Firas Al-Sawah, the origin of religion lies in man's

relationship with nature. This implies that the relationship of consciousness or awareness with the universe is what leads man to feel the existence of an unseen world that lies above the perceptible. Hence, the impulse arises to believe in the existence of a higher power that governs the universe, which ultimately means nothing but religiosity (Al-Sawah, 2002: 391). In order to explain that, Firas Al-Sawah had to seek the help of quantum physics that distinguishes between a visible world and an invisible one. This type of physics can control the relationship between these two worlds and consciousness or awareness. In order to make it simpler, one has to return, through imagination, to the case of the primitive man who was in direct confrontation with nature. He searched for strength and shelter and succeeded in that matter, which made him feel that he is able to control nature. At the same time, he was facing phenomena that he could not explain. He felt weak in front of such phenomena like volcanoes, thunderbolts, death and disease. Then, he felt weak and helpless. Since man, i.e. the rational being, tried to rationalize nature for nothing but to put an end to his fear and incapacity, he had nothing but to link nature to powers that surpass him in potency and omnipotence. Then, he developed awareness for the sacred and mundane groups. All of the above makes religion an expression of awareness of existence, a state in which man realizes existence in its comprehensive sense. As for religiosity, we can say that it is specific to man but not to other creatures that are unconscious.

To conclude, we can say that Firas Al-Sawah succeeded in taming the religious subject in order to make it accessible to phenomenology, which led to objectivity that is rarely found in this type of studies. It is worth emphasizing that it is not easy for the reader to criticize Firas Al-Sawah or even to stand on phenomenological gaps when he studies religion. These facts confirm our hypothesis which links, through a correlational relationship, between objectivity and the phenomenological approach in the religious subject at the philosophical level. In other words, objectivity depends on the extent to which phenomenology is applied as a method of study to religion as a philosophical subject. Though this turned out to be quite difficult, Mircea Eliade and Firas Al-Sawah showed that it is quite possible.

6–Conclusion:

Based on all the above, we can assert that first the hypothesis that we considered and sought to prove is highly valid, and second that the phenomenological approach can be applied in the philosophy of religion, which allows us to achieve a great deal of objectivity and value neutrality. This means that philosophy, thanks to the phenomenological approach, can subject religion to mental meditation, away from subjectivity, which is often the primary reason for the clash between religions when sanctities and beliefs of others are violated.

Furthermore, subjectivity can have a negative impact, even within a single religious system, by supplying and encouraging sectarianism and doctrinal conflicts. In addition, all of the above confirms that religious extremism is actually nothing but intellectual extremism that found the appropriate environment to materialize into reality. This is so because in religious phenomenology, all sanctities and beliefs ought to be fully respected by not discriminating between religions or making comparisons between them, and by not issuing judgments that are based on our prior knowledge. This is viewed as part of the concept of general phenomenology that sought to develop a new theory of knowledge that goes beyond the Cartesian cogito that came about in subjectivity. Therefore, phenomenology can be considered as a new theory in cognitive psychology (Piaget, 1967, P 11).

It can therefore be asserted that the religious subject in philosophy is within the reach of the phenomenological approach. This gives any study of this kind some credibility to what phenomenology can achieve in terms of objectivity in the proposal. As for the philosophical studies that tried to deal with the religious issue without applying the methodology of phenomenology, they may be considered as mistakenly placed in the philosophical shelf. Here, we are referring to studies such as those presented by Hisham Djait, entitled: "*The Fitna (sedition): The Dialectic of Religion and Politics in Early Islam*", or those put forward by Max Weber under the title: "*The Capitalist Spirit and Protestant Ethics*." The philosophical study of religion has to be phenomenological, with all prejudgments suspended and religion reduced, so it can carve perceptions that express philosophical awareness of the religious phenomenon. This awareness must be characterized by value neutrality and objectivity, as in the Science of Matter. It ought to express the philosophical perceptions of religion as if they were scientific facts (Tillich, 1973: 48). In fact, in his book "*Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion*", Juan Martin Velasco asserts the existence of studies that can be called the Science of Religion

in which Max Mueller is considered as one of its prominent founders. This is embodied in Velasco's saying: "*The Science of Religion is certainly modern. This name seems to have derived from Friedrich Max Müller who is commonly considered as its main founder, in the strict sense of the study of religious truth, in addition to the methods of positive scientific knowledge that emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century*" (Velasco, 1982, p 18). Hence, the following question arises: *Why can't religious phenomenology be the science of contemporary religion?* This question came to our mind because phenomenology can make philosophy, as a descriptive and analytical study, the fundamental basis for all our knowledge and for the universal science of many other sciences (Rafi Muhammad, 1973: 110).

However, if the three models used in the present study are compared, then we can say that the initiative is credited to Rudolf Otto who was the first to try to apply the phenomenology of religion. Nevertheless, despite the great fame he gained through his book "*The Idea of Al-Qudsi*", he did not succeed in adhering to the rules and principles of phenomenology. As for Mircea Eliade and Firas Al-Sawah, we think that they both succeeded in subjecting the religious subject to serious phenomenological study. For this reason, these two thinkers are considered as those who confirmed the existence of a point of intersection between the religious subject and the phenomenological approach. They also, at the same time, affirmed that the Arab thought is no less good than its Western counterpart.

Thus, in short, one has to answer the following question: *What is the purpose of founding the Philosophy of Religion or the Phenomenology of Religion?* Through the application of religious phenomenology, we sought to achieve a sufficient degree of objectivity and value neutrality in the philosophy of religion, knowing that this is not an easy matter. We nevertheless feel that our study sought a more important goal than that because we do not perceive value neutrality and objectivity as moral acts that should be categorical, as Kant envisioned it. On the contrary, according to our point of view, objectivity and value neutrality in the philosophy of religion must have a higher goal, which means that we have to justify our search for objectivity and value neutrality in the philosophy of religion, until completion of our study, at least from our point of view as researchers.

Furthermore, the absence or lack of objectivity and value neutrality in studies that are believed to fall within the philosophical scope often results in two main problems. The first one is the conflict of religions, bearing in mind that the lack of objectivity in any discourse in

connection with a religious system can certainly cause injustice and deviation from the truth, which is not accepted by those concerned with this religious system. This may be the main reason for feeding grudge, hatred and even extremism. Therefore, fair and objective research would be the best way to bring religions and civilizations closer together. The best example to illustrate that is what Gene Heck presented in his book "*When Worlds Collide*" and what he did in defense of Islam until he arrived at the pressing necessity to ask the question: *What has humanity done to Islam?* (Heck, 2010:14). This entails that our adherence to the phenomenological approach in our philosophical investigations about religion not only makes us capable of achieving a great deal of objectivity, but also provides a large part of the solution to the problem of clash of civilizations, especially with regard to its religious aspect. As for the second problem, which we are facing today due to the lack of objectivity and value neutrality in studies oriented towards religion, it is related to sectarianism and to the feeding of doctrinal conflict. In this context, Hisham Djait said: "*The Fitna (sedition) had a breathless rhythm, and the sky of ideas supervised it*" (Djait, 2000: 08), which implies that the lack of objectivity and value neutrality in dealing with the religious text is the main reason for the emergence of sectarianism and conflict of doctrines.

This research paper may therefore be concluded by emphasizing on the fact that a very important detail still needs to be addressed by several studies. Indeed, when religion becomes a subject of thought, this subject must fulfill the conditions of objectivity and value neutrality through its adherence to the principles and rules of phenomenology. This has to be carried out in this manner so that our study of religion can be fair with respect to the topic under study and to ourselves as researchers as well. We say so because religion has been unfairly and unreasonably utilized in various conflicts with another person whether having a different belief or following a different religious faith or doctrine (Madhhab).



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