

James M. Nelson

# Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality

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# Preface

Over a century ago, psychologists who were fascinated with religion began to study and write about it. Theologians and religious practitioners have responded to this literature, producing a fascinating dialogue that deals with our fundamental understandings about the human person and our place in the world. This book provides an introduction to the important conversations that have developed out of these interchanges.

The dialogue between psychology and religion is difficult to study for a number of reasons. First, it requires knowledge of both psychology and religion. People with a background in psychology often lack a solid understanding of the religious traditions they wish to study, and theologians may not be up to date on the latest developments in psychology. Second, it requires conceptual tools to organize the material and understand the basic problems involved in any attempt to connect the science of psychology with religion. These concepts can be found in many places, for instance in the writings of philosophers of science, but they are complex and often hard to follow for those without a proper theological and philosophical background. Finally, authors who write on the topic come to the study of psychology and religion from a variety of academic and personal backgrounds. This makes for wonderful diversity in conversations, but it makes understanding and mastery of the material quite difficult.

Given these problems, why should we try to understand this dialogue? Along with many other scholars, I believe that psychology and religion both have things to say to each other that are mutually beneficial. Psychology offers religion the resources of science to improve the accuracy of its self-understanding and the methods it uses to pursue desired goals. Religion offers psychology a vast store of accumulated wisdom on the nature of the human person and how a good life might be achieved. As each field hears what the other has to say, there is a response or critique, and these are of vital importance as well. For instance, theological responses to psychological theory and research provide valuable corrections that can help the field avoid mistakes and misunderstandings. Accordingly, this book is written from a *dialogical perspective*, looking at some of the important conversations and critiques that have been exchanged between psychologists, theologians and religious practitioners. The word “and” in the title of this book reflects this dialogical aim.

A dialogical approach to psychology and religion carries with it certain assumptions. First, psychology and religion are treated as equal conversation partners that are both worthy of respect. Thus, an attempt must be made to avoid privileging either field in our inquiry. Second, while dialogue produces many fascinating connections it does not produce a structure that fits both areas into a neat system. While psychology and religion have much to say to each other, they are different in their aims and methods, so that discontinuities between the fields will always be present.

While the book has a primary focus on Christianity—and I write from that perspective—Hinduism and especially Buddhism have also contributed greatly to the psychology and religion dialogue. Thus, major sections of the book also discuss information related to these two traditions. Unfortunately, some other major religions have not been well studied by psychologists, and so there is not a coherent body of dialogue available for discussion. Thus, there is very little discussion of Judaism in this book, and only a modest treatment of Islam. Hopefully, theory and research will progress in the future so that these important religious traditions will have a more central place in the conversation with psychology.

## **The Plan of This Book**

The fields of psychology, religion, and spirituality have a vast, rich heritage that is beyond the scope of any single volume or set of volumes. Even the literature on the intersection between psychology and religion is enormous. Accordingly, in a book such as this, hard choices must be made about what to include and how it should be discussed. In general, I have tried to provide a bird's-eye view of the field, indicating important major issues and areas where dialogue is taking place. However, this is a textbook rather than an encyclopedia, so you will not find coverage of all the major writers or research related to psychology, religion and spirituality. Such an undertaking would be neither possible nor desirable in the confines of a single volume. Instead, it is important to be selective and focus on key figures or ideas as a way of introducing various points of view and issues of interest. In order to understand the current state of the dialogue, it is necessary to focus more on recent research findings and understandings of various issues, although older work is also considered when it is relevant to current debates. This includes discussion of research in the sociology and anthropology of religion that is of importance to psychology. Each chapter concludes with a discussion of a key issue or theme that emerges from the psychology and religion dialogue on that topic.

The material in the book falls into several sections. Part I deals with fundamentals in the psychology and religion dialogue. It is very helpful to consider this topic within the context of the larger conversation between science and religion. Thus, there is a chapter that introduces the philosophical concepts (e.g., naturalism, materialism) and historical information (e.g., positivist movements) needed to understand the science and religion relationship, particularly as it has worked itself out with reference to psychology. For those that are unfamiliar with the major religious traditions

addressed in the psychology and religion dialogue, a chapter with a brief review of Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity is also included.

Parts II and III cover basic areas in the psychology and religion dialogue as it has evolved over the past century. Part II also provides an overview of approaches to the topic that are likely to be central in the future, such as the perspectives provided by neuroscience and postmodernism. Part III summarizes material related to the important area of human development, and suggests how new advances in narrative psychology may help us to understand the process of spiritual growth.

Part IV deals with the practical applications of the psychology and religion dialogue. Religion and psychology share a concern with the quality of human existence. They hope to offer guidance to people seeking to find meaningful, fulfilled and even happy lives. Thus, a final goal of this book is to harness theory and empirical research in the service of practical applications. How can we in the 21st century build positive communities? In what ways can we help individuals deal with challenges and develop richly satisfying lives? The concluding chapters of this book will attempt to begin sketching out answers to these questions.

A difficult problem is how to handle terminology and references, which for this topic must come from a number of fields. For the most part, references utilize the system developed by the American Psychological Association, although this is not always ideal when referring to philosophical or theological works. Multiple author citations have been abbreviated somewhat in the text, although the full citation can still be found in the reference list. A glossary is included at the end of the book that provides quick definitions of terms as they are typically used by psychologists, theologians, and religious studies scholars.

The primary task of a book such as this is to present ideas that have been influential in the dialogue between psychology and religion. Once we have these ideas in front of us, the next critical task is to evaluate the value of these ideas and the evidence that supports them. This is important, as the ideas of many influential figures in the dialogue (e.g. Freud, Fromm) have little or no evidence to support them, while other less-known ideas appear on examination to be very attractive. However, evaluation is not easily done. A systematic critique of theories requires agreement on how they should be evaluated and a body of theoretical discussion or evidence relevant to the task. Unfortunately, one or both of these things is often missing in the science and religion dialogue. Scholars in different fields such as social psychology and religious studies often disagree on what constitutes evidence in support of a position. For instance, scientists often insist upon the presence of empirical data to support a theory, while a theologian might argue that other kinds of evidence are more relevant and persuasive. There is also much variability in the quantity and quality of critique directed at different positions. Some theories—even good ones—have been the target of extensive critiques, while others have received little criticism even when there is little data to support them. So while evaluative sections have been included in situations where there has been a lot of scholarly discussion about the worth of a particular theory or position, it has not always been possible to offer an extensive critique of every theory. Absence of a critique does not mean a position is “proven” and presence of a critique does not mean a view has

no value. Much remains to be done to evaluate the worth of the many strands in the psychology and religion dialogue.

## **The Community Behind the Book, with Thanks**

Any writer is indebted to many people both past and present. One of the most painful parts of writing the book has been the need to cover rich systems of thought and lifetimes of study by many fine people in a few sentences. Thus, both thanks and apologies are due to colleagues. Hopefully this book will motivate the reader to pick up and read the original sources and authors involved in the psychology and religion dialogue.

Many of my students have contributed to this book in important ways. John Unrath did some of the background research for Chapter 12, and Mark Burek contributed some suggestions on Chapter 13. Kathryn Alfrey, Lisa Daube, Katie Patrick, Marla Tiebert, and Kathy Berg did much of the typing, editing and cross-checking of the reference list, a significant job in a book of this type. Julie Hamaide, Erin Westerman, and Jennifer Zimmer read large portions of the text and commented on them from a student point of view, suggesting improvement to make the book more user friendly. They also worked with Chrystal Frey and Anthony Nelson in helping to assemble the glossary. Catherine Renken and Megan Berning assisted in the production of the index. Several of my psychology and religion classes at Valparaiso University and in China have also endured earlier versions of the chapters in this book and made helpful suggestions.

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Indiana, USA

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction to Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality

### 1.1 Introduction

The nature of the human person has been a subject of fascination since ancient times. We desire to understand ourselves and our place in the world, and at times we also look at broader human questions: Why am I here? What is the meaning or purpose of my life? Why do people suffer? This book is about two of the most important ways that people have attempted to answer these kinds of questions—religion and psychology. Especially over the past century, there has been a fascinating interchange of views between psychologists and religious practitioners about questions of daily life and broader meaning. In this book, we will seek to understand this complex and constantly changing dialogue and its implication for our understanding of the human person (cf. Henking, 2000). We will begin our quest in this chapter with a look at the basic concepts of religion, spirituality, and psychology, as well as some history of the dialogue between them.

### 1.2 Basic Concepts

#### 1.2.1 *What is Religion?*

From prehistoric times to the present, religion has been a central part of human experience and culture. Religions are thought to have existed in all times and societies (Cela-Conde, 1998; Glock & Stark, 1965). Traditionally the term **religion** was used to refer to all aspects of the human *relationship to the Divine* or **transcendent**—that which is greater than us, “the source and goal of all human life and value” (Meissner, 1987, p. 119). More recently, scholars have started to understand religion as activities and a *way of life*: “the fashioning of distinctive emotions; of distinctive habits, practices, or virtues; of distinctive purposes, desires, passions, and commitments; and of distinctive beliefs and ways of thinking,” along with “a distinctive way of living *together*” and a language for discussing “what they are doing and why” (Dykstra, 1986). Thus religion has to do not only with the transcendent as it is “out

there” but also as it is **immanent** in our bodily life, daily experiences, and practices. Some religious traditions like Islam are thought to emphasize transcendence, while Eastern religions tend to emphasize immanence. Christianity stresses both: the transcendent God is also the God who can be found within and around us, discernable in both a dramatic religious experience and in the simple, quiet love of a child for his or her parent (Maloney, 1992, p. 1; Spidlik, 1986, p. 134; Shannon, 2000; Macquarrie, 1982, p. 34). Religion is thus multidimensional, and its complexity must be understood if it is to be properly evaluated (Gorsuch, 1984; Snibbe & Markus, 2002).

### 1.2.1.1 Religion as Transcendence

All of us encounter the **transcendent** part of life, something that takes us beyond our current way of thinking, feeling, or acting. We master a foreign language, listen to a new kind of music or learn to pilot a canoe. All these things are examples of self-transcendence and they are also comprehensible; we can understand the system of processes, abilities, and decisions behind each of these new activities. We could refer to these situations as offering a kind of **weak transcendence**, something that is beyond us but also within our reach—transcendence “of an *internal* and human sort” (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 379). It is something that can be achieved or comprehended, often without a fundamental change in our way of life or outlook.

Sometimes, however, we encounter more radical forms of **strong transcendence** that defy comprehension, understanding, and control. This happens when we find that life cannot be put into a box or reduced to a set of propositions and rules despite our best efforts. In the words of philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1969), we find that our world is not just a settled, controllable “totality” of a clearly understood system but is an “infinity” that sometimes goes beyond our human control and understanding. This infinity can appear in situations that challenge our settled view of things, as when the death of a loved one makes us realize the finitude of life. The psychiatrist-philosopher Karl Jaspers (1932) referred to these as **limit situations** or experiences. Strong transcendence also appears in the puzzles and **paradoxes** of life—things that seem to be simultaneously true but not reconcilable with each other. For instance, the world seems to have an underlying unity, but at the same time there is great diversity. Religious people can speak of God as love and at the same time acknowledge the presence of suffering in the world. Paradox appears when we ask big questions like why do things exist? Why is the world predictable and orderly? Finally, it is evident in our **human freedom** to make choices, pursue goals, react in different ways, and exercise creativity (Theophan, 1995, p. 72). No matter how carefully we study and plan, our own actions and those of others—even the effects of planful modern science and technology—continue to surprise us and defy prediction. Human action can be thought of as a struggle between this freedom and necessity (Arendt, 1998, pp. 230–235). In religious traditions, many thinkers speak of spiritual life as involving some kind of ascent and contact with this transcendence and that after returning from such an encounter we find ourselves changed in important ways (Shah-Kazemi, 2006, p. 1).

While most human philosophies and religions embrace at least some form of weak transcendence, views on strong transcendence vary markedly. Most forms of humanistic philosophy reject the idea of strong transcendence, arguing that sacredness is just another word for human power and ability (Ornstein, 1991, p. 274; Taylor, 2007; Vergote, 1969, p. 74). A view such as this emphasizes our ability to control the world instead of seeing it as a gift to be received. On the other hand, many religious systems would argue that while weak transcendence exists and is good, a view of the world or the human person that stops there is radically incomplete. We must also take strong transcendence into account.

For the majority of religious people in the world, this transcendence is not just an abstraction, but it has a personal quality. The something that is beyond relates to us in love, and we in turn offer it our love. This is known as **theism**, belief in a God who is free, transcending both us and the world, but who wishes to relate to us. As transcendent, God can become an object of devotion (Peters, 2007; Hay, Reich, & Utsch, 2006). Nontheistic religions may acknowledge strong transcendence but deny its personal quality. This is a traditional stance within Buddhism.

Strong transcendence poses problems for science in general and psychology in particular on a number of fronts. First, scientists generally prefer tidy models that attempt to explain things without reference to transcendence (Smith, 2000). Inclusion of transcendence in a model is an admission that the theory is limited in its explanatory power, while many model builders hope to continually expand their reach. Second, some scientists have a limited view of logic which conflicts with aspects of transcendence such as paradox. As Wolfhart Pannenberg has noted, some scientists have a tendency to confuse **rationality** (something that makes sense) with **rationalism** (something that conforms to a rigid understanding of logic; Tupper, 1973, p. 261), a stance that is quite restrictive and at odds with how most people—including scientists—actually arrive at knowledge (Watts & Williams, 1988, p. 56; Polanyi, 1962). This demonstrates that our ideas about logic and rationality are not neutral but have important implications (Watson, 1994). Third, freedom also poses problems for many scientific explanations. Like most aspects of strong transcendence, freedom is defined in a negative way as *not* chance or *not* necessity; as such it cannot be directly observed (Macquarrie, 1982, p. 13). In the words of Levinas it is a **trace phenomenon**; we can see its effects as in the free response we make to the demands of others (Treanor, 2005), but we can never see the thing itself. You can observe the fact that you are reading this book and understand how this is different than alternatives that you might have chosen, but you cannot measure or prove that freedom allowed you to make the choice. Some scientists assume that since something cannot be directly observed, it cannot exist. Scholars who accept the presence of strong transcendence argue that problems like rationalism or freedom show us a natural limitation of science in its quest to grasp the human being. They suggest that we cannot understand the human person solely by looking at ourselves from a non-transcendent point of view. We must also seek other ways of knowing, (Goldsmith, 1994, p. 95; Howard, Youngs, & Siatczynski, 1989; Powlison, 2003, p. 205; Macquarrie, 1982, pp. 26, 41–42; Zizioulas, 2006).

Since transcendence is an essential part of most religions, the study of religion using a system that excludes transcendence would appear to have limits in understanding its object of study. For instance, hope for an afterlife is an important part of religion for most theists, and an understanding of this phenomenon must accept that for believers this type of transcendence is entirely real. However, many scientists—including some psychologists—would find this difficult to accept because it is not directly observable. As a science, psychology suffers under limitations and needs to avoid “psychologism,” the tendency to assume that all of religion can be explained by psychology when it obviously excludes critical aspects of the phenomena (Vergote, 1969, pp. 5–21).

### 1.2.1.2 Religion as Immanence or Human Activity

Many experts prefer to see religion as a particular type of human activity, and certainly all major religious traditions have developed philosophies on the nature of the human person and our place in the world (e.g., Hartsman, 2002). For instance, the sociologists Charles Glock and Rodney Stark see religion in relation to our **values**, things that we deem particularly important. They feel that individuals develop value orientations or “over-arching and sacred systems of symbols, beliefs, values, and practices concerning ultimate meaning which men shape to interpret their world” (Glock & Stark, 1965, p. 9), and they view religion as one manifestation of this phenomenon. By this definition, Marxism and other secular systems of thought are akin to religion as they provide value orientations. However, Glock and Stark also view religion as a social phenomenon with particular dimensions: (1) ritualistic, (2) experiential, (3) intellectual, and (4) consequential, i.e., having implications for behavior and ethics.

In a similar way, religious studies scholar Ninian Smart (1998) identifies religion as a human activity with some or all of the following dimensions: (1) practical and ritual, including prayer, worship, and meditation; (2) experiential and emotional; (3) narrative or mythic; (4) doctrinal and philosophical; (5) ethical and legal; (6) social and institutional; and (7) material, including buildings and other artifacts. He believes that the narrative or mythic element of religion is particularly important, as it includes the sacred stories and art that help define both the group and the sacred entities that are the focus of the religion. Smart argues that many secular movements such as atheism, humanism, or Marxism fit some or all of this definition but that it is not proper to call them religions, because “they conceive of themselves, on the whole, as antireligious” (1998, p. 26). However they can be thought of as offering a **worldview** (1999a,b)—a basic set of assumptions and way of thinking about self, the world and our place in it (cf. Kearney, 1984, p. 41). Secular worldviews often appear to fill some of the same functions as a religion by providing an **ideology**, or system of thought, that attempts to explain everything from a single premise. For instance, the ideology of **humanism** is based on a concept of the basic good and power of humanity. In the modern world, ideologies often claim to have a scientific basis to increase their persuasive power (Arendt, 1968, p. 468).

Other authors prefer to look at religion as an activity that is part of **culture**, the complex whole of “capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor, 1871), especially the “webs of significance” available in society that help us in the search for meaning (Geertz, 1973, p. 5). Belzen (1999) argues that seeing religion as merely another part of culture could provide a “religiously neutral” starting point for inquiry by psychologists. A cultural view of religion tends to see it as a human production, a multidimensional system or worldview that underpins a culture and allows members to construct meaning and make sense out of the world. This is a popular approach to religion in contemporary university settings (Marsden & Longfield, 1992; Vergote, 1997, p. 19).

There are two ways of approaching cultural phenomena. In the **etic** model, cultural forms are seen as universal phenomena with similar characteristics across all cultural settings. In the case of religion, an etic view assumes that all religions share certain attributes like having a view of transcendence, and that they can be broken down and analyzed according to a universal set of categories, as when we compare Christianity and Buddhism on their “devotional practices.” In the **emic** model, each cultural form is thought to be unique and occurs within a given physical, social, and historical context. An emic view of religion would argue that two different religions are not just alternate varieties of the same thing; rather they are unique systems and each must be understood and evaluated on its own merit (e.g., Shuman & Meador, 2003, pp. 37–40). Both of these approaches can be found in the contemporary psychology and religion literature, with scientists tending to use etic models and theologians or religious studies scholars arguing more from an emic stance.

Definitions of religion that view it as a human activity often have two implications. First, if religion is defined as a worldview, it is possible to speak of everyone as being religious since everyone has a worldview. The Christian theologian Paul Tillich seems to have believed this, saying that it was impossible to be nonreligious because everyone has “confessed or concealed answers to the questions which underlie every form of religion” and if they don’t profess a religion they at least belong to a “quasi-religion” (1963a, pp. 2–3). Second, when religion is viewed as a human activity it is natural to conduct a **functional analysis** and look at it in terms of its functions—what it does—instead of a **substantive analysis** that looks at its content and specific beliefs. For instance, a functional analysis might evaluate religion in terms of its ability to help us cope with life stresses, while a substantive analysis could look more at the truth value of religious doctrines. Functional analyses are commonly used in psychology (Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999; Ahmed, 2004) and offer a practical approach to study; the disadvantage is that functionalism can obscure underlying differences, sometimes labeling everyone as “religious” despite the fact that some people avoid or oppose it (Smart, 1999b, p. 57; McDargh, 1983, p. 9; Vergote, 1997, pp. 14–15). A functional analysis might conclude that there is no difference between a table lamp and a flashlight because both give light. However, a power outage or a battery failure after prolonged use would show that the functional analysis had overlooked some important substantive differences! Similarly, religion may function differently in those for whom it is a central part of life compared with individuals who seldom practice it. Finally, functional analyses

can imply that religion is *only* about its functions and not about its substance such as its views on transcendent reality, a position that would certainly not be shared by adherents of religious traditions (Drees, 1998, p. 323; Berger, 1974).

Are religions more about transcendence or immanence? While some religions may emphasize one over the other, all the great religious traditions encompass both (cf. Shah-Kazemi, 2002, 2006, p. 69; al-'Arabi, 1980, pp. 72–75).

### 1.2.2 What Is Spirituality?

Over the last several decades the term **spirituality** has entered the common language as an alternate way to describe our search for the transcendent. In its original English meaning, “spiritual” was a term used to contrast church life with “worldly” or materialistic ways of being (Rizzuto, 2005). In the 19th century, “spirituality” was not a commonly used term and “Spiritualism” referred to contact with spirits and other psychic phenomena. In contemporary usage, the term has a number of common meanings (Zinnbauer et al., 1997), and definitions in the scholarly literature also vary. These differences reflect the fact that spirituality is a broad term encompassing multiple domains of meaning that may differ among various cultural, national, and religious groups (Roehlkepartain, Benson, King, & Wagener, 2006; Lewis, 2004; Takahashi & Ide, 2003). Today the term is often used to denote *the experiential and personal side of our relationship to the transcendent or sacred* (cf. Hill et al., 2000; Emmons & Crumpler, 1999). Those who use the term in this way typically contrast it with religion, which they define narrowly as the organizational structures, practices, and beliefs of a religious group (Zinnbauer et al., 1999). Theologians and religious practitioners, on the other hand, tend to prefer definitions that draw less of a strict division between religion and spirituality. In their eyes, spirituality is *the living reality of religion as experienced by an adherent of the tradition*.

Roof (1999, p. 35) argues that spirituality encompasses 4 themes: (1) a source of values and ultimate meaning or purpose beyond the self, including a sense of mystery and self-transcendence; (2) a way of understanding; (3) inner awareness; and (4) personal integration (cf. Tillich, 1958; Becker, 2001; MacInnes, 2003, p. 51; Ingersoll, 1994). The last characteristic is particularly important. Spirituality has an integrative and harmonizing function that involves (a) our inner unity and (b) our relationship and connectedness with others and to a broader reality that powers our ability to be transcendent (Schneiders, 1998; cf. McGrath, 2006; Kosek, 1996; Theophan, 1995, pp. 95–99). Thus, the fact that we are spiritual is not a separate nature or characteristic that we have but an inseparable part of all we are and do (Wagener & Malony, 2006; Wuthnow, 1998; Shafranske & Gorsuch, 1984, p. 231; May, 2004, p. 42; Wiseman, 2007). Most visions of spirituality also involve contact with the **sacred**, or “those forces whose dominance over man increases or seems to increase in proportion to man’s effort to master them” (Girard, 1977, p. 31; cf. Roehlkepartain, 2004), so spirituality has a powerful, mysterious quality that cannot be reduced to a simple object of study (May, 2004, p. 183). Ideally, spirituality

takes us beyond ordinary daily experience and has a transforming effect on our lives and relationships. It is not just about being and experience, it is also about doing. In contemporary practice, it involves a search for higher values, inner freedom, and things that give life meaning (Shannon, 2000, p. 47; Vergote, 2003). While in Western countries this search has typically involved a search for God, a nontheist can also be involved in the quest for meaning (Mansager et al., 2002).

Religious conceptions of spirituality generally involve **thick** definitions that are rich in allusions to specific beliefs and practices, as opposed to **thin** or generic “one size fits all” definitions that focus more on natural experiences, personal values, or connectedness (Zaehner, 1961; Walzer, 1994; Shelldrake, 1998, p. 56; e.g., Miller, 1999; Emmons, 1999, p. 92; Piedmont, 1999). For instance, Jernigan (2001) offers a thin definition of spirituality as “the organization (centering) of individual and collective life around dynamic patterns of meanings, values, and relationships that are trusted to make life worthwhile (or, at least, livable) and death meaningful.” (p. 418). His thick definition of Christian spirituality is more specific: “the organization (centering) of individual and collective life around loving relationships with God, neighbor, self, and all of creation—responding to the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ and at work through the Holy Spirit.” (p. 419). Thick definitions often are theistic, have a strong communal content and are multidimensional with experiential, relational, and behavioral components (Dykstra, 1986; Aumann, 1980, p. 18; Shelldrake, 1998, pp. 58, 82; Schneiders, 1994; Hall & Edwards, 1996, 2002). Thin definitions of spirituality are attractive to scientists because they are thought to tap universal human qualities related to invariant natural laws that the scientist can discover through research. However, some scholars believe that such definitions may distort the fundamental nature of spirituality (Slife, Hope, & Nebeker, 1999). Thicker concepts may contain important content and contextual information necessary for understanding a particular type of spirituality. Different groups and individuals have very diverse ideas about it, making thin or global interpretations difficult (Helminiak, 1987, p. 165; 1996; Richardson, 1996; Zinnbauer et al., 1997; Zinnbauer et al., 1999; Shahabi et al., 2002; cf. MacIntyre, 1988, 1990).

Given that religion and spirituality are complex concepts that have different meanings for different groups, it is difficult to articulate a single definition for either of them. However, their multidimensionality suggests that definitions that focus on only one aspect of religion or spirituality should be avoided.

### 1.2.2.1 Connections Between Religion and Spirituality

A number of scholars see spirituality and religion as conceptually different. Sinnott (2001), for instance, thinks spirituality involves one’s relation to the sacred as distinct from religion which involves adherence to specific beliefs and practices, although he also admits that the two are sometimes hard to separate and are often not distinguished in theory and research (Sinnott, 2002a,b). Separating the two has the advantage of recognizing that a kind of broadly defined spirituality is quite possible for those outside of religious traditions and communities (Rayburn, 2004). Focusing

on spirituality fits especially well within a Western framework that focuses on the individual and their experience rather than the needs and experiences of a larger community (Mattis, Ahluwalia, Cowie, & Kirkland-Harris, 2006; Bonnycastle, 2004). Continental European authors find the distinction particularly attractive, as some associate the decline in traditional values and religion with a turn toward spirituality and a focus on the “deeper” layers of the self (e.g., Houtman & Aupers, 2007).

There are numerous indications in the empirical literature that in Western samples it is possible to (1) develop definitions and measurement instruments that reliably measure religion and spirituality separately, (2) find that they have different qualities or effects, and (3) identify people who are either spiritual or religious, but not both, although in many people they are highly related (Halman & Riis, 2003; Shahabi et al., 2002). For instance, Dowling and her colleagues (Dowling et al., 2004) have found that religion and spirituality have independent effects on thriving, although spirituality also has an effect on religiosity. They found that spirituality involved orientation to help others and do good work, as well as participate in activities of self-interest. This was found to contrast with religiosity, which involved things related to beliefs and institutional influences. Some studies with adults also show that religion and spirituality can be separated and that they change differently during the aging process, with group averages on religiosity staying fairly steady across the life span, while spirituality increases, especially after age 60 (e.g., Dillon & Wink, 2003). Individuals who are spiritual but not religious may also differ in beliefs, for example, they have higher levels of **nihilism**, the belief that life has no purpose (Shahabi et al., 2002).

Others raise objections to the practice of making a strict separation between religion and spirituality. Certainly individuals in religious traditions generally reject the idea that these are separate (e.g., Merton, 2005b, p. 46). The psychologist Brian Zinnbauer and his colleagues have pointed out that researchers who draw a strict distinction between religion and spirituality often polarize the concepts in value-laden ways, with organized, communal religion defined in negative terms and individualistic spirituality in positive terms. In their view, these types of definitions can tell us more about the values or prejudices of the investigators than the phenomenon they are studying (Zinnbauer et al., 1999). They also note that the people we study generally do not draw a strict distinction between them. In their studies of US Midwestern adults, only 6.7% of their sample saw the two as strictly different, while the vast majority saw the two as interrelated in some way (Zinnbauer et al., 1997; cf. Musick, Traphagan, Koenig, & Larson, 2000). Similar results have also been found in Japan (Takahashi & Ide, 2003), and personality research suggests that those high in spirituality and religiousness share many things in common such as a compassionate attitude toward others (Piedmont, 2005). This suggests that in some cultural settings a distinction between religion and spirituality may not be meaningful and that even when the two can be distinguished they can support each other in positive ways (Verma & Maria, 2006).

Is it really possible to be spiritual without being religious? If by this we mean is it possible to engage in a spiritual quest without formal membership in a religious group, the answer is “yes.” However, complete separation of spirituality from religion is difficult. The psychologist David Elkins has argued that it is possible and in his book *Beyond Religion* (1998) presents a program for spiritual life outside of

religion. However, his program makes extensive use of practices and beliefs taken from major religious traditions, and he frequently quotes religious figures in support of his arguments! This illustrates the fact that in practice it is often impossible to divorce spirituality and religion from each other (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Eliassen, Taylor, & Lloyd, 2005) and that the practice of spirituality without the support of religious structures is difficult in many ways. In Christianity, religious practitioners and theologians have traditionally resisted the move to split religion and theology from spirituality as inaccurate and harmful, although it has occurred during periods of history. These writers would argue that ultimately the Christian religion and spirituality require each other, and the same is probably true in other religious traditions as well (Tillich, 1963a, pp. 88–89; Pannenberg, 1983, p. 13; Rahner, 1975, p. 40; Sheldrake, 1995, pp. 52–57; Rossler, 1999). Certainly the study of spirituality in those who are outside of religious groups is particularly difficult, so that most research on spirituality to date involves those who affiliate with churches or other religious groups (Emmons, 1999, p. 98).

If religion and spirituality are distinct yet related, there are two ways of understanding their connection. One way is to suppose that one of the constructs is actually a subset of the other so that religion is just an “add-on” or response to spirituality or vice versa. For instance, Kenneth Pargament defines religion broadly as “a search for significance in ways related to the sacred” (1999, p. 32) and sees religion as a broader concept than spirituality (Zinnbauer et al., 1999; Pargament, 1999). An opposite perspective is offered by the European researcher Stifoss-Hanssen (1999), who argues that spirituality is a broader construct because the quality of sacredness emphasized in religion is not experienced by atheists and agnostics. A third perspective is to see that religion is related to the sacred but that sacredness can be approached from other ways (e.g., Demerath, 2000). A sensible way to resolve the issue is to treat religion and spirituality as distinct but overlapping (e.g., Hill et al., 2000; Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Rude, 2003). Scholars who follow this line of thought have developed typologies that classify people into categories according to their levels of religiousness and spirituality (see Table 1.1).

**Table 1.1** Typology of religion and spirituality

Religiosity		
	High	Low
	Engaged, Participatory (US Percentage)	Disengaged, Uninvolved (US Percentage)
Spirituality		
High	Traditional Integrated (59–74%)	Spiritual Seeker Individualistic (14–20%)
Low	Cultural Dogmatic (4–15%)	Uninterested or Antagonistic (3–12%)

Note: Figures for relative proportions are from multiple US studies as reported by Marler & Hadaway (2002). For use of the terms “Spiritual Seeker” and “Dogmatic” see Roof (2003).

## 1.3 Religion and Spirituality Today

What is the status of religion and spirituality in the world today? This is a difficult question to answer. Both are extraordinarily rich parts of our human experience and social life, and as such are resistant to easy description. The complexity of the topic and weaknesses in available statistics are complicated by the fact that different measures of religion may be appropriate for different cultures (Chaves & Stephens, 2003; Presser & Stinson, 1998; Sherkat & Ellison, 1999; Kisala, 2003). For instance, traditional research often measures religiosity by membership in a religious community such as a congregation. However, Asian Buddhists may be very religious but typically do not belong to a specific group—temples do not have membership lists.

Despite these problems, social commentators and sociologists have produced a number of descriptions of the current state of religion. These cluster around three points of view—secularization, religious transformation, and cultural divide.

### 1.3.1 *The Secularization Hypothesis*

Early 20th-century sociologists assumed that religion was a critical part of human life. The famous French sociologist Emile Durkheim, for instance, argued that religion would always be present because it performs necessary functions. This was challenged mid-century by the **secularization hypothesis** (Davie, 2003). This theory developed out of French Enlightenment and positivist views of history, which hold that religion is a primitive way of thinking that will eventually be displaced by modern science and technology (Gorski, 2003; Lash, 1996, p. 110; see Section 2.3). Steady declines in European religious participation beginning in the 19th century especially among younger adults seem to support the idea that religion is dying out. Other authors hold a milder version of the secularization hypothesis and argue that while religion may not die out, it will have declining influence in the public sphere. Belief may continue but will no longer be taken for granted or in some circles even considered a respectable option (Gill, 2001; Norris & Inglehart, 2004, p. 73; Taylor, 2007, pp. 1–14). In this view, the absence or negative portrayal of religious figures and practices in the media are surface manifestations of secularization (Clarke, 2005).

Taylor (2007) argues that secularization is about more than removing religious beliefs in God. He outlines the components of secularization as follows:

- It is a rejection of the possibility of strong transcendence, a move to a purely immanent and human-centered frame of reference that assumes life is about human flourishing and achieving purely human goals (cf. Arendt, 1998, p. 253). Goals beyond ordinary human flourishing or afterlife beliefs are seen as irrational, unscientific, enthusiastic, or fanatical.
- It removes the sense that the world is “enchanted” and affected by spiritual and moral forces or agencies.

- It sees the universe as at best impersonal, and at worst cold or threatening, rather than created by God with positive divine purposes in mind. Time is seen as infinite, homogeneous and empty as opposed to moving toward a particular conclusion.
- It rejects the idea that we are persons embedded in a social and natural world that has divine purposes; rather we are individuals with “buffered” identities disengaged from others. Expressive varieties of individualism that developed especially in the 1960s gave this aspect of secularization a big boost.
- It sees human rationality and power as key values, with an active, interventionist goal of controlling both nature and other people to achieve human goals.
- It works to exclude religion from important areas such as politics, economics, or ethics (cf. Vergote, 1969, p. 253).

Wilson (2001) provides a typical account of the secularization hypothesis. He argues that secularization is a global process affecting all religions. In the first phase of secularization, increasing material comforts cause salvation to be relocated from some future time and place—heaven or some state of rebirth—to the present. This removes the motive for spiritual and moral striving, which leads to a second phase in which morality is seen as simply following the rules so that one can participate in society. In the third and final phase, work and society become increasingly depersonalized, and the moral social order is abandoned in favor of mechanistic efficiency and productivity, which have minimal requirements in terms of personal relations or moral commitments. The sacred or transcendent is eliminated, and the focus shifts to pleasure through common participation in technological and financial structures. Religion has declining influence over the individual as well as social life and politics, although there may be continuing personal religiousness (Tschannen, 1991; Halman & Pettersson, 2003a; Greinacher, 1999; Procter & Hornsby-Smith, 2003). Scholars like Bruce (2001, 2002) see this as an irreversible process under current social, economic, and intellectual conditions. In this view, religion will cease to matter as a real force in society and the lives of individuals.

Many social commentators who agree that secularization is occurring argue that it is associated with a number of social problems including distrust, weakened social institutions, increasing rates of psychological problems, and a decreased sense of meaning and coherence. These problems lead to apathy, cynicism, and consumerism or materialism (Martin, 1978; Tillich, 1963a), although some see fewer negatives and more positives in these developments (e.g., Halman & Riis, 2003; Bréchon, 2003). Secularization can also lead to **atheism** which can take a number of forms: an active denial of God and the value of religion as in secular humanism and some forms of scientific atheism, or a more passive lack of affirmation where people may retain membership in religious organizations and participate in ceremonies like weddings or funerals but reject its daily role in their lives as in consideration of moral questions. While science is often associated with active forms of atheism, in fact science is not necessarily atheistic (Peters, 2007; Pannenberg, 1983; Tupper, 1973, pp. 27–32; MacIntyre & Ricoeur, 1969; see Chapter 2).

By the late 20th century, the secularization hypothesis had been severely challenged, and it has been rejected by a number of contemporary scholars

(Sherkat & Ellison, 1999; Berger, 1999, 2007; Davidman, 2007). Evidence against the secularization hypothesis includes the following:

1. *Statistics show continued strong interest in religion and low rates of atheism, even in technologically and scientifically sophisticated societies like the US.* The Gallup International survey in 1999 found that 84% of their sample identified themselves as part of a religious denomination. Rates of atheism were low, ranging from about 2% in North America to 15% in Western Europe. Even in Western Europe, some countries still have high rates of participation, and the evidence suggests that while disbelief has increased and religious practice has decreased, changes in belief or affiliation have been much less substantial so that the population might better be described as “unchurched” rather than “secularized” (e.g., Halman & Riis, 2003; Davie, 2000). People in countries with formal commitments to atheism such as China also appear to have a strong and increasing interest in religion (Tu, 1999).

2. *Trends in contemporary religion aren't really that different than the past.* While individualized spirituality may be more prominent today (Taylor, 1999), since at least the early 1800s there has always been a portion of American society that has identified with different spiritual movements and rejected mainstream religion. Also, while membership rates have fluctuated quite a bit, US attendance and participation rates have actually been quite stable at around 40% (Wuthnow, 1998, p. 40; Dillon & Wink, 2007, pp. 43–69; Ammerman, 1997; Presser & Chavez, 2007).

3. *Trends away from religion are really part of a more general trend away from social involvement.* Several authors (e.g., Chaves & Stephens, 2003; Putnam, 2000; Presser & Stinson, 1998) suggest that any trends away from organized religion are part of a general decline in participation in civic and voluntary organizations so that “secularization” is more about social disengagement than a move away from religion and spirituality.

4. *Secularization in apparently less religious areas such as Europe is an anomaly due to unusual sociocultural factors* (Davie, 1999, 2001). Some believe that higher rates of European nonparticipation are due to the traditional identification between government and religion in many of those countries, allowing religious non-adherence to become a form of social protest (e.g., Martin, 1978). The French sociologist Daniele Hervieu-Leger (2000, 2001) also argues that there is a unique amnesic quality in modern European society that makes it difficult to maintain access to traditional beliefs and practices that underlie communal religion.

While levels of strong religious commitment in the US remain stable, one change that does seem to be taking place is a decrease in those who are affiliated with a religion but minimally involved, and an increase in those who are completely disconnected. This trend is probably aided by increasing cultural support for alternative religious practices, as well as the idea that spirituality, morality, and religion can or should be separate. This suggests that increasing *polarization* rather than decreasing levels of genuine commitment is the trend in the US and perhaps elsewhere (Dillon & Wink, 2007, pp. 70–72, 119–128; Putnam, 2000, p. 75; Norris & Inglehart, 2004, p. 93). However, as a number of authors have pointed out (e.g., Abramowitz, 2001), declining participation or membership rates do not mean

that people are necessarily becoming less religious or spiritual. The idea of a simple steady progression toward secularization does not fit the evidence and is leading scholars to look for alternatives (Ammerman, 2007b).

### *1.3.2 The Religious Transformation Hypothesis*

Problems with the secularization hypothesis have led to the development of a revisionist or **religious transformation hypothesis** (e.g., Luckmann, 1967; Stark & Bainbridge, 1997; Roof, 1993, 1999). This theory rejects the secularization model of straightforward decline and argues that cultural changes like increasing individualism and social fragmentation will transform but not eliminate religion, making a more individualized spiritual and religious practice attractive (Hill et al., 2000; cf. Ammerman, 2007a, pp. 4–9; Taylor, 2007, p. 461). Hervieu-Leger (2001) notes that while participation in organized religion in Europe has dropped dramatically, there has been little decline in interest in spirituality or religion, just a shift from communal participation to a system where individuals choose their own constructed belief systems and participate in communal activities only as they advance their personal agendas. Taylor (2007) argues that the modernist and secularist view of life that rejects transcendence is unconvincing and unattractive to many people because it leads to a sense of absence or emptiness and lack of meaning, and so a turn away from traditional religion does not lead to unbelief for most people but to many alternate forms of religious seeking. Individuals may become “spiritual but not religious,” or even engage in **vicarious religion**, where the persons themselves do not practice but support religious institutions and the practice of religion by others (Davie, 1999). Taylor predicts that when the secularization narrative does not pan out and the evils attributed to religion do not go away in secularized societies, the draw of unbelief will lessen, and the move to a transformed religion will gain further support.

This increasing individualism in religion is thought to fuel several trends:

1. *The increase in religious seeking both inside and outside of religious organizations.* Robert Wuthnow (1998) and Wade Clark Roof (1999) argue that disillusionment with religion has led some US residents to go from being **dwellers** or participants in a particular religious tradition to being **seekers** who have no firm commitment to a particular religious group. Seekers tend to see churches as providing religious goods and services to be sampled, with the primary purpose of personal satisfaction, enabling one to survive a busy contemporary life. The increase in seeking is thought to be a product of skepticism in the validity of any one religious or secularized spiritual path. It is also associated with certain kinds of family backgrounds marked by rigidity and less closeness. The shift toward seeking and away from dwelling changes the expectations and reasons people participate in religious organizations, which has provoked experimentation among religious groups for different ways of reaching out to seekers (D’Antonio, 1995; Wright, 1995). Seeking has advantages in terms of flexibility and adaptability, but it also has disadvantages. Roof and others argue that the personal individualistic spirituality of seekers often involves an incoherent and

unclear pattern of beliefs and practices. They also argue that it is hard to maintain commitment and identity without spiritual support from group interaction. Seekers that lack this community connection tend to lack strong commitments to particular beliefs and practices and so are more likely to remain spiritual “tourists” rather than pilgrims dedicated to growth (cf. MacIntyre, 1984, pp. 221–223).

2. *Religious and spiritual eclecticism.* The formation of individually constructed spiritualities often involves combining religious practices from different traditions and the many alternatives that are available, what Roof has called a *pastiche* style of religiosity (Roof & Gesch, 1995; Besecke, 2007). In North America and Western Europe only about 20% of the 1998 Gallup sample agreed with the statement “there exists one and only one true religion,” while 55% of the Europeans and 71% of the North Americans endorsed the statement “there is truth in many religions.” Similar results have been found in more recent polls (e.g., Pew Research Center & Pew Forum on Religious Life, 2002). This kind of syncretism can also be seen throughout the developing global culture, for instance, in Japan where people combine Buddhist and Shinto worship (Levitt, 2007; Pace, 2007; Musick et al., 2000). Interestingly, some scholars argue that globalization trends such as secularization and Westernization will eventually lead to homogeneity and *less* religious variety (Halman & Pettersson, 2003c).

3. *The rise of New Age spirituality and new religious movements, as well as the revival of ancient beliefs and practices like paganism.* Herrick (2003) argues that a “new religious synthesis” now exists for many people that combines the use of scientific rationality to enhance spiritual evolution with mystical ideas about nature and personal divinity. Hervieu-Leger (2001) sees New Age religious movements as individualistic expressions that emphasize the subjective nature of reality. In these groups, truth must be discovered through an individual quest for self-perfection that satisfies the needs of the seeker. Sociologists like Hervieu-Leger are somewhat critical of this development, as they question whether a truly individualistic spirituality can ever succeed in creating satisfying meaning, if individuals never have real affirmation of their views from others.

Taylor (2007, pp. 486–488, 505–529) argues that there are both positives and negatives to seeking religion. On the positive side, it focuses on authenticity and moving beyond a lifestyle purely focused on pleasure. It rejects a purely instrumental stance toward the world that leads to personal or environmental devaluation and fragmentation. It also is expressivist in nature and facilitates practices such as pilgrimages that fit in well with a seeking style of spirituality. On the negative side, it tends to be individualized and privatized, and since it lacks structure or support, it can lead people into practice patterns that are shallow and undemanding. Taylor argues that some seekers will find this unsatisfying and will be drawn back to traditional religious structures and practices. He believes the US will be particularly congenial to increased spiritual or religious seeking because of the independence of religion from government, its positive role in American society, and the long tradition in the US of nontraditional religious forms. However, not all the religious transformation that is taking place is of the individualistic seeking variety. For instance, some writers in the Christian tradition have commented that individuals coming to

churches are highly interested in community, as well as experiential and participatory activities or rituals (Pleasants, 2004).

### ***1.3.3 The Cultural Divide Hypothesis***

Ronald Inglehart has proposed a new theory about global religious trends that attempts to update the secularization hypothesis (Norris & Inglehart, 2004; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). Inglehart begins his analysis of sociological data with the observation that one of the strongest forces behind the importance of religion is a need for security (cf. Pannenberg, 1983, p. 74). He believes that in Europe, economic development has increased security and reduced physical constraints on lifestyle, while the welfare system has produced a sense of existential security, that one's survival can be assumed. This increased security, along with less constraint, leads to an emphasis on values of self-expression, personal autonomy, and well-being, as well as decreasing commitments to the family and childrearing. Together, these factors lead to lower birth rates in Europe, as well as secularization and less motivation for religious participation. In this environment, religion (as well as family) is seen as an extra that may or may not be desirable rather than a necessary way of life (Casey, 1996, p. 25). On the other hand, the developing world faces continued and increasing threats to security. This leads to increased religious observance, which in turn strengthens family values and leads to population growth. The combination of decreasing population in secularized areas and increasing numbers in more religious ones means that as a whole the world has actually become *more* traditionally religious over the past 40 years (Lippman & Keith, 2006, p. 113). Inglehart thinks this will produce an increasing **cultural divide** between secular and religious societies and provoke reactions from sections of the world that see themselves threatened by secular values. His theory is unclear about the reasons for continued religiosity in the US and differences in secularization in different parts of Europe; perhaps they are a result of complex differences in history and patterns of religious activity (Halman & Pettersson, 2003a).

Although each of these sociological hypotheses has its weaknesses, all of them also have some supporting evidence. Secularization, transformation, and polarization are important parts of the contemporary religious landscape. An understanding of these trends is helpful as we consider psychological perspectives on religion.

## **1.4 Psychological Approaches to Religion and Spirituality**

### ***1.4.1 What Is Psychology?***

Like the term spirituality, the meaning of the word **psychology** has changed over time. The term originally comes from the Greek words *psyche* or soul, and *logos*

or study. This association of psychology with the human soul implies a focus on the interior life of the person, and historically most definitions of psychology have labeled it as the study of mental life or the mind. Prior to 1850, most works in psychology were written by philosophers, but in the latter half of the 19th century experimental laboratories for the study of psychology were established in Europe and North America, and researchers began applying methods from the natural sciences to the study of the mind. Psychology then became seen as *the scientific study of behavior*, and this definition is the one found in the contemporary textbooks and scholarly articles written by most psychologists. In North America, this emphasis on natural science led to a loss of contact between psychologists and scholars in fields like philosophy or theology that did not have an exclusively scientific outlook (Gorsuch, 2002a, p. 48; Fuchs, 2002). This type of split was much less pronounced in Europe, so interdisciplinary study and cooperation has a much stronger tradition there, especially on the Continent.

In the US, **behaviorism** was the dominant paradigm in psychology for the first half of the 20th century. Behaviorists believe that human behavior can be explained largely on the basis of learning and reinforcement from the environment. Secondary to this was the **psychodynamic** or psychoanalytic school of thought, which sees behavior as determined by internal and often unconscious forces and structures. The discovery of antidepressant and antipsychotic drugs in the 1950s led to increased interest in **neuroscience** theories that explained behavior on the basis of biological and genetic factors affecting the brain. Finally, progress in design of digital computers invited comparisons with the mind and helped fuel the development of **cognitive psychology**, which uses scientific methods to study mental processes like language, reasoning, and memory. The rise of these biological and cognitive models have displaced behaviorism as the dominant models in psychology (Miller, 2003), although behavioral and psychodynamic views continue to have some influence within the field.

While many early psychologists were interested in or sympathetic to religion, none of the four dominant approaches to psychology has been particularly friendly to religion, and in the US, psychologists tend to be less religious than the general population. This, along with the disciplinary isolation that began in the early 20th century, has kept psychologists and theologians or scholars in religious studies relatively unacquainted with current work in each other's fields. Christian theologians and scholars in other religious traditions often respond to older theories that are no longer of wide interest within psychology, and psychologists are often unaware of important aspects of the religious traditions that they study. However, recent writers have expressed more appreciation for alternative perspectives, as in the openness of some psychologists to more theoretical perspectives (e.g., Vande Kemp, 1999).

### ***1.4.2 Early American Psychology of Religion***

Many of the founders of American psychology had interests in religion, as well as personal religious backgrounds (Spilka, 1987), and were interested in applying

scientific principles to its study. This included the two main founders of the field: William James (1842–1910) at Harvard and G. Stanley Hall (1844–1924) at Clark University. A second generation of scholars carried on the work of James and Hall, including Edwin Starbuck (1866–1947) and James Leuba (1868–1946). Starbuck and Leuba both did their Ph.D. work at Clark, and so together with Hall they are sometimes referred to as the “Clark school” in the psychology of religion (Vande Kemp, 1992), although Starbuck worked closely with James and shared many of his views. Two aspects of religion were of primary interest to these early authors: religious experience and religious development (Booth, 1981).

### 1.4.2.1 William James

William James (1842–1910) was the founding president of the American Psychological Association and one of the greatest American psychologists and philosophers. Originally trained in medicine, he moved into the field of psychology and became the first American professor of the subject. Later in his career, he became more interested in philosophical and religious topics, including the study of psychic phenomena. From 1899 to 1902 he spent a sabbatical in Europe, during which time he delivered one of the famous Gifford lectures in natural theology at the University of Edinburgh. His lectures were published in 1902 under the title, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, which remains one of the great classics of psychological and religious literature (see Section 4.2).

### 1.4.2.2 The Clark School

*Hall and the reinterpretation of Christianity.* Hall is best known as a developmental psychologist and an early advocate of **genetic psychology**, which held that the development of the individual was a recapitulation or repeat of prior stages in the development of the human species. He thought that Darwinism and critical views of Biblical texts made it impossible for any intelligent, educated person to believe in traditional Christianity, but that the Christian religion contained vital truths worth preserving. He thought genetic psychology and secular ideas could help restructure Christianity, preserving essential psychological truths while rejecting intellectually unrespectable beliefs such as supernaturalism. His critique and proposal, contained in *Jesus the Christ in the Light of Psychology*, was published in 1917. In the book, he tried to apply psychoanalytic principles to explain Christianity as “a purely psychological projection” (Hall, 1924, p. 422). Hall believed in the existence of a vital force called the Mansoul that represented the highest nature present in humanity and contained our potential for development (Hall, 1924, pp. 280, 442–443). The goal of evolution was for us to surrender our individuality to this larger racial consciousness, which in his view is the real god. Hall thought that the racial soul was a residue from a past “probationary age” (p. 243) and that the function of religion was to bring us back to these older aspects of our psychic life, hopefully assisting

us in our advancement. Jesus was thought of as an expression of this principle, who showed the inherent good in human nature and the possibilities our race might achieve through continued evolution. In this view, Jesus offered a kind of practical psychotherapy that would release us from guilt and fear.

*Leuba and the triumph of science over religion.* Leuba came to America from Switzerland and studied with Hall. Leuba had abandoned personal religious beliefs prior to beginning his professional work and became a sharp critic of traditional religion, although he viewed spirituality in a positive light (Wulff, 2000). In 1921, he conducted a famous study on the religious beliefs of scientists that indicated lower levels of religious belief in “greater men” of science as opposed to “lesser men,” from which he concluded that “disbelief in a personal God and in personal immortality is directly proportional to abilities making for success in the sciences” (1925, pp. 324–325). A follow-up of Leuba's study suggests possible declining levels of personal belief and increasing levels of disinterest or disbelief among leading scientists across the 20th century (Larson & Witham, 1998).

Leuba (1912) agreed with Hall that traditional Christianity was no longer acceptable and that psychology could assist in the formation of something to take its place. He believed that all religious experiences or needs could be explained on a purely psychological basis, with the help of biological and evolutionary theory and an understanding of normal thought processes. He believed that all behavior is **instrumental**, designed to achieve gratification of needs and desires, and that religion was about how we relate to and use the powers of the psyche. Religion is thus a psychological phenomenon, and should be studied by psychological experts, not religious practitioners or theologians who he viewed as ignorant. Serious theology should only be conducted using scientific methods, and thus should become a branch of psychology. When this happened rapid spiritual improvement would follow (Leuba, 1925, p. 332). He attacked research conducted by those with religious convictions as “hopelessly biased and blind,” preferring work done by those who “have lived naively through religious experiences and then to have gained freedom from traditional convictions” (1912, p. 275). Leuba argued for the existence of a metaphysical, impersonal god, a “non-purposive Creative Force” (1912, p. 334), which he thought could form the basis of a reconstructed religion or morality.

Not surprisingly, Leuba's work was criticized by some including Joseph Marechal, a European Jesuit psychologist. Marechal (2004) questioned Leuba's objectivity and accused him of going beyond the limits of psychology to advocate personal views of atheism. He also criticized Leuba's simplistic and reductionist view of mystical experience as ecstasies that were psychopathological or sexual in origin. He argued that Leuba simply started with these conclusions and then arbitrarily interpreted his data so that it would support his views.

The work of the Clark school did not continue. By the 1920s, behaviorism and positivism had become the dominant paradigms in psychology; workers in these areas had little interest in religion, and it was marginalized in academic psychology (Delaney & DiClemente, 2004). Also, a reaction against the racist implications of early 20th century evolutionary thought limited the acceptance of Hall's genetic theory. However, a newer version of this line of thought has begun to appear recently in applications of evolutionary thought to psychology and religion (see Section 6.2).

### ***1.4.3 European Developments***

European investigations in psychology and religion during much of the 20th century have both parallels and divergences from US work. A main parallel would be a strong interest in phenomenology and religious experience, which can be seen in the early 20th century work of German authors like Friedrich von Hugel, Rudolf Otto, or Friedrich Heiler, the French author Joseph Mareshal, or the later work of the Belgian priest-psychologist Antoine Vergote (see e.g., Section 4.3). The divergences between Europe and the US reflect differences in intellectual and cultural situations. The split between psychology and fields like philosophy or theology did not affect Europe as much as the US, so psychological works by Europeans often show more familiarity with developments in other disciplines. Also, the religious climate in Europe is marked by much lower levels of religious participation and higher levels of unbelief, so psychologists of religion working in Europe have a significantly different object of study, sometimes leading to different questions and conclusions.

Within European academic circles there are also differences between national traditions. German writers have often held posts in departments of theology or religious studies and been exposed to work in Asian religious traditions like Hinduism and Buddhism. French work has been strongly influenced by the psychoanalytic thought of Freud and the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (Vandermeersch, 2000). It also has been strongly influenced by French anthropological and sociological thought that owes much to Marxism in its formulation. British psychology shares many affinities with the US in both psychological and philosophical traditions, so its work resembles that of the US and has been particularly influential in North America. For instance, the British object relations school of psychoanalysis has been much more important in the US psychology of religion than the French varieties influenced by Lacan.

### ***1.4.4 Psychodynamic Approaches***

#### **1.4.4.1 Sigmund Freud**

One year before the publication of William James classic *Varieties of Religious Experience*, an unknown medical researcher named Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) published *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* and began to make his views known to the world. Freud became the founder of psychoanalytic psychology and wrote on a variety of topics, including religion. In general, Freud saw religion as something that fostered illusion and prevented people from coming to grips with reality (see Section 5.1). Despite the fact that Freud was highly critical and even dismissive of religion, 20th century theologians like Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr were surprisingly sympathetic toward his work. Like Freud, they were aware of the potential for illusion in religion, and hoped to find in the psychodynamic approach some help for understanding the human person and dealing with issues in pastoral

care. Psychoanalysis had a particular impact on Catholic writers, especially those in Europe such as Antoine Vergote (Vandermeersch, 2000).

#### 1.4.4.2 Erik Fromm

Erik Fromm (1900–1980) was a psychoanalyst who had substantial impacts on humanistic psychology, transpersonal psychology, and the dialogue of psychology with Zen Buddhism. Although Fromm was ambivalent about religion, he was both personally and professionally interested in the topic, meditating on a daily basis and reading extensively in mystical literature, especially Zen and works by the medieval mystic Meister Eckhart (Funk, 2003).

Fromm defined religion broadly as “any system of thought and action shared by a group which give the individual a frame of orientation and an object of devotion” (1950, p. 21). He felt that psychoanalysis and religion have somewhat different interests but need not be opposed. In his view, the key to healthy spirituality is to reject all **authoritarian religion** and belief in a power greater than ourselves, such as that traditionally held within Christianity. He believed that submission to authority as in authoritarian religion leads to hate and intolerance, as well as interfering with the exercise of human reason. Rather, we should accept a **humanistic religion** “centered around man and his strength” in which God is understood only as a symbol of human power, “what man potentially is or ought to become” (1950, p. 37). He felt that philosophies such as Spinoza, some varieties of Buddhism, and the teachings of Jesus or mystical Christianity were all acceptable humanistic religions. Psychoanalysis could relate well to them because of their awareness of basic issues about existence, focus on “ultimate concerns” or the meaning of life, and their desire for oneness. On the other hand, religion that promoted belief in the existence of God and a lack of self-reliance should be rejected. The viewpoint of Fromm is similar to that of the rationalist psychologist and atheist Albert Ellis (1985), who saw most religion as a form of mental illness due to its supposed promotion of dependency and irrational ideas.

Fromm was pessimistic about the social role of religion. Following Freud, he argued that religion “...has the task of preventing any psychic independence on the part of the people, of intimidating them intellectually, of bringing them into the socially necessary infantile docility toward the authorities” (1963, p. 16). It also made life tolerable for people so that they would be less interested in change. Given these views, it is not surprising that he thought traditional religion was an “empty shell” that was no longer useful (Fromm, 1963, p. 100; Cooper, 2006, p. 116). However, he was also pessimistic about the contemporary alternatives. He believed that while modern society had freed itself from the totalitarian authority of the church, it had produced complacent, automated, alienated people absorbed in consumerism and the fulfillment of desires. He felt we must emerge from materialism to a level where spiritual values are important so that we could follow our humanitarian conscience.

Zen Buddhism attracted Fromm because he perceived it to be more anti-authoritarian. He became friends with the Japanese scholar D. T. Suzuki (1870–1966), the leading interpreter of Zen to the US and Europe. Fromm attended

lectures by Suzuki, and in 1957, he arranged a conference in Mexico that involved Suzuki and a group of psychoanalysts. This meeting was an important early milestone in a dialogue between psychoanalysis and Buddhism that has remained very active (see e.g., Section 14.3.2).

### *1.4.5 Humanistic and Transpersonal Approaches*

After the demise of the Clark school of psychology and religion, dialogue between the two fields languished outside of psychoanalysis. This began to change in the 1960s with two new developments: the rise of humanistic psychology, and the application of social-personality psychology to the study of religion (Gorsuch, 1988).

In the 1960s, **humanistic psychology** joined psychoanalysis and behaviorism as a “third force” within the larger field of psychology. It attempts to use scientific inquiry to study people in terms of their uniquely human positive qualities and potentials, including capabilities for self-transcendence and mystical experience. In general, humanistic psychology argues for a weak interpretation of transcendence, an individualistic and subjective view of the human person, and anti-traditionalist views of religion (Sutich, 1969). The three most prominent founders of the movement were Carl Rogers (1902–1987), the existential psychologist Rollo May (1909–1994), and Abraham Maslow (1908–1970). May (the most friendly of the three to religion) and especially Rogers have been influential in the psychology and religion dialogue primarily through their impact on the pastoral counseling movement (see Section 14.1.4). Maslow is important because he was vocal about religious issues and was a central figure in the creation of **transpersonal psychology**, a movement within humanistic psychology focusing on potentials for human development and experiences that extend beyond what is typical for the individual person. Transpersonal psychology has provided a forum for dialogue between psychology and some Asian religious traditions.

#### **1.4.5.1 Abraham Maslow**

Maslow is well known for producing a motivational theory of personality. He believed that people act to meet certain basic needs (e.g., food, safety) and that once these are consistently met we have the ability to develop further and begin seeking after higher needs. In his theory, the highest need and goal of life was the drive for **self-actualization**: “man’s desire for self-fulfillment, namely, to the tendency for him to become . . . everything that one is capable of becoming” (1970, p. 46; 1964, p. 49). Satisfaction of higher needs would lead to better physical and psychological functioning and “greater, stronger, and truer individualism” (1970, p. 100).

Especially in his earlier work (e.g., 1964), Maslow had a largely negative view of religion. He was a member of the American Humanist Association, an organization that promoted atheism (Taylor, 1999, p. 269). He felt that while religion might have a role in helping people satisfy lower drives like safety needs, the “sophisticated”

scientist will disagree with most religious answers to spiritual questions. He thought that a “humanistic faith” could be developed based on scientific study of the “natural” man using empirical procedures. This could allow scientists to discern basic values and answers to religious questions by identifying what contributes to the “actualization of the inner nature of man” (1970, p. 270). However in his last work (1999, p. 206), Maslow moved toward a less negative view and acknowledged that an authentically religious person might be able to use their faith to construct a set of genuine values.

One of Maslow’s most famous contributions was his study of self-actualizers, reported in the classic book *Motivation and Personality* (1970). His subjects were a group of personal acquaintances, friends, and historical figures chosen by him as exemplary. His group largely excluded traditional religious figures, although the Buddhist scholar D.T. Suzuki and the Christian figure Thomas More made the list. Maslow found that these individuals had a variety of positive features, including deep interpersonal relations, creativity and more efficient perception of reality. They also had imperfections, could be ruthless, and struggled with guilt, sadness, or conflict like others. Not surprisingly, given the absence of traditional religious figures from his sample, he found self-actualizers were not religious. They were strongly ethical but unconventional and not always concerned with social politeness.

A key characteristic reported by his self-actualizing subjects was the presence of **peak experiences**—an ecstatic state of nonpossessive and self-transcending perception of the universe as an integrated whole. In his early work (1964), he argued that religious or mystical experiences were examples of peak states. He felt that religion should play no role in the understanding of these states because religious experiences are just part of human nature and can be explained naturalistically without any theological baggage or interference (1970, p. 164). Because the peak state is the core of all religious experiences, he believed that all religions are in essence the same and apparent differences can be safely ignored, a position that is questionable from a modern religious studies perspective.

#### 1.4.5.2 The Transpersonal Psychology Movement

Maslow’s work on self-actualization and peak experiences led him to speculate about the human potential to go beyond the personal and tap into universally available advanced states of cognition and development. He saw this transpersonal potential as very important, and so in the late 1960s, he worked with Stanislav Grof and Anthony Sutich to found a “fourth force” within psychology, the field of transpersonal psychology (Maslow, 1969; Valle, 1989). In this field, investigators begin with the assumptions that (1) higher levels of human functioning and potential are most evident in our ability to reach more advanced levels of human consciousness, and (2) while religions contain transpersonal elements, they also contain much specific content that is culture-specific and irrelevant to transpersonal concerns (Scotton, 1996). This latter view is sometimes known as the **perennial**

**philosophy**, the belief that all religions have a common, universal core (Wittine, 1989; Huxley, 2004; see Section 4.3). Along with these is a further assumption that (3) humans have untapped human potential which can be released and developed with sufficient effort and study (Valle, 1989; Frager, 1989).

While the basic concepts tying together the transpersonal movement are quite simple, in practice, the field of transpersonal psychology has encompassed the study of a wide variety of phenomena related to consciousness, including mystical, transcendent, and even psychic or parapsychological experiences (Sutich, 1969; Tart, 1975, 1992). Also of interest have been techniques used to alter consciousness such as meditation or drugs (e.g., Shapiro & Walsh, 1984; Grof, 1985). The transpersonal outlook is reflected in the work of the important religious philosopher Ken Wilber. In his early work such as *The Atman Project* (1996), Wilber focused on the evolution of consciousness and its relation to human development (see Section 7.5.1). In later work such as *Integral Psychology* (2000a), and *Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality* (2000b), he has critiqued modern rationality and scientific thought, arguing for a more holistic and unified view of the world.

*Assessment.* A number of critiques of the transpersonal movement have been offered, such as the one by Rubin (1996). He notes that while transpersonal psychology has made a contribution in its consideration of non-Christian religious systems, it has typically gone to the other extreme and become “Orientocentric” (Rubin, 1996), although some small steps have been taken recently to begin referencing Christian mystical thought (e.g., Judy, 1996). Transpersonal psychologists have also tended to focus on only those Asian traditions with minimal theistic content (such as Zen Buddhism) and ignore versions of even the same religious tradition with a more devotional orientation (such as Pure Land Buddhism), thus potentially biasing their work. He also argues that the transpersonal focus on consciousness as the key to development is individualistic and neglects vital relational aspects of spirituality, a complaint echoed by other critics of humanistic and transpersonal approaches (e.g., Liebert, 2000, p. 19).

### ***1.4.6 Social and Personality Approaches***

In the early to mid-20th century, some psychologists became interested in studying religion as a dimension in personality or as a form of social behavior. They attempted to develop a rigorous scientific methodology for the study of religion using questionnaires and other quantitative methods. Interesting findings from this work began a revival in the psychological study of religion that had languished in the US since the demise of the Clark school. Much of the modern field of psychology of religion has evolved out of this work by social psychologists interested in the scientific study of religion, especially their study of religious beliefs and behavior (Batson, 1997). This field has generated an impressive empirical literature looking at religion from a psychological perspective, and recently spirituality has also become a topic of interest.

### 1.4.6.1 Gordon Allport

The most important early figure in this school is Gordon Allport (1897–1967), a social psychologist and personality trait theorist. Like many early psychologists, Allport hoped to remove judgments about the human person from the sphere of morality and put the study of mature development on a scientific basis (Nicholson, 1998). Allport differed from some psychologists such as those of the Clark school as he had a more positive attitude toward Christianity, but he did believe that some kinds of religious involvement could be negative (Vande Kemp, 2000). Like Fromm, and many in the generation affected by Nazism and World War II, Allport had a strong interest in authoritarianism and prejudice. In his studies on the subject, he was surprised to find that many religious people displayed high levels of prejudice, even though the beliefs of their religion were opposed to that type of attitude. Allport was able to explain this by looking at why individuals had religious commitments. He found that some people were attracted to religion for instrumental or **extrinsic** reasons as a way of achieving specific goals, and that these people were more likely to be prejudiced than those who had an **intrinsic** attitude and pursued religion for its own sake (Allport, 1966).

Allport's theory has been modified and expanded over time and has been a dominant construct in the psychology of religion research for many years. For instance, Richard Gorsuch and his colleagues have conceptualized the intrinsic and extrinsic stances as reflecting types of basic **religious motivation**, and were able to replicate their existence in non-Western religious groups. They found that measures of genuine religious involvement such as attendance were correlated with intrinsic but not extrinsic religiosity (Schaefer & Gorsuch, 1992). Another proposed revision has been that of Batson, who identified a third orientation called the **quest** or seeking orientation. Thus it is now common for social psychologists to talk about three dimensions of religious motivation:

1. *Extrinsic or means dimensions*: The use of religion to meet self-serving ends such as dealing with feelings of weakness and impotence (Vergote, 1997, p. 53). Research indicates that this is a common religious orientation but is associated with no beneficial effects and perhaps some negative ones.
2. *Intrinsic or ends dimension*: Religious commitment is used as a “master motive” for life, part of a coherent worldview. This orientation may have positive and negative consequences, although research has generally connected it with positive outcomes.
3. *Quest or seeking dimension*: An “open-ended readiness to confront ultimate, existential questions, coupled with a skepticism of definitive answers to these questions” (Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993, pp. 376–377). Batson argued that questers have the positive benefits of religion without having to tolerate the loss of freedom he believes is implicit in intrinsic religious commitment. Batson's views have led to many interesting studies but have not been consistently supported by research.

Schaefer and Gorsuch (1991) have argued that religious motivation is a central factor in religion. They have proposed a **Multivariate Belief-Motivation Theory**

**of Religiousness** that divides religion into three interacting domains: (1) motivation (intrinsic-extrinsic), (2) beliefs such as our concept of God, and (3) problem-solving or coping style (see Sections 8.3, 9.3.1 & 10.2). On the other hand, researchers like Kirkpatrick and Hood (1990) have been critical of the concept of religious motivation because of perceived conceptual and methodological problems. Others have criticized its tendency to reduce the complex phenomenon of religion to simply a type of human motivation (e.g., Vergote, 1969, pp. 57, 94–96). As a result the concept of religious motivation has been less influential in recent research.

Social psychologists like Allport and Gorsuch wrote from a perspective sympathetic to religion and have frequently pointed out positive aspects of religious behavior on both personal and social levels (Wulff, 2003). Allport in particular was willing to consider the moral quality of various personality orientations, which he thought could be demonstrated scientifically. He argued that psychology and religion were both about truth and so that ultimately there could be no conflict between them, although he rejected what he called “psychologism” or the attempt to reduce religion to psychological categories (Vande Kemp, 2000). However, not all social psychologists believe that religion is beneficial or needed. For instance, Daniel Batson and his colleagues have argued that “the religious Stranger does not appear to be on our side” (Batson et al., 1993, p. 373). This more negative assessment has been challenged in important ways over the last 15 years, as we will see throughout this book.

### ***1.4.7 Integration and Dialogue***

In the post World War II period, many Christians entered psychology either as academic teachers and researchers or as clinical practitioners. They were dissatisfied with what they saw as an anti-Christian bias within the field that was problematic both for themselves and for the people they were trying to serve. A key work that expressed some of this dissatisfaction was a book by Paul Vitz entitled *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship* (1977). In that book, Vitz argued that psychology had become a secular religion that was anti-Christian, perhaps hostile to most religious traditions, and that this bias was causing negative effects on individuals as well as society. He argued that much of the academic prejudice against Christianity is an automatic, assumed position by people who are largely ignorant of Christianity or the issues involved. Vitz attacked the “selfism” inherent in the secular humanism of Fromm. He argued that the positive view of humanity articulated by humanists was plainly contradicted by psychological research that demonstrated the inherent tendency of humans toward destructive aggression. He concluded from this that humanist selfism is not scientific and is simply a religious position, a set of values that gain scientific prestige through their inclusion in psychology.

There is considerable support for this position. A highly critical stance toward Christianity is obvious in the views of many of the people mentioned in this chapter, such as Leuba, Freud, Fromm, and Maslow. Research studies have found that (1) psychologists have substantially lower levels of religious belief

and participation than the general population, (2) few psychologists receive significant information or training in their graduate program related to religion or spirituality, and (3) very little psychological research concerns religion. For instance, an early 1990s review of 7 major APA journals found only 2.7% of studies assessed a religious variable (Weaver et al., 1998). A response to this bias and neglect can be found in the Christian integration and Biblical counseling movements.

#### 1.4.7.1 The Christian Integration Movement

Since most university psychology departments were perceived as being inhospitable to religion or psychologists with religious affiliations, a movement began to start independent schools that would conduct research and train clinicians in a more religion-friendly atmosphere, as well as try to develop an approach to psychology that would integrate good scientific knowledge with basic Christian beliefs. The term **integration** began to be used in the 1950s as a way of describing theory and research that attempted to combine psychological and theological perspectives. The 1960s saw the organization of the first independent, faith-based clinical psychology training programs. The movement has spawned a considerable literature and grown to encompass a number of scholarly journals and training programs (Vande Kemp, 1996). Explicitly Christian organizations like the Christian Association for Psychological Studies (CAPS) were created to supplement more secular groups such as Division 36 (Psychology of Religion) in the American Psychological Association or the Association for Spiritual, Ethical and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC) which is part of the American Counseling Association.

While there are a wide variety of approaches within the integration movement, there is broad agreement among its members that psychology and Christianity have the potential to illuminate each other (Ellens, 2004a). Through most of the 20th century the relationship was largely a unidirectional one, with psychologists studying religion and religious professionals and scholars (mostly Christian) studying psychological theories and techniques. However, more recently there have been attempts to critically evaluate psychological theories from a theological perspective, to make constructive use of religious ideas and practices in psychological theory and practice, and to engage in mutual dialogue (Jones, 1994). This critical evaluation has focused on the fact that psychological theories and practices are value laden and contain unacknowledged philosophical and metaphysical positions that may be at odds with a Christian view of the human person. Translation of Christian ideas into psychological categories thus has the potential to distort or alter theological beliefs and practices. Christian integration writers argue that they must prevent this by having a clear understanding of the theology and values underlying integration, as well as the implications of this theology for psychological theory and practice (cf. Jones, 2006; Murphy, 2005; Spilka & Bridges, 1989).

### 1.4.7.2 Biblical Counseling

While the integration approach gives a positive status to both psychology and Christianity, others have viewed the psychological contribution to integration with greater suspicion. Jay Adams (1970) and more recently David Powlison (2000, 2001, 2003) have argued that any Christian counseling strategy must be Biblically based and distinct from secular paradigms or theoretical commitments which can blind investigators and do not offer a coherent explanation of the human person. Powlison argues that non-Biblical models of counseling have a detached, impersonal quality avoided by the Bible and appeal mostly to human desire; they “systematically suppress awareness of our dependency on and accountability to God” (Powlison, 2003, p. 4) and our need for redemption. Biblical counselors generally believe that self-will, pride and personal sin are at the root of many problems. These factors are thought to lie behind our excessive focus on achievement and acquisition, problematic desires for superiority and control, and avoidance of the needs of others, all of which eventually lead to worry and anxiety. In this view, freedom comes when we give up attachments to power, set aside our pride and become more focused on others (see Section 14.3.1).

### 1.4.7.3 Asian Dialogues

The other two main psychology and religion dialogues that have taken place involve Buddhism and Hinduism. Conversations with Hinduism have largely been limited to appropriating specific techniques like yoga for use in clinical situations (see Section 10.3.2). The dialogue with Buddhism has been more extensive, probably due to its perceived commitment to a nontheistic view of the world and its complex understanding of human psychology (Wallace & Shapiro, 2006). Buddhist understandings have had a significant impact on psychological approaches to religion through their influence on Carl Jung and psychodynamic theorists like Erik Fromm. Particularly noteworthy was Fromm’s work with the Zen scholar D. T. Suzuki, that made Zen Buddhism a religious tradition of primary interest for some psychoanalysts (Parsons, 2000). Specific techniques inspired by Buddhism are seeing increasing use in clinical settings (see e.g., Section 11.4.2) and the broader importation of a Buddhist worldview into psychotherapy has also had an impact, particularly in psychoanalysis (see Section 14.3.2). However, the Buddhist dialogue has been somewhat limited by the fact that it has been dominated by Westerners and attracted little interest from Asians in the various Buddhist traditions (Heisig, 1999; Bankart, 2003).

### 1.4.7.4 Approaches to Integration

*Types of models.* Many different schemes for relating psychology and religion have been proposed; but, as Richard Gorsuch has aptly noted, none of them has seen any wide adoption. Ideas about the relationship between psychology and religion

can be described according to several characteristics including *congruence* (how well do psychology and religion fit together) and *priority* (should psychology or religion be counted as more important). There are three general positions that can be taken with regard to congruence—separation, conflict, and complement. In the **separation** model, it is assumed that psychology and religion each have their own areas of interest and approaches to truth and that both are necessary for a complete picture of reality. This was the traditional view in the science of the early modern period (see Section 2.2) and is still occasionally argued, as by the evolutionary theorist Stephen Jay Gould (1999, p. 65). Opposed to this is the **conflict** view, which holds that science and religion do have overlapping areas of interest (against the separation model) but that they provide different and conflicting truth claims (against the integration model). A third position is the **complement** view, which holds that science and religion deal with some of the same questions (against the separation model) but are congruent or complimentary (against the conflict model). In this view, both science and religion are vital because each provides important and irreplaceable viewpoints on human behavior (Ellens, 2004b). The latter position has been the traditional stance within the Roman Catholic Church. This view is congruent with the idea that psychology and theology have much to offer each other, and so interaction between them should be encouraged (Spilka & Bridges, 1989).

The complement model can be further divided into weak and strong versions. A weak position holds that some congruence is possible between psychology and religion but that in other areas there might be separation or conflict. In contrast, a strong complement model holds that it is possible to develop a single seamless system of truth that encompasses both psychology and religion. An example of weak complementarity is the position of Richard Gorsuch, who defines integration as “when two or more disciplines are jointly brought to bear on the same issue so that decisions about that issue reflect the contributions of both disciplines” (2002a, p. 6). Like Peter Homans (1968b) he argues that this integration can happen at both professional and personal levels. An example of the strong position might be that of John Carter and Bruce Narramore (1979). They argue that there is a unity of truth so that it should be possible to integrate truth from different sources, including psychology and theology (cf. Johnson, 1997).

The second issue in integration involves priority, whether psychology or religion will receive privileged status in the interaction of the two fields. This depends in part on one’s views of science and religion, so that it seems likely that there will never be a single agree-upon way of doing integration, even within a specific religious tradition (Vande Kemp, 1998). Three positions can be taken here: **confessionalism**, which privileges the perspectives of a specific religious tradition over those of psychology; **scientism**, which argues that science is the superior or only way to gain true knowledge and thus should be privileged in the relationship with religion; and **dialogical integration**, which tries to give equal respect to each field, although the methods and conclusions of one might be preferred in certain areas.

An example of confessionalism is the work of Robert Roberts (1997a,b). Roberts argues that integration can never be based primarily on psychology, because the field does not offer a body of mutually congruent and coherent beliefs and that any

privileging of psychology will undermine spirituality and provide unnecessarily reductionistic or simplistic explanations of human phenomena. He believes that Christianity will provide a better base for integration, because it includes a resistance to overly individualistic views of the person found in psychology, as well as strong concepts of agency and sin. He has a weaker view of the possibilities of integration because he believes that, while psychology and theology have many interests in common, there are fundamental differences in sources of data (e.g., the use of Biblical narratives). Gorsuch, on the other hand, argues for a position of dialogical integration, in which the positions of all parties in the dialogue are respected. He rejects scientism, saying that a true integration dialogue requires an acknowledgement that other sources of knowledge beyond science are useful (2002a). Current figures that argue for scientism would include some writers in the evolutionary psychology of religion movement, such as Pascal Boyer (see Section 6.2.3).

*Current status.* The integration and Biblical counseling movements continue to be very vital, attracting many adherents and generating lots of research and writing. It can also be argued that the integration movements have had a significant role in changing negative views toward religion and spirituality within the profession of psychology, although clearly other factors have been involved as well. However, there is tension and less dialogue than one would like. Clearly, integration is not easy for, along with areas of common ground, there are differences in goals and even strategies of inquiry, both in terms of theory and practical application (Jones, 1996). One issue that is often important but is left unaddressed has to do with the context of the discussion. As Browning and Cooper point out, an integration dialogue within an evangelical Christian faith community is in a different context than a dialogue in a more public forum (Browning & Cooper, 2004, p. 263).

## 1.5 Religious and Theological Responses to Psychology

During the early part of the 20th century the theological response to scientific psychology was muted. Protestant Christian theology was heavily influenced by the neo-orthodox position of Karl Barth (1886–1968), who believed that theology should be based totally upon “the Word of God” rather than human experience or psychological theory. Protestant dialogue during this period was mostly carried out in the context of the pastoral counseling and theology movements. In Roman Catholicism, the situation was somewhat different. Early Catholic psychologists like Edward Pace (1861–1938) and Thomas Verner Moore (1877–1969) were ordained priests with substantial training in theology and a commitment to working as psychologists within the Catholic context. While this situation was more favorable for dialogue, there was often opposition by suspicious members of the Catholic hierarchy (Gillespie, 2001). However, by mid-century more Protestant writers had begun to join the dialogue. Especially noteworthy are Paul Tillich (1886–1965) and Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971).

### 1.5.1 Paul Tillich

Theological responses to psychology are influenced not only by the individual views of the theologian toward psychology but also by their theological stance. Tillich adopted an *apologetic* approach to theology that began with human experience and tried to make the Christian message appealing to contemporary thinkers, rather than a *kerygmatic* stance (e.g., Karl Barth) that gives priority to the basic Christian message (Cooper, 2006, p. 196). Tillich called his apologetic approach the “method of correlation” (1951, pp. 60–63). He analyzed the human situation using materials from contemporary thought and then reinterpreted Christian theology to show how the Christian message provided answers to modern questions (1957, pp. 28, 239). His method was dialectical, and he tended to avoid the approach of later writers who wanted to critically evaluate the positions taken by secular and scientific writers (1963a, p. 51; Tracy, 1975, p. 46). He used two primary tools in building his system—the existential philosophy of writers like Soren Kierkegaard or Martin Heidegger, and the insights of psychoanalysis.

#### 1.5.1.1 Tillich and the Human Existential Situation

**Existentialism** tries to understand the human person by looking at their connection to the ultimate characteristics of existence like freedom (we all have the power to make choices and change or transcend our situation) and finitude (we always work within limitations and eventually will die). Religion for him was intimately connected to these ultimate concerns and our attempts at self-transcendence, a focus shared with humanistic psychology (1963b, p. 107; Maslow, 1964, p. 45). In his theology, Tillich emphasized the transcendence of an infinitely free God who is not only the ground of all nature but beyond it as well. Tillich argued that this dialectic between nature and freedom is also repeated in our human situation. We are part of the natural world and thus finite, but we also transcend the natural world because we possess a finite version of God’s infinite freedom. The tension between these forms the basis of what Tillich called an “existential gap” or existential situation. The dialectic between the constraints of existence and nature and our essential freedom is “the condition for man’s religious existence” (1957, p. 10). The transcending possibility of spirit and freedom means that religion cannot be reduced to psychological dynamics or moral self-integration (1963b, pp. 118, 192).

#### 1.5.1.2 Tillich and Depth Psychology

Tillich used psychoanalysis to help articulate the psychological dynamics involved in dealing with ultimate concerns. An individual who is able to stand at the balance point between the demands of existence and their essence as a free person he referred to as “centered” (1957, p. 60). He saw this state of balance or self-integration as the goal of a healthy life. However, Tillich argued that this ideal

balance can never be realized because we are finite and unable to assimilate the many conflicting demands of existence. The result of this lack of balance is confusion, self-alienation, and meaninglessness, leaving us at the mercy of internal compulsions and external demands. It is our awareness of this situation of finitude, lack of meaning and helplessness that leads to **ontological anxiety**, a basic tension that is built into existence and must be accepted. This anxiety is different from **neurotic anxiety** that is caused by psychological problems and is open to psychological help (1957, p. 34; 2000; Cooper, 2006, pp. 37–52). Fleeing from ontological anxiety creates neurotic anxiety and irrational or unreasonable fears that tie up the person with inner conflicts. However, through the religious life and support of a spiritual community, people could embrace a capacity for transcendence and by making appropriate “moral” choices develop a genuine sense of identity (1963b). Science, on the other hand, is unable to understand or help with ontological anxiety because it detaches existence from transcendence and tries to explain and control everything on a purely natural basis.

Perhaps in part because of his correlational method and his own personal experience with traumatic anxiety as a chaplain during World War I, Tillich was quite open to the basic findings of psychoanalysis such as the existence and power of unconscious motives and their impact on some religious activities, as well as the problem of guilt and the need for acceptance (1957, p. 177; 1963b; Cooper, 2006, p. 41). He appreciated and accepted Freud’s work, although he observed that it had limitations because it ignored our existential situation and our essential nature as free persons. Not surprisingly, Tillich also rejected Freud’s apparent position of total psychological or biological determinism (1957, pp. 54, 66). He was more ambivalent toward behaviorism; for instance, he rejected the idea that life processes are oriented toward the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain because hedonistic views ignored the presence of other forces like creativity (1963b, p. 56).

### 1.5.1.3 Tillich, Fromm and Rogers

Terry Cooper (2006) notes that there are a number of interesting points of agreement and disagreement between Tillich and humanists like Fromm and Rogers. Tillich and Fromm had a long acquaintance that went back to their days in Germany; both were influenced by Marx and Freud, but they had many disagreements as well. Tillich agreed with Fromm that selfishness and self-hate rather than self-love are the basic human problems. However, Tillich saw that these problems could not be solved apart from God, while Fromm wanted to eliminate God talk from the conversation altogether. Fromm thought that we have tendencies toward both good and evil and can choose good, overcoming our problems without help. Tillich believed our estrangement was too great for self-solution and that we had a need to wait for help, a passivity that was offensive to Fromm.

Tillich and the humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers also had some areas of agreement in addition to their differences. Rogers and Tillich both saw inner conflict or self-estrangement as a basic human problem, but they had different ideas about the nature

of estrangement and how acceptance helps. Rogers saw self-estrangement as an incongruence between our true self and societal expectations or pressures that thwart our drive toward growth. His answer to this was an experience of unconditional positive regard by a therapist or other person who sets aside their values and is nonjudgmental. Tillich, on the other hand, argued that estrangement is ultimately built into existence, so we need more than human sources of acceptance (Cooper, 2006, p. 5). Tillich also rejected the claim made by Rogers that psychotherapy can and should be value free. In Tillich's view, any relationship—including the therapeutic relationship—involves a commitment to some kind of values. Cooper argues that Rogers viewed himself as making psychological claims but that actually his theory reveals many hidden theological or ontological assumptions that go beyond “scientific psychology.”

While Tillich was extremely influential in the psychology and religion dialogue during the 1950s through the 1970s, he is less so today as his existential approach is not central to contemporary discussions (Polkinghorne, 2004, p. 51). Tillich tended to describe highly personal encounters with abstract concepts that are seemingly removed from qualities of personal care and love. Fromm even questioned whether Tillich's thought really represented an authentic statement of the Christian faith (Cooper, 2006). Nevertheless an understanding of his work is vital in the study of the psychology and religion dialogue.

### ***1.5.2 Reinold Niebuhr***

Another prominent 20th-century theologian and participant in the dialogue was Reinold Niebuhr (1955; 1996a,b), who produced some interesting theological perspectives on Freud. While Niebuhr approved of some of Freud's positions such as his vision of human complexity, he had a number of criticisms of Freud, including his denial of transcendence and freedom.

#### **1.5.2.1 Niebuhr's View of the Human Person**

Niebuhr believed that each of us is finite and thus bound by the laws of nature, but at the same time we are free and able to transcend our situation; we are “a unity of finiteness and freedom, of involvement in natural processes and transcendence over process” (1996b, p. 113). This self-transcendence is evident in the way that our natural impulses run beyond the bounds of nature, while nonhuman animals are restrained by natural instinct. This contradiction between finiteness and freedom or transcendence is the occasion—but not the cause—for many human problems. “This essential homelessness of the human spirit is the ground of religion; for the self which stands outside itself and the world cannot find the meaning of life in itself or the world” (1996a, p. 14).

In Niebuhr's view, the tension between our two natures has important consequences. It causes anxiety, which can be a source of creativity or a motivation to hide our finiteness and freedom. When we avoid our finiteness, we ignore our

limitations, leading us to overestimate ourselves as individuals or as a race. This can lead to arrogance and fanaticism, either in rationality or religion. Avoidance of our freedom is also problematic, for it blinds us to human potentials such as the possibility for true altruism. It also hides from us the possibility that freedom has both creative and evil possibilities and so can be misused. Contemporary history is full of evidence of the potential for evil in modern systems of warfare, power, and economics, but we still deny this evil potential, supposing that somehow these problems are just due to ignorance, not enough science, or social forces which we are about to overcome, rather than seeing our poor choices. Remorse and repentance (as opposed to simple psychological guilt) are thus in some sense religious experiences, because they show an awareness of our situation of finiteness before God.

### 1.5.2.2 Avoidance in Freud

Niebuhr appreciated the fact that Freud recognized our finite nature, but criticized him for his naturalistic stance, which made it impossible for him to recognize the presence of freedom and transcendence. Freud rejected the possibility of transcendence or freedom, because he attributed all behavior to human drives, developmental events, or culture, leading to pessimistic views on individuals and society. Niebuhr saw this as an incoherent position, as the ego and even Freud's id, which was supposedly ruled by blind instinctual forces, showed themselves to be wily and smart, revealing "subtleties and strategies that are not part of nature" (1996a, p. 43). Also, while Freud saw reason and intellect as our best hope, he also claimed that we are totally controlled by instinct and culture and thus not truly responsible. The implication of Freud's denial of freedom is that all guilt must be neurotic guilt, denying the possibility that a person might have legitimate guilt from violating either personal or more universal norms and the claims that others have on us.

Niebuhr saw the problem of freedom as not confined to Freud but a general limitation of psychology. Freedom is something that allows us to transcend the boundaries of predictable time and space, but empirical psychology can only study things within those bounds. The mystery of freedom is apparent in the fact that "any previous event is an intelligible, but not a sufficient, cause for the succeeding event" (1955, p. 61). What we do can be understood in retrospect but cannot be predicted in advance. Human activity in history is more like a kind of practical wisdom than a predictable rationality (cf. Section 6.3.4). In his view, a psychology that wants a rich view of the individual will thus have to go beyond the boundaries of natural science.

Humanistic psychologists responded to Niebuhr in a predictably negative fashion. Carl Rogers (1962), while sympathetic to Niebuhr rejection of deterministic naturalism and his advocacy of freedom, disliked Niebuhr's claim to possess the truth and rejected his focus on human sinfulness. Rogers' view of human nature rejected both the notions of perfection and evil; he believed that people were inherently "positive, forward-moving, constructive, realistic, trustworthy" (Rogers, 1957). Niebuhr offers food for thought to those who want a view of human nature that tries to balance optimism and realism.

### *1.5.3 Hermeneutic Writers: Don Browning and Paul Ricoeur*

Another influential response from the religion side of the dialogue with psychology came from practical theologian Don Browning, who offered a critique of psychological theories used in counseling. Browning based his approach in part on the interpretive or **hermeneutic** approach to understanding found in the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur. According to Ricoeur, any kind of understanding—including a psychological theory—comes into being through an interpretive process involving a series of dialectical relationships that move the interpreter from their original view of the world to a new understanding (Ricoeur, 1976; 1981, p. 93). This means that our understandings and theories are strongly influenced by our starting view of things, including our current beliefs, personal experiences, and the culture and history of any larger groups to which we belong. This starting point is known as our **pre-understanding**. In the hermeneutic view of things, knowledge is not some single verifiable fact but a set of new ideas “opened up” by our attempt to move beyond a pre-understanding. We gain new understanding as we appropriate these ideas and make them our own (Ricoeur, 1974, p. 87). Since knowledge is dependent upon the starting context, it is prudent to know and critique the relevant pre-understanding factors and understand their effect on a person who is advocating new knowledge claims (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 90; Packer, 1988; see Section 6.3). For instance, a hermeneutic investigator would be interested in the fact that Freud had a strong pre-existing personal belief in atheism, as this pre-understanding most likely had an influence on how he interpreted data about religion.

Browning has utilized a hermeneutic approach in a couple of ways. First, he has attempted to uncover the pre-understandings of the various schools of psychotherapy and subject these to a Christian critique (Browning & Cooper, 2004). In the hermeneutic perspective, all psychological theorists begin with implicit assumptions, worldviews, and ethical points of view that go beyond what is explicitly present in their research and often attempt to reduce all behavior to these implicit worldviews or metaphors without considering the validity of their pre-understanding and how it might distort the object of study (Browning & Cooper, 2004). This is an issue in all the sciences, but this is especially true in psychology and religion where personal beliefs for or against religion can be very strong. This does not mean that good science is not possible—just that we must be aware of our biases and those of others (Vergote, 1997, pp. 30–31; 1998, p. 40; but cf. Beit-Hallahmi, 1985). In Browning’s view, the secular presuppositions of many psychological theories are questionable, and adjusting these presuppositions could result in a more adequate theory. Second, Browning has attempted to use the hermeneutic model to develop what he calls a practical theology that looks at how religious practices actually function in real life. This approach rejects a technological view of religious practice and argues that religious activities can only be understood when they are considered in the context of their relational, cultural, and theological surround. True religion is not something one does on the side; it is a way of life (Browning, 1991; see Section 6.3).

## 1.6 Current Research Approaches

The basic philosophical assumptions behind scientific approaches to religion will be explored in the next chapter. Here, we provide just a quick summary of commonly used research methods that will make it easier to evaluate and appreciate the large body of empirical research that exists on topics related to psychology and religion. These methods fall into two general groupings—quantitative and qualitative.

### 1.6.1 *Quantitative Methods*

Quantitative methods allow scientists to measure and look at relationships between important variables. In this process, important variables are operationalized through a process of **methodological reductionism** or simplification so they can be measured, and then measurement instruments are developed that measure the variable of interest and give a numeric value in relation to it. For instance, in religion research, we often want to study a person's religious commitment, but this is a very rich construct that cannot be grasped numerically, so we reduce it to a simpler variable like Sunday worship attendance that can be more easily measured. A key problem here is that the way constructs are defined and operationalized can affect how they are related to each other (Watson, 1994, p. 120). Also, quantitative surveys force individuals to respond according to categories or choices defined by the experimenter, when none of the categories may accurately represent its position (Berger, 2007).

How does one investigate relationships among variables using quantitative data? Assuming that one cannot take an **experimental** approach by manipulating variables in a controlled setting like a lab and seeing the effects, one is left doing what is called a **quasi-experimental** approach, which involves careful selection and observation of variables in a group of subjects and then generalization from sample subjects to the characteristics of the larger population they are drawn from. **Descriptive statistics** (such as averages) can be used to understand characteristics of the sample, and then **inferential statistics** (also known as significance tests) allow us to understand how confidently we may be able to generalize conclusions about a sample to a larger population. Typically the researcher comes to the project with a theory and specific hypotheses or predictions based on the theory that they want to test.

Quantitative research can proceed from one of two stances. In **exploratory analysis**, the researcher thinks that there are relationships among a group of variables but is unclear about the nature of the relationships. The exploratory analysis examines a wide variety of possible relationships using (1) an inferential statistical test to determine whether a significant relationship exists between variables and (2) descriptive statistics to determine the **effect size**, a measure of the strength and nature of the relationship. The classic measure of effect size is the **correlation coefficient**, which ranges from a positive relationship of 1.0 (perfectly related, where variables increase or decrease together) to 0 (not related) to a perfect negative relationship of  $-1.0$  (perfectly related, where one variable increases while the other decreases).

It is extremely important to look at both inferential and descriptive measures in evaluating the results of a research study, as often a study may find results that are statistically significant in the inferential test but relatively unimportant when one examines the effect size. For instance, Krauss and Flaherty (2001) discovered a significant negative correlation between mood and quest scores, with higher quest scores related to lower levels of mood. This is an interesting finding, but how important is it? The size of the correlation coefficient is  $-.15$ , which means that only slightly more than 2% of the variance in mood is related to quest score, and 98% is related to error or other factors. Thus it is significant but relatively unimportant.

The second possible approach is the **confirmatory analysis**. In this procedure, the researcher identifies the hypothesized relationships between variables ahead of time and then asks the question, is my model consistent with the data? Confirmatory analytic procedures such as structural equations modeling can be powerful tools for testing elaborate models and are seeing increasing use in psychology of religion research.

Scientists look for law-like regularities that underlie the complexity of nature, so simplification is a natural part of the scientific enterprise. A number of statistical procedures like **factor analysis** have been developed to look for simple underlying dimensions in complex data. These analyses are helpful, although the presence of simple factors in data does not necessarily indicate that these dimensions have real existence—they are just statistically handy for simplifying things (D'Andrade, 1995, pp. 83–86).

Even though quantitative research seems straightforward, and it has added much to our knowledge about the human person, interpretive problems remain. For instance, most of the research in psychology of religion uses correlational or quasi-experimental methods that cannot establish whether religion is a cause or an effect of psychological factors (Batson et al., 1993, p. 373). Another problem is one of measurement, which is particularly difficult in psychology of religion research, since variables like “religiousness” or “spirituality” are difficult to define and measure. Generally a measurement instrument is thought to be satisfactory if it has good **reliability** (it gives consistent results) and **validity** (it measures what it is supposed to measure). A tremendous amount of effort has gone into devising instruments with good measurement characteristics, perhaps at the expense of research that could be devoted to more substantive questions (Gorsuch, 1984). Many of these are self-report measures, although some constructs with religious significance such as humility may not be measurable by self-report (Tangney, 2002). Finally, psychologists involved in the study of religion often have strong pro and anti views, so investigators must work hard to guard against bias and resist the temptation to offer judgments about the ultimate meaning and nature of religion (Gorsuch, 1988; Vergote, 1998, p. 39).

### ***1.6.2 Qualitative Approaches***

Qualitative methods provide a different and complementary approach to research. They are designed to be flexible, sensitive to social context, and focused on meaning and action as they emerge in real-life situations. A qualitative approach attempts to create holistic descriptions and understandings that may or may not be supplemented

with quantification or statistical analysis (Mason, 2002). These methods are especially useful when you do not know much about an area and need to construct an initial understanding of a phenomenon. They are also helpful in situations where complex phenomena are being studied or where the individual meaning of certain experiences is of interest. There has been an increasing number of qualitative studies in the psychology and religion area (for a review, see Aten & Hernandez, 2005). Some authors argue that the holistic and experiential nature of spirituality is better captured by qualitative research (e.g., Hamilton & Jackson, 1998; cf. Hay, 1979). In fact, quantitative and qualitative approaches are both valuable, address different levels of complexity, and have different roles in the scientific process. Qualitative methods are particularly good at generating ideas and possible models, which may become the target of further research using quantitative procedures (Belzen & Hood, 2006).

### 1.6.2.1 General Characteristics

*Basic philosophy.* Qualitative research is often more a philosophy or attitude toward inquiry rather than a specific technical methodology. A key attitude is openness to having one's ideas changed and flexibility in the research process. Understanding is more important than prediction or control, and validity is more important than reliability in qualitative studies, so the investigator strives to use methods that will accurately describe the phenomenon in question. This can be seen in attitudes toward sampling: while quantitative researchers try to use standardized procedures and random samples of subjects, qualitative researchers focus on selecting informants who are experts and will provide the maximum amount of information. Clearly formulated research questions and the use of multiple methods are used to enhance the validity of qualitative studies.

*Contextuality.* Human behavior and experience always takes place in a particular environment, so good research provides relevant information about the context of the phenomenon being studied. Qualitative methods assume that these situations are complex and that a holistic understanding is valuable. This has several implications. First, a holistic understanding cannot afford to always ignore outliers or people whose pattern does not follow the norm. Second, the investigator himself or herself forms part of the context for the study, as the person doing the interpreting affects the interpretation.

*Participant focus.* A distinguishing feature of qualitative methods is their dependence on various types of interviews and the way they are conducted. First, in qualitative interviews, questions are not standardized; rather subjects are asked questions in a way that will best allow them to express their knowledge of a topic. Second, there is an assumption that the people you are interviewing have a valuable and unique knowledge about your research question. While the knowledge of the subjects may not be accurate, it is not automatically assumed that the investigator is the expert and the subjects possess only folk knowledge (Gabriel, 2004). Particularly in research asking about individual experiences and life stories, it is assumed that

the participant has an expert's role. Third, qualitative researchers generally try to ensure that any research will be of benefit to the participants and that all parties will have a voice in the interpretation and dissemination of results from the investigation. The intensive, relational nature of the qualitative process makes it impossible to treat participants simply as objects of study. Devising an analytical scheme and categories that are not relevant to the participants is thought to be of questionable value (cf. Roff, 2001).

### 1.6.2.2 Specific Approaches

*Grounded theory.* **Grounded theory** (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) is a qualitative approach in which one begins with a research question rather than a theory and specific hypotheses and tries to construct a theory and categories on the basis of the data. The design, methods, and concepts of the study are allowed to emerge during the research process as a result of developing theory. Analysis in grounded theory is a continuous process of conversation between researchers and data. Description is used to identify the categories of phenomena, interrelationships among conditions (structure), unfolding action (process), and consequences. The theory and categories are then refined until theoretical saturation is reached, and new data produces no new understanding. The research is very participant-focused, and it is expected that the needs of the participants, as well as their ideas about interpretation should be taken into account, although the participants are not always assumed to be completely knowledgeable.

*Ethnographic interviews and observation.* Ethnographic research methods were originally developed to study various cultures, and thus their ultimate aim is the collection of information about groups. Ethnography generally involves (1) *fieldwork*, traveling to and living in or near the group under study; (2) *participant observation*, where you actually participate in the group, allowing you to blend in and get new insights in the context of real-life situations; and (3) *ethnographic interviewing* of informants selected for their knowledge of the group and ability to talk about it. The result is information that would not be attainable by other means (Bernard, 2002). While rarely used in psychology and religion research, studies of religious communities such as the work of Nancy Ammerman (1998) and James Hopewell (1987) have used these methods.

*Phenomenological analysis.* The phenomenological approach has its basis in philosophy rather than in psychology, but it lies behind most if not all methods of qualitative data collection. The philosophical roots of the work are typically traced to the writings of Husserl (e.g., 1970). The basic thrust of this type of investigation is to examine the subjective experience of the individual from a point of *epoche*, a detached objective stance taken by the investigator. Since the method focuses on subjective experience, it is typically used when we wish to understand a certain type of experience (e.g., a religious experience) or the reactions of people to a certain type of situation (Moustakas, 1994). The research begins with interviews that have both open-ended and guided questions. The goal of the interview is to

perform a phenomenological reduction of the experience to gain a fresh perception of the source of the experience and its meaning. After setting aside or bracketing out things so that the phenomenon can be focused on, the researcher looks for the *horizon* or boundary of the experience, as well as its meaning and constituents such as temporal or spatial quality, causal inference, and intention. Individual descriptions are then integrated into a composite textural and structural description.

*Hermeneutic analysis.* Hermeneutic approaches have traditionally been used in the interpretation of discourse, textual materials, and narrative, with the goal of increased understanding. Methods inspired by hermeneutics have also been used generally in psychology and more specifically in the psychology of religion (Packer & Addison, 1989; Belzen, 1997). They will be discussed further in Chapter 6 (see also Chapter 9.3.3).

## 1.7 Conclusion and a Look Ahead

The fields of psychology, religion, and spirituality have a vast, rich heritage that is beyond the scope of any single volume or set of volumes. Even the literature on the intersection between psychology and religion is vast. The remainder of this book will provide a framework for understanding contemporary discussions in psychology and religion and some examples of the excellent work that is taking place at the intersection between these two fields of human endeavor.

In the next two chapters (Chapters 2 and 3), we will look at some basic concepts in psychology, science, and religion that underlie any discussions between the two fields. Then the next six chapters will consider specific approaches to the study of psychology and religion: experiential/phenomenological (Chapter 4), psychodynamic (Chapter 5), developmental (Chapters 7, 8, 9), and new approaches (Chapter 6). We will consider empirical research, as well as important theories and religious/theological critiques that have emerged within each of these approaches.

Religion and psychology share a concern with the quality of human life. They hope to offer guidance to people seeking to find meaningful, fulfilled, and even happy lives. Thus, a final goal of this book is to harness theory and empirical research in the service of practical applications. How can we in the 21st century build positive communities? In what ways can we help individuals deal with the challenges of life and develop richly satisfying lives? The concluding chapters of this book (Chapters 10, 11, 12, 13, 14) will attempt to begin sketching out answers to these questions.