CHAPTER 1

The Psychological Nature and Functions of Religion

There is only one religion, though there are a hundred versions of it.

I assert that the cosmic religious experience is the strongest and the noblest driving force behind scientific research.

I am an atheist still, thank God.

The intractable mystery that was religion is now just another set of difficult but manageable problems.

Things have come to a pretty pass when religion is allowed to invade the sphere of private life.[1]

THE WHY, WHAT, AND HOW OF THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION

Why Should We Study Religion Psychologically?

There is a surprisingly simple answer to the question of why psychologists should study religion. Religion is of the utmost importance to many people, and many fascinating behaviors are performed in its name. Religion, especially in the "Abrahamic" traditions (i.e., Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—the three major traditions acknowledging Abraham as a prophet and founder), is an integral part of many aspects of our human existence. We surround ourselves with spiritual references, creating a context in which the sacred is invoked to convey the significance of major life events. Regardless of time or place, religion is omnipresent and affects people's lives. It is also true that religion has a dark side and may itself be viewed in negative terms. Some, such as Sam Harris (2004), may be right when they claim that more evil is done in the name of religion than in anything else. Indeed, newly emerging groups of atheists and nonbelievers are challenging the very basis of any and all religious thought as delusional (Dawkins, 2006). As we describe throughout this book, religion, including spirituality (we discuss the distinction between these two terms later in this chapter and throughout

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[1]These quotations come, respectively, from the following sources: Shaw (1931, p. 378); Einstein (1931, p. 357); Luis Buñuel, quoted in Rogers (1983, p. 175); Boyer (2001, p. 2); Lord Melbourne, quoted in Cecil (1966, p. 181).

the text), has the capacity to bring out the best—and worst—in people. The highly respected personality and social psychologist Gordon Allport, who was also a leading scholar in the psychological study of religion, once said, "The role of religion is paradoxical. It makes prejudice and it unmakes prejudice" (1954, p. 444). Religion thus has both a bright and a dark side.

Is Religion in a Period of Decline?

There is a common perception that religion is losing its influence in society; 70% of Americans in one survey so indicated (The Gallup Poll, 2010a). The degree to which this is an accurate perception depends largely on how religion and spirituality are understood. Certainly there are cultural differences. Europe has already experienced a period where religion, especially institutional religion, has declined. There is evidence that the number of people who identify themselves as atheist or agnostic, as well as people who do not identify with any religion, has increased, but primarily in Europe and to a lesser extent in the United States and Canada (Pew Research Center, 2010). But this is not true everywhere. In fact, it is projected that by the year 2050, atheists and agnostics "will make up a *declining* share of the world's total population" (Pew Research Center, 2015a; emphasis added).

In the United States in particular, few human concerns are taken more seriously than religion. Research tells us that about 92% of U.S. residents believe in God (The Gallup Poll, 2011), and that about 90% pray (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999). Furthermore, 8 out of 10 Americans say that religion is very important (56%) or fairly important (24%), though these numbers have slightly declined in the past two decades (Newport, 2007b). Even among emerging adults, for whom religion is perceived to be losing its influence the most, 70% say that religion is important or very important in their lives (Harvard Institute of Politics [IOP], 2008), and spirituality remains important even in the context of college (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Hill, 2011). Simply put, most Americans see their religious faith as part and parcel of the larger picture of living their lives. Our role is to keep this larger picture before us as we attempt to understand the psychological role of faith in the individual personality. However, we are also cognizant that in many European countries, religion is of much less significance. Religion is more salient in some cultures than in others. Furthermore, religions outside the Abrahamic faiths, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, differ in substantial ways from the Abrahamic faiths and have been less studied by psychologists of religion—although, as we note, this is beginning to change.

The preceding discussion answers another fundamental question: "Why has religion attained such status?" This is a problem not only for both the social sciences and psychology; it is also one for religion, particularly for the theologians who justify and support each faith. Though we may not deal directly with theology, the topics and issues discussed in these pages are central to both psychology and religion, and therefore to religious people everywhere. Particularly in Western civilization, and especially in the North American milieu (for which psychologists have the most reliable empirical data), religion is an ever-present and extremely important aspect of our collective heritage.

What Is the Psychology of Religion?

Psychologists of religion want to know what religion is *psychologically*. However, just as scholars debate the definition of "religion," so do they debate the definition of "psychology." The discussions of psychology and methodology in most contemporary psychology textbooks

lack a sophisticated philosophical treatment of various assumptions that are involved in a commitment to any given methodology (Belzen & Hood, 2006; Miles, 2007). This can be illustrated by the fact that the contemporary psychology of religion and spirituality is repeating the scenario that characterized the emergence of the discipline. Our acknowledgment of this will frame our exploration of the methodological options available for psychology of religion.

Even though our approach here examines the person in the sociocultural context, it focuses primarily on the individual; this distinguishes psychological analysis from sociology and anthropology, which examine religion in society and culture—though sometimes the distinction is difficult to make. Our commitment is to no single methodology or ontological perspective. Thus we cannot rest comfortably with any declaration presented as if it defined a discipline or required a priori ontological assumptions. Our discussion assumes "methodological pluralism" (Roth, 1987). That is, we believe that religion and spirituality are best illuminated by a variety of methods, each of which contributes something to our understanding. More controversially, we also assume the stance of "methodological agnosticism," in which transcendent realities remain as possible contributors to a full understanding of religion (Hood, 2012b; Newberg & Newberg, 2010; Porpora, 2006). Furthermore, we accept the call by Emmons and Paloutzian (2003, p. 395; emphasis in original) for "a new *multilevel interdisciplinary paradigm*" for the study of religion.

The perpetual issue for psychology has been to what extent, if any, it can include religious or spiritual constructs that explicitly involve transcendence. Many psychologists subscribe to what is known as the "methodological exclusion of the transcendent," arguing that an empirical psychology must remain within the limits of natural science and not admit any reference to transcendence as playing a causal role in psychology (Flournoy, 1903). In what remains a useful distinction, Dittes (1969) provided four possible options. Each has methodological implications—two that include the possibility of including transcendence, and two that necessarily exclude transcendence. The issue is relevant, insofar as some have argued that in order for psychology of religion to gain respectability, it must court mainstream psychological methods (Batson, 1977, 1979), while others have argued that mainstream psychology can be enhanced by adapting methods and topics unique to the psychology of religion (James, 1890/1950; Hood, 2012b).

Two of Dittes's options support methods that allow the psychology of religion to integrate with mainstream psychology. Dittes's first option is the claim that the only variables operating in religion are the same that operate in mainstream psychology. Therefore, the psychology of religion need have no unique methodologies, as its subject matter is not unique. The second option is that while the variables operating in religion are not unique, they may be more salient in religious contexts, and thus their effect is greater within religion than outside of it. However, they remain purely psychological variables. By definition, these two options adopt the principle of the exclusion of the transcendent first championed by Flournoy, as noted above.

Dittes's second two options allow for the possibility of the inclusion of the transcendent, especially in the study of spiritual experience. The least controversial of the first in this set of two options is that psychological variables uniquely interact in religious contexts, and thus the psychology of religion must acknowledge religion as a cultural phenomenon and study psychological processes that interact with religion (Hood, 2010, 2012b). The final option is that there are unique variables operating in religion that either do not operate in or are ignored by mainstream psychologists. This can include acknowledging the transcendent as

an additional causal factor in spiritual experience (Hood, 2012b; Porpora, 2006). Obviously, Dittes's second set of options is more compatible with a nonreductive integrative paradigm for the psychology of religion and spirituality, which seeks to integrate theological and psychological constructs in meaningful research designs. It is also more compatible with the claim that at least some forms of science and some forms of spiritual experience are epistemologically similar (James, 1902/1985; Miles, 2007; Walach, Kohls, von Stillfried, Hinterberger, & Schmidt, 2009). We assume that a basic goal of the psychology of religion is to understand people within the context of their faith commitments. The psychology of religion is but one of many applications of this rather broad definition of psychology; in fact, over 50 specialties have been designated divisions of the American Psychological Association (APA). These divisions represent not only such basic psychological topics as personality, coping/adjustment, clinical psychology, psychological development, and social psychology, but also such specific domains as health psychology, psychology of women, gay and lesbian issues, and peace psychology. For us, the most pertinent one is Division 36, whose history can be briefly noted here as instructive of the diversity that characterizes researchers in the psychology of religion.

A Brief History of Division 36 of the APA

What eventually became Division 36 of the APA began when the Catholic Psychological Association began meeting as an interest group at the 1946 annual meeting of the APA. This interest group gradually morphed into a group named Psychologists Interested in Religious Issues (PIRI), a title formally adopted in 1970 with the intent of obtaining divisional status in the APA. After an initially failed attempt, PIRI obtained divisional status in 1974. In 1992, the division's name was changed to Psychology of Religion. The most recent change occurred in 2010, when Division 36 officially became the Association for the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality.

This brief history suggests tensions and commitments that continue both to unite and to divide psychologists of religion. Whether psychologists are "interested" in religious issues, want to explore psychology *and* religion, seek to identify a psychology *of* religion, or seek to be involved in an association of psychology and spirituality has implications that will become evident throughout this text. To cite but one example, recent handbooks reviewing our field tend to be titled with some variation of *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*. Paloutzian and Park (2013a) initiated this trend, focusing upon Dittes's first two options. However, the official APA handbook in two volumes goes by the same name, with the first volume devoted to a review of the empirical literature (Pargament, Exline, & Jones, 2013) and the second devoted to clinical application that mesh nicely with Dittes's second two options (Pargament, Mahoney, & Shafranske, 2013). However, as Körver (2015, p. 252) has noted, many psychologists worry that the APA can be seen as promoting superstition and magic, especially among psychologists committed to Dittes's first two options and denying that there is a sacred or transcendent dimension. Finally, yet another handbook (Miller, 2012a; see Miller, 2012b, pp. 1–4) breaks fully with the restrictions of Dittes's reductionistic options and argues for a "postmaterialist" psychology of spirituality—one fully committed to the reality of a sacred transcendent dimension and questioning psychological science's fundamental core ontological assumptions. The diversity of these debates and of the methodologies they support is evident throughout this text.

Understanding Our Limits

We must always keep in mind that there is a major difference between religion per se and religious behavior, motivation, perception, and cognition. We study these human considerations, not religion as such. It is important, therefore, that psychologists of religion recognize their limits. The psychological study of religion cannot directly answer questions about the truth claims of any religion; attempting to do so is beyond its scope. A psychologist of religion may offer insights into why a person holds a specific belief or engages in a particular religious behavior, but this says nothing directly about the truth claim itself that may underlie the specific belief or behavior. However, having said this, we also acknowledge that psychology has implications affecting all of the domains just discussed—and, as we have noted above, psychologists vary widely in what ontological assumptions and methodological commitments they accept in the study of religion.

The Psychology of Religion in Context

By now, it should be clear that our approach emphasizes the empirical and scientific; we go where theory and data take us. But it should also be clear that we see value in different methods of collecting data (something discussed in Chapter 2). The fact that most psychological research has been conducted within the Judeo-Christian framework is reflected in this text. Wherever information is available outside the Judeo-Christian realm, however, we pursue it—and such information is increasing. Again, the essential psychological point here is that psychologists of religion do not study religion per se; they study people in relation to their faith, and examine how this faith may influence other facets of their lives. To do this thoroughly and accurately, however, a psychologist must respect the context of what a person believes to be true, whether it be a major religious tradition, a sect or cult outside the religious mainstream, a spirituality independent of a formal religious tradition, or an agnosticism or atheism (that also involves an orienting belief system)—and whether the psychologist agrees personally with that context or not.

Whereas sociologists and anthropologists look to the external setting in which religion exists, we psychologists focus on the individual. Ours is an internal perspective. Even while we adopt the psychological stance, we must never lose sight of the fact that people cannot really be separated from their personal and social histories, and that these exist in relation to group and institutional life. Families, schools, and work are part of the "big picture," and we cannot abstract a person from these influences. They constitute a large part of what we discuss in the following chapters, in light of the call noted earlier for a multilevel interdisciplinary paradigm.

How Should We Study Religion Psychologically?

We have already provided the short answer to the question of how to study religion psychologically: We advocate an empirical, scientific approach. Now we'll explain. From a scientific perspective, a psychologist desires to gather objective data—that is, information that is both public and capable of being reproduced. Even though there is contention in scientific circles about how to go about collecting such information, the problem for the empirical scientist is how to carry out research without letting his or her biases affect the outcome (Roth, 1987). The sociologist C. Wright Mills is reported to have declared, "I will make every effort to be

objective, but I do not claim to be detached." As we will see, it is often not easy to remain either "detached" or "objective."

Perhaps the challenge of objectivity is even greater when the object of study is something about which people have strong opinions, such as religion. A fair question to ask is this: "Can a psychologist of religion who is also devoutly religious be objective?" From the standard scientific perspective, an individual who is both a believer and a scientist may experience a conflicting struggle for definitive answers, and thus may be less able or less qualified to be objective. We should note, however, that theological conviction is a problem not just for a religious psychologist, but for any psychologist who takes a stand regarding religion. The agnostic and the atheist likewise must constantly seek to avoid prejudices that may jeopardize objectivity.

Though it is certainly true that extreme positions exacerbate conflicts (Reich, 2000), "extreme" is in the eye of the beholder; that is, what is reasonable to either a committed believer or a committed scientist may seem unreasonable and extreme to the other. Examination of the "objective" realm may necessitate parallel examination of one's "subjective" commitments. Self-examination is a prerequisite to self-understanding and to the avoidance of short-sighted prejudices. At the very least, all researchers should acknowledge their own vulnerabilities to bias, and should resolve to prevent (as much as possible) those biases from driving their research and conclusions.

A scientific treatment of religion may be subject to the criticism that science is usurping religious prerogatives—something we have already stated we are trying to avoid. There are several ways to consider the relationship. First, in order to accomplish this goal, one might want to adopt an approach described by the late Stephen Jay Gould (1999). Gould argued that there is no inherent conflict between religion and science, insofar as science deals with facts and religion with values. Thus religion and science are nonoverlapping domains of teaching authority. This is a version of "giving to God that which is God's, and to Caesar that which is Caesar's." However, Gould's dichotomy is unsatisfactory to many faith traditions, which insist on the historical accuracy of what others see as myths, and which also accept as fact events (e.g., miracles) that are unacceptable to science. A second approach available to the religiously committed scholar is to consider science as an avenue to God. This implies that God primarily works through natural law and processes. Another religious judgment might claim that a religious psychologist gains insight into God's way in the world, and that humanity may possibly be endowed with a naturalistic awareness of God's existence. As interesting as these perspectives may be, if we are to be true psychologists of religion, we must wear the scientific mantle when we conduct our research and formulate our theories about faith in the life of the individual.

Let's Be Realistic

We have stated our hopes and ideals. The problem is the way people, including psychologists, tend to think and behave in real life. Professional psychologists are quite as subject to prejudices against religion (with a smaller number favorably prejudiced toward religion) as their religious peers have been to prejudices against (or for) psychology. Some clinicians perceive religion as inducing mental pathology and countering constructive thinking and behavior (Cortes, 1999). At times in this book, we will see that religion creates problems and can be "hazardous to one's health." We will also see that religion functions in a much more constructive manner for the majority of people. We further show that the kinds of religion being

judged and the standards used to judge religion have an impact on any evaluation of the usefulness of personal faith. Indeed, anyone can selectively employ psychological research to make a case either for or against religion. The better quest is to understand religion in its manifold varieties.

It is obvious that a scientific, empirical approach is the one favored in this volume, but we do not take this in the narrow sense of focusing only upon laboratory-based experimental research. Any empirical method that helps us understand religion is accepted, including qualitative methods such as interviews and individual narratives. By taking this perspective, we intend to note the potential for biased views to enter the picture and to reduce such bias, even as we admit our own vulnerability to bias. Indeed, we three authors have varied faith commitments, and we hold varying values.

The Necessity of Theory

Knowledge has to be meaningfully ordered, and theories can provide that necessary order. Theory is therefore central to an empirical approach. The noted social psychologist Kurt Lewin is reported to have said that "there is nothing as practical as a good theory." Theories are the ways we have of organizing our thoughts and ideas, so that the data we collect make sense because all of the relevant variables have been studied. Without theories, we have little more than a random and confusing collection of research results. So we need to develop theories to tell us what factors or variables may or may not be pertinent when certain problems and issues are examined. Theories should first be formulated in interaction with any available data, and then should be used to guide research.

But where do these theories come from? The prime source for the psychology of religion has usually been mainstream psychology—primarily personality and social psychology, though clinical, developmental, and cognitive psychology have also provided theoretical foundations. Let us consider what Hill and Gibson (2008) have identified as three theories of continuing promise for the psychology of religion. First, attribution theory has been instrumental in guiding research in the psychology of religion and has been a central guiding theory in what is now the fifth edition of this book. Second, many issues in the study of personal faith involve personality, mental disorder, and adjustment; hence coping theory is of great importance. Third, there is much concern about how personal religion develops in early life and changes over the lifespan. As these examples suggest, psychology is a complex field with a large number of subdisciplines. All have the potential to provide theories for the psychology of religion.

Even though we usually look to the main body of psychological knowledge to guide us theoretically, there is no reason why the psychology of religion itself may not eventually provide us with new and constructive directions. Indeed, some of its findings do not fit well with other parts of psychology; this implies that these other subareas may be able to benefit from the psychological study of religion. For example, the recent positive psychology movement, particularly with its focus on human flourishing and the development of virtue, may draw many insights and ideas from the psychology of religion (Hill, 1999; Hill & Hall, 2018).

Clearly, we are not confined to psychology and its subdisciplines for theoretical guidance. Sociology, anthropology, and biology cannot be ignored. Indeed, because the significance of religion is of such breadth and magnitude, we cannot deny the possibility that fruitful ideas will come from other scientific and nonscientific sources. Even theologies themselves can serve as psychological theories (Spilka, 1970, 1976). But to say that we take ideas from such

other areas does not mean that the ideas remain unchanged. They may be altered because the psychology of religion has somewhat different interests, or because modifications are necessary to enhance their fit with our data. The theories we hold are "open"; they are always amenable to new information. Closing our minds is the most impractical thing we can do. Our approach is therefore both theoretical and empirical, because neither aspect by itself is meaningful.

WHAT IS RELIGION?

To this point, we have tried to answer the "why," "what," and "how" questions about the psychology of religion. Before we go any further, maybe we need to step back and ask an even more fundamental question: The psychological study of religion requires that we understand what religion is in the first place. For thousands of years, scholars have been writing and talking about religion. Chances are that more books have been written on religion, or some aspect of religion, than any other topic in the history of humanity. With such impressive evidence of concern, who would have the temerity to ask, "Just what is it you are talking about?" Boldness notwithstanding, this is a very good question to pose to anyone.

There may be a tendency for some to disregard such questions as unnecessarily pedantic—one of those exercises that interest academics, but in which few others see value. "I know religion when I see it" is a common (but vague) response, and indeed there may be considerable agreement on some aspects of being religious, at least within a given culture. Such a response, however, not only fails to satisfy scientific and intellectual curiosity; it leaves any observation open to the phenomenon that social psychologists refer to as the "false-consensus effect" (Ross, Greene, & House, 1977)—the tendency to overestimate the extent to which others hold one's own opinions or views. There is no reason to think that religious perceptions and beliefs are uniquely immune from such cognitive bias. Hence what one person is sure to call religious may be far removed from another person's understanding, especially when we begin to analyze religion across traditions and cultures.

Is Defining Religion Even Possible?

Any attempt to define religion therefore immediately runs into trouble. We feel quite confident that we can come to a meeting of the minds if we deal with the Judeo-Christian heritage and the Islamic tradition, but once we go beyond these to the religions of eastern Asia, Africa, Polynesia, and a host of other localities that are not well known in North America and Europe—or even to the Native religious traditions of the United States and Canada—we find ourselves in great difficulty. Religion may encompass the supernatural, the non-natural, theism, deism, atheism, monotheism, polytheism, and both finite and infinite deities; it may also include practices, beliefs, and rituals that almost totally defy circumscription and definition.

The best efforts of anthropologists to define "religion" are frustrated at every turn. Guthrie (1996b) claims that "the term religion is a misleading reification, labeling a probabilistic aggregate of similar, but not identical ideas in individual heads" (p. 162; see also Guthrie, 1996a). In other words, we select a number of ideas and observations that we think belong together and call it "religion." The fact that we use one word to describe a complex of beliefs, behaviors, and experiences as "religious" is often enough for us to believe that religion is

really one entity, and that we can expect to find the same or similar phenomena anywhere else in the world.

The assumption that the term "religion" really represents one entity leads to a second question: "On what basis do we group the components we now call 'religion'?" The evident answer is that we call upon our experiences, obviously in our own society and culture, and then uncritically generalize these to other peoples. For example, if idols are found, they are often considered representations of the Judeo-Christian God; rituals are frequently viewed as religious ceremonies; and trances are commonly termed "mystical religious states." We distinguish religion from other aspects of our culture, but such a distinction may be invalid elsewhere, and our interpretations can be very wrong. The noted anthropologist Murray Wax (1984) affirms "that in most non-Western societies the natives do not distinguish religion as we do" (p. 16).

The sociologist J. Milton Yinger (1967) maintained that "any definition of religion is likely to be satisfactory only to its author" (p. 18), and a noted early psychologist of religion, George Coe (1916), said that he would "purposely refrain from giving a formal definition of religion. . . . partly because definitions carry so little information as to facts" (p. 13). The situation has changed little in the past century. That said, it is important to recognize that there are important differences between religious traditions. Many of us in the West are familiar with Christianity but are less likely to know much about other major religions, so we now provide a brief review of the five major world religions. This is not a text on comparative religion, so we are not going into great detail; we focus primarily on the major substantive issues within each religious tradition that are particularly relevant to psychological functioning.

The Five Major World Religions

For people who identify with a religious tradition, religion often becomes an important source of cultural identity, especially when it is a minority religion. In fact, Cohen (2009) maintains that religion should be thought of as a cultural variable. Thus the ability to practice one's religious faith freely, without fear of repercussion or ostracism from the larger culture; to impart religious education to one's children; to mingle with other people of the same tradition; and to have access to places of worship are all important contributors to one's cultural identity (Tarakeshwar, 2013). To understand how religion and spirituality are formed and how they function within specific populations, it is crucial to understand their cultural manifestations in light of the specific claims made by the major religious traditions within which they are embedded.

Islam

Islam is a highly diverse religion, and only the most general Islamic beliefs and practices, common to most all Muslims, are reviewed here (for a more detailed description, see Esposito, 1998, or Gordon, 2002). Islam is a monotheistic religion that includes beliefs in divine judgment (heaven and hell) and predestination (though with allowance for free will that is granted by Allah) (Abu-Raiya, 2013). The Qur'an is Islam's holy book and is considered the direct word of Allah (God). All beliefs and ethical guidelines must be filtered through the Qur'an. Islamic practices include the "Five Pillars of Islam"—five required practices that reflect the human relationship with Allah, and that together constitute the Islamic ritual system and ceremonial duties (Gordon, 2002).

- *Shahada,* or the testimony of faith, is the oft-repeated act of stating with conviction that "There is no true god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah" during ritual duties.
- *Salah,* the ritual of prayer, is considered the single most important ritual, in that it alone is considered the supreme act of righteousness.
- *Zakah,* or alms giving, is the act of the annual distribution of material possessions to the less fortunate. The ritual has the spiritual significance of purification of one's soul, so that there will be no suffering in the next life.
- *Sawn,* or fasting during the month of Ramadan, involves a righteous intention of discipline whereby the Muslim cannot eat, drink, smoke, or have sexual intercourse from sunrise to sunset during Ramadan.
- *al-Hajj* is the once-in-a-lifetime required pilgrimage (for those who are healthy and can afford it) to Mecca.

There is no single Islamic document that provides explicit guidelines for ethical conduct. Rather, such guidelines must be understood through careful study of the Qur'an. Farah (1987, as summarized by Abu-Raiya, 2013) has identified 10 major Islamic ethical guidelines: (1) Acknowledge no other god but Allah, (2) respect and honor parents, (3) respect others' rights, (4) be generous, (5) avoid killing (except when totally justified), (6) commit no adultery, (7) protect the possessions of orphans, (8) deal equitably and justly in all relationships, (9) be pure, and (10) be humble and unpretentious.

Judaism

Jews, like members of every other religious grouping, tend to be diverse (e.g., Orthodox vs. Conservative vs. Reform Jews), and taking such differences into account is important in understanding Judaism's impact on psychological functioning. Nevertheless, certain characteristics of Judaism cut across such denominational differences and are both similar to and in contrast with the characteristics of other religious traditions. For example, compared to most other religious traditions, Judaism (as well as Hinduism) is a "religion of descent" (Morris, 1996); that is, one's religious identity is primarily determined by birth. One *is* a Jew; one does not *become* a Jew. In contrast, other religions might be considered "religions of assent," which emphasize the role of beliefs. Cohen and Hill (2007) have found, for example, that Protestant Christians are more likely than Jews (and, to a much lesser extent, than Catholics) to stress the importance of beliefs to one's religious identity. In contrast, Jews are more likely to stress the importance of practice. One important cultural implication is that Christians and Jews, for example, may use different criteria by which they make moral judgments (Cohen, Gorvine, & Gorvine, 2013). Jews may be less likely than Christians to consider thoughts morally diagnostic. It's the practice that counts, in other words.

Thus "Judaism is a religion concerned with ritual boundaries—kosher versus not kosher, Chosen versus Gentile, Sabbath versus not. Many aspects of the Jewish law first given in the Torah (the five books of Moses) have been extended to be more general so that one does not accidentally transgress a commandment" (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 667). As a result, it may be easier for a Jew to understand and even identify with the concept of "religious, but not spiritual" (a category with which a very small percentage of people in the United States self-identify), especially if the term "spiritual" is to be somehow dissociated from institutional religion (Sands, Marcus, & Danzig, 2008). This does not mean that theology, especially as it

relates to beliefs, is unimportant in Judaism. It does suggest, however, that what one believes is less constraining in Judaism than it is in some other religious systems (e.g., Christianity); in contrast, what one does very much defines one's identity as a Jew. As Cohen et al. (2013) note, "Much Jewish practice is rooted in traditions that are hundreds and thousands of years old, and religious practice can for some Jews be less about expressing one's personal religious feelings than it is about participating in and continuing the arc of Jewish history, defined by the community's relationship with God" (p. 666).

Christianity

Roughly one-third of the world's population is Christian, with Roman Catholics constituting slightly more than half of the Christian population. Though Protestants are outnumbered by Catholics nearly 3:1 worldwide, they make up the majority of Christians in the United States. Beck and Haugen (2013) have used the statements found in the Apostles' Creed, a 4th-century statement of basic Christian belief, to arrange their discussion of the Christian religion. We provide a brief synopsis of that discussion.

Central to Christian belief is a Trinitarian God—the idea that God is composed of three divine "persons" who are unified into one "being": God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Though cloaked in masculine terminology, the Trinity is not necessarily seen by Christians as a gendered being. Particularly distinctive is the role of Jesus Christ, the Son in the Godhead, whose life on earth (including his death and reported resurrection) is recounted in the four Gospels (the first four books of the New Testament). Christianity stresses that one can have a personal relationship with God, often described in the idiom of human relationships such as a parental or spousal relationship, through belief in Jesus's claims to be the Son of God. The legitimacy of Christ's claims is believed by Christians to be rooted in the Biblical recounting of his death (which sacrificially atoned for past, present, and future human sins) and resurrection (which demonstrated the power of life over death, such that believers will also experience their own resurrection for an eternal blissful life in the presence of God). The Holy Spirit is believed by many Christians to dwell within each believer in Christ to provide day-to-day guidance in the believer's spiritual journey.

The Bible is Christianity's sacred text. Though the Bible is revered by all Christians, there are different views on how to interact with the text. Some take a more conservative literalist approach to understanding the Bible, while others interpret the text more symbolically and moralistically.

Buddhism

More than the other major religious traditions, Buddhism is as much a philosophy and a psychology as it is a religion (Kristeller & Rapgay, 2013), and therefore has had perhaps a disproportionate connection with and influence upon psychology. The *dharma* is the communication and translation, in spirit and in content, of core Buddhist concepts into practice. The *dharma* originates from the teachings of the Buddha, which are supported by guidance from the *Sangha*, awakened beings who serve as spiritual leaders. The Buddha, who historically was the person of Siddhartha Gautama, is not a savior to be worshipped as much as it is simply the embodiment of teachings and principles; thus, to "take refuge in the Buddha means to commit to looking for the Buddha within" (Kristeller & Rapgay, 2013). Central to the dharma are the Four Noble Truths: (1) Life necessarily contains *dukkha,* or suffering, which is not

to be avoided but understood; (2) the origin of *dukkha* is our desire to seek pleasure and to avoid discomfort; and (3) fully grasping and accepting the first two truths will provide the understanding for release from suffering through (4) following specific instructions known as the Noble Eightfold Path.

The Noble Eightfold Path consists of eight interrelated guidelines for pursuit of a better life, both spiritually and otherwise. The eight paths involve training that falls into three categories, all based upon the intellectual and experiential acceptance of Buddhist teachings: wisdom (two paths: right understanding and right intention); ethics (three paths: right speech, right conduct, and right livelihood); and meditation (two paths: right effort and right mindfulness). Spiritual and personal growth resulting from the intentional practice of these paths will diminish the hold of three life poisons: ignorance, craving, and aversion.

Hinduism

Branches of Hinduism vary considerably from each other, in that some are monotheistic and revere a personal God, while others are monistic and see divinity as pervading all reality. Thus any description of Hinduism in terms of common features is likely to be overly simplistic, and the best that can be done here is to represent a significant portion of the broad religious tradition. However, it is safe to say that common to virtually all religious Hindus is a belief "in a reality that transcends the mundane, empirical, or phenomenal world" (Puhakka, 1995, p. 123).

Most branches of Hinduism are pantheistic, though not in the way pantheism is commonly understood. There are an infinite number of gods who are only *avatars* (manifestations) of the three primary manifestations of the one true Godhead: the Vishnu (who are actually all one), the Trimutri (the three in one—sometimes called the "Hindu Trinity"), and the Brahman (the Supreme Being). The Brahman appears in many forms by emanation throughout the created order. As pointed out in the Vishnu Purana (one of the medieval collections of laws, stories, and philosophy that reflect the teachings of older scriptures):

> Just as light is diffused from a fire which is confined to one spot, so is the whole universe the diffused energy of the supreme Brahman. And as light shows a difference, greater or less, according to its nearness or distance from the fire, so there is a variation in the energy of the impersonal Brahman. Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva are his chief energies. The deities are inferior to them; the yakshas, etc., to the deities; men, cattle, wild animals, birds, and reptiles to the yakshas, etc., and trees and plants are the lowest of all these energies . . . (Vishnu Purana 1.22)

Though such manifestations are phenomena of a world that is only temporary and partial and conceals total truth, they nevertheless reflect a certain divine immanence that places an emphasis, in positive psychology terms, on experiences of awe and appreciation (Haidt, 2003; Maltby & Hill, 2008).

The ultimate goal of the Hindu moral life is spiritual liberation, or the achievement of unity with the Brahman. To achieve this goal, one must initially also strive toward achieving the lower ideals of wealth, pleasure, and ethical merit. Ultimately, however, such goals must be transcended to achieve union with the Supreme Being, and this is accomplished through four spiritual paths: devotion (through such practices as prayer and rituals), ethical action (through deeds that bring pleasure to the Brahman rather than the self), knowledge (of spiritual bliss), and mental concentration (gaining mastery over one's mind). *Karma,* the teaching

that suggests that people's past deeds have an impact on their present lives (as do present deeds for future living, including future lives), can offer a preliminary route to spiritual liberation (by the accumulation of good deeds)—just as it can create a barrier (by the accumulation of bad actions) to developing righteous tendencies and dispositions (Tarakeshwar, 2013).

There are, of course, other religious traditions, but these five are the largest, and their adherents together constitute the majority of the world's population. In addition, there are people who do not explicitly identify with these five (or any other) religious traditions, yet consider themselves as spiritual. This creates additional challenges for the psychology of religion. However, an early psychologist of religion (Dresser, 1929) suggested that "religion, like poetry and most other living things, cannot be defined. But some characteristic marks may be given" (p. 441). Following Dresser's advice, we avoid the pitfalls of unproductive, far-ranging, grandly theoretical definitions of religion. Quite simply, we are not ready for them, nor may we ever be. Many are available in the literature, but the highly general, vague, and abstract manner in which they are usually stated reduces their usefulness either for illuminating the concept of religion or for undertaking empirical research. Our purpose is to enable our readers to understand the variety of ways in which psychologists have defined religion by identifying, in Dresser's words, its "characteristic marks."

However, we admit that we are in a quandary. We deal largely in this book with the Western religious tradition (because that is where most research has been conducted), but we are saying that religion performs many functions for many different people. The extent to which research findings generalize to other religious traditions is still largely unexamined. Surely some of these functions may vary greatly in terms of their surface appearance; however, we feel that at their core they represent the same elemental human needs and roles, about which we will have more to say.

Spirituality and/or Religion?

"Spirit" and "spiritual" are words which are constantly used and easily taken for granted by all writers upon religion—more constantly and easily, perhaps, than any of the other terms in the mysterious currency of faith. (Underhill, 1933, p. 1)

This observation is perhaps even more applicable today than it was over 80 years ago. In the past few decades, "spirituality" has become a popular word. It is now common to refer to "spirituality" instead of "religion," but without drawing any clear distinction between them. Furthermore, much of Western society seems captivated by the notion of spirituality. It is not uncommon to see the topic as the cover story of popular newspapers such as *USA Today*, or news magazines such as *Time*. After reviewing the available literature on spirituality in the early 1990s, Spilka (1993), in his frustration, claimed that spirituality is so "fuzzy" that it has become "a word that embraces obscurity with passion" (p. 1). However, Hood (2003) has argued that "spirituality" is a fluid term often used in opposition to the clearly defined commitments of the religiously faithful. Though Daniel Helminiak (1987, 1996a, 1996b) has written a number of impressive scholarly psychological/philosophical treatises on spirituality, psychologists of religion have not taken his theoretical guidance and provided the kind of objective assessment we are stressing here. As a priest and a psychologist, Helminiak (2015) has completed his major work by arguing for an integration of neuroscience, psychology, spirituality, and theology. On the other hand, Gorsuch and Miller (1999) have suggested that the term "spirituality" can have meaning in the psychology of religion if clear operational

definitions are made. As we will see throughout this text, progress is being made to allow clearer empirical distinctions between those who primarily define themselves as "both religious and spiritual" and those who define themselves as "more spiritual than religious" (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005).

The Spirituality–Religion Debate

The last few decades have witnessed a growing response to the question of spirituality that draws some distinctions between spirituality and religion. It is as if a "critical mass" of vague definitions has been reached. This has stimulated a new concern with the conceptualization of spirituality that directs our thinking toward its objective assessment and application through research (Hill et al., 2000; Hood, 2000b; W. R. Miller, 1999; Pargament, 1999; Pargament & Mahoney, 2002; Zinnbauer et al., 1997; Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999). Many current thinkers are therefore attempting to create theoretical and operational definitions of spirituality that either distinguish it from personal religiosity or show how the two concepts are related.

A traditional distinction exists between being "spiritual" and being "religious" that can be used to enhance our use of both terms (Gorsuch, 1993). The connotations of "spirituality" are more personal and psychological than institutional, whereas the connotations of "religion" are more institutional and sociological. In this usage, the two terms are not synonymous, but distinct: Spirituality involves a person's beliefs, values, and behavior, while religiousness denotes the person's involvement with a religious tradition and institution (Streib & Hood, 2016).

Psychologists seem to be embracing this distinction. It should be noted that only a minority of psychologists are religious in the classical sense of being affiliated with religious organizations, but that many more see themselves as spiritual (Shafranske & Malony, 1985). Despite the negative reaction the concept of "religion" engenders in most psychologists, aspects of it have become recognized as important for major areas of life. These include the benefits of meditation (Benson, 1975; Benson & Stark, 1996), as well as the evidence that religious people are less likely to use illegal substances, abuse alcohol, or be sexually promiscuous (Gorsuch, 1988, 1995; Gorsuch & Butler, 1976). As a result, religious persons possess better physical health than those engaging in these actions (e.g., Larson et al., 1989).

To some people, wanting only what is good from spirituality without the institutional baggage of religion is an "easy religion" or "cheap grace"; to others, it is "separating the valuable from the superstitious." Clearly, there is considerable debate regarding the potential separation of these concepts. Donahue (1998) forcefully claims in the title of a paper that "there is no true spirituality apart from religion." Pargament (1999) views the separatist trend with ambivalence, and offers guidance to prevent a polarization of these realms. Regardless of how the professionals debate this issue, the distinction may be sharpening on the popular level, with spirituality the favored notion (Roof, 1993). However, as Streib and Hood (2011) note, spirituality remains at best a form of privatized religion. This does not preclude the possibility that spirituality can occur both within and outside religious traditions: thus one can be "both spiritual and religious," or can be "spiritual but not religious."

It is still an open question whether the practice of spirituality outside religion can be adequately defined. Hood (2003) argues that it can be, and we discuss many empirical data supporting this claim throughout this text. If it can, will it then be found to relate to the same variables as religion? The proponents of Transcendental Meditation provide support that

some effects of meditation are separate from those of religion (see Chapter 10), but this is a difficult area to research, for training people in a meditation style independent of a religion does not mean that they practice meditation apart from their faith. No one knows at this point whether spirituality will be a more viable psychological construct than religion once it is operationally distinguished from religion. However, the spirituality–religion distinction is gaining considerable empirical support. Distinctions are emerging that show religion to be associated with conservatism, while spirituality is associated with openness to change (Fontaine, Duriez, Luyten, Corveleyn, & Hutsebaut, 2005). Likewise, in a meta-analysis of several studies using the Schwartz Value Scale (Schwartz, 1992), Saroglou, Delpierre, and Dernelle (2004) found that religious persons scored higher on the Conformity and Tradition subscales. They also scored low on subscales assessing values associated with spirituality, such as Universalism. Thus religion may be an institutional expression of particular (but clearly not all) aspects of spirituality. Furthermore, as we discuss later in this text, spirituality is associated with many paranormal phenomena (see Chapters 10 and 11)—phenomena that both religion and science tend to reject.

Can We Distinguish Spirituality from Religion?

Defining "spirituality" in a manner distinct from "religion" can start from the past meanings of the ancient and complex term "spirituality." In Western thought, it has been a part of classical dualistic thinking that pits the material world against the spiritual world. Some things we can see, hear, smell, or touch, whereas elements that exist in the mental world can at best only be inferred from the material world. Non-Western thinkers have seen these two areas as more closely intertwined, but "spirit" still has the sense of being immaterial. For example, in Thailand, a house must be provided for the spirits of a parcel of land before it can be used (many Thai restaurants in the United States have such houses); although the spirits themselves dwell outside of ordinary experience by the human senses, they must still be appeased by a physical dwelling.

A contemporary illustration of setting spirituality apart can be seen in the way many Christian Protestant denominations and churches practice church governance. In these congregations, there are two governing bodies, often called the "deacons" and the "elders" (as they are defined in the New Testament). The deacons are concerned with the material aspects of congregational life, including maintaining a church's physical property and taking food to the needy. The elders are responsible for the spiritual welfare of the church. This includes taking the comforts of the faith to the sick and grieving, and encouraging activities that enhance the members' relationships to God. In other words, the elders are concerned with the inner being of the church members, and the deacons with the more physical aspects of the members' and the church's existence. Rarely do members have trouble defining the "physical" and "spiritual" matters of the congregation. But what these church members know, the psychology of religion (including the psychology of spirituality) needs to spell out—that is, to define operationally.

Another approach to defining spirituality from classical usage is to identify it with "spiritual disciplines." These have included not only such acts as prayer and meditation, but also fasting and doing penance for sins. For example, monks retire to a monastery to practice such disciplines, in order to lead a more spiritual life than is commonly possible outside the monastery. With the traditional Christian Protestant usage noted above and the set of spiritual disciplines, we could just divide the psychology of religion into personal practices (the

spiritual) and communal practices (the religious). That is, we could employ both terms, but would not use them synonymously.

There are other ways of defining spirituality that shift the construct to new grounds, and so allow testing of whether "religion" and "spirituality" are just interchangeable terms. Here is one: "Spirituality is the quest for understanding ourselves in relationship to our view of ultimate reality, and to live in accordance with that understanding" (Gorsuch, 2002, p. 8). Streib and Hood (2016) note that if one accepts that for some transcendence can be vertical (Dittes's two nonreductive options) and for others it can be horizontal (Dittes's two reductive options), both religiously and spiritually committed persons can be identified in relation to transcendence. Some differences between this definition of spirituality and a definition of religion include the following:

- Spirituality is personal and subjective.
- Spirituality does not require an institutional framework. Its authenticity requires no consensus or "meeting of the minds."
- A spiritual person is deeply concerned about value commitments.
- A person can be spiritual without a deity (although some would say that the "view of ultimate reality" always includes what Alcoholics Anonymous refers to as a "higher power").
- Religiousness is a subset of spirituality, which means that religiousness invariably involves spirituality, but that there may be nonreligious spirituality as well.

There appears to be a growing consensus that these views are useful in distinguishing religion from spirituality; however, this consensus is still far from being unanimous. We do not intend to force any distinction on the profession—and, in fact, it is safe to say that even we three authors of this text do not fully agree with each other about the meaning of these terms. These are highly ambiguous terms, and the astute consumer of research needs to check carefully what is actually being measured, rather than to rely exclusively on any researcher's use of the term "religious" or "spiritual."

Defining Religion Operationally

From an empirical perspective, what is used to measure religion or spirituality in research is therefore the crucial element. "Operational definitions" literally focus on "operations"—the methods and procedures used to assess something. They are the experimental manipulations plus the measures and instruments employed. With respect to religion, what does it mean to be religious? How do we indicate religiousness? Operationally, we often identify people as religious if they are members of a church or other congregation, attend religious services, read the Bible or other sacred writings, contribute money to religious causes, observe religious holidays or days of fasting, pray frequently, say grace before meals, and accept religiously based diet restrictions, among other possibilities. Many psychologists also look to the beliefs that the devout express, as well as the experiences they report. Frequently, respondents fill out questionnaires about these expressions, and the questions they answer are the operational definitions for that study. There are a great many such operations that illustrate commitment to one's faith.

Basically, operational definitions tell us what a researcher means when religious language is used. For example, suppose we desire to evaluate the degree to which individuals

believe in "fundamentalist" doctrines. We might then administer a questionnaire specifically designed to obtain agreement or disagreement with such principles. The Altemeyer and Hunsberger (2004) Religious Fundamentalism Scale might be selected, and we could report its scores for the sample tested. Fundamentalism is thus operationally defined by this measuring instrument. Of course, the scale itself is based on a conceptualization of fundamentalism that needs to be reasonable and testable. However, Williamson, Hood, Ahmad, Sadiq, and Hill (2010) have developed another measure of fundamentalism based on the theory of intratextuality developed by Hood, Hill, and Williamson (2005). Fulton, Gorsuch, and Maynard (1999) have used yet another scale that they call Fundamentalism. Finally, Streib (2008, pp. 58–59) and his colleagues have created a subscale of the Religious Schema Scale named Truth in Text and Teachings, which is also a measure of fundamentalism. This leaves us with at least four different operational measures of fundamentalism. It is important to examine the measures (as well as their underlying conceptual development) closely, to determine how similar and how different their items are. Throughout this volume, we emphasize operational definitions of different aspects or forms of faith. This is the only way we can understand religion from a scientific standpoint. Not all measures of religion are created equal; some are better than others, in that they conform more closely to certain standards of good measurement. We investigate those standards more thoroughly in Chapter 2.

THE NEED FOR MEANING AS A FRAMEWORK FOR THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION

The assumptions forming the fundamental framework for this book are that the search for meaning is of central importance to human functioning, and that religion is uniquely capable of helping in that search. Our framework suggests that the cognitive, motivational, and social aspects of finding meaning in life offer us the directions necessary for a rather "grand" psychological theory for understanding the role of religion in human life. When we look at cognition, we discover that people are active meaning-making creatures through whose efforts some sense of global meaning is achieved. The study of motivation in finding meaning focuses us on the need of people to exercise control over themselves and their environment. Social life, which we encapsulate in the concept of "sociality," recognizes that people necessarily exist within relationships. Not only must they relate to others to survive and prosper, but it is often through their relational selves that meaning is discovered. In short, people need people, and it is through others that a sense of meaning is often most fully experienced. We now turn our attention to each of these realms.

The Cognitive Search for Meaning

It is safe to assume that all mentally capable people, not just those who are religious, struggle at some point or another to comprehend what life is all about. People need to find their particular niche in the world. It is hardly surprising that pastor Rick Warren's (2002) book *The Purpose-Driven Life* is reported to be the best-selling book of all time, except for the Bible. Viktor Frankl, a survivor of the Auschwitz and Dachau concentration camps in World War II, wrote a book called *Man's Search for Meaning* (Frankl, 1962), which was identified in 1991 by *The New York Times* as among the 10 most influential books in the United States. The struggle with existential questions and the corresponding search for answers sometimes

lead individuals to religion. Though there is a kind of scientific vagueness to the idea of "meaning"—and thus psychologists sometimes prefer to use other overlapping terms, such as "cognitive structure"—no other word seems to capture as well its inherent significance, and thus we employ the term without concern.

The first two editions of this book used attribution theory, a staple of social psychology for decades, as a framework for understanding the psychology of religion (see Spilka, Shaver, & Kirkpatrick, 1985, for a full explication of the application of this theory to religious experience). Attribution theory is concerned with explanations of behavior—primarily causal explanations about people, things, and events—and is therefore a theory of meaning making. Such explanations are expressed in ideas that assign roles and influences to various situational and dispositional factors. For instance, we might attribute a person's lung cancer to being exposed to the smoking of coworkers, to his or her own smoking, or to the view that "God works in mysterious ways." All of these are attributions. Research examining such meanings and their ramifications became the cornerstone of cognitive social psychology, and attributional approaches were soon extended to explain how people understand emotional states and much of what happens to them and to others (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Among the factors that may be involved in understanding the kinds of attributions people make are situational and personal-dispositional influences; the nature of the event to be explained (whether it is positive, negative, or neutral); and the event domain (e.g., medical, social, economic). We will also want to know what cues are present in the situation. For example, does the event take place in a church, on a mountaintop, or in a business office? Similarly, when we turn to personal-dispositional concerns, we may need to get information on the attributor's background, personality, attitudes, language strengths and weaknesses, cognitive inclinations, and other biases. Research Box 1.1 presents a representative attributional study in the psychology of religion.

All of this is well and good. Attribution theory has been extremely useful to social psychology, and Hill and Gibson (2008) have suggested that it has been underutilized by researchers in the psychology of religion. As an effort to acquire new knowledge, the attributional process appears to be a first step in making things meaningful (Kruglanski, Hasmel, Maides, & Schwartz, 1978). Making attributions, however, is only the first step and is therefore only a small part of the total process. People (whether religious or not) do not talk about their attributions. They talk about what makes life meaningful. Rick Warren's book would hardly have sold if it had been titled *The Attribution-Driven Life*! In the third and fourth editions, and now (even more so) in the fifth edition of this text, we have therefore attempted to provide a more inclusive framework.

Scientists, of course, may not have the luxury of deriving and testing specific empirical hypotheses from such a broad construct as "meaning." For them, more specific theories such as attribution theory are better capable of providing the framework necessary for conducting empirical studies. Therefore, we return to attribution theory in Chapter 2 as a foundational component for the empirical study of religion. For now, though, it is helpful to consider this research in terms of the big picture of the need for meaning. In essence, people need to make sense out of the world in order to live and to adapt; it must be made meaningful. Heintzelman and King (2013, 2014) make the case that, given the adaptive value of meaning in life, people's ability to find meaning must be commonplace. Their review of the empirical data supports their contention. Several national surveys (e.g., House, 2008; Kobau, Sniezek, Zack, Lucas, & Burns, 2010; Oishi & Diener, 2014; Stroope, Draper, & Whitehead, 2013) consistently show that the vast majority of people (over 80% and sometimes about 90%) agree

> **RESEARCH BOX 1.1.** General Attribution Theory for the Psychology of Religion:
> The Influence of Event Character on Attributions to God
> (Spilka & Schmidt, 1983a)
>
> This research focused on the components of events that occur to people. When seeking explanations, is a person influenced by (1) whether the event happens to oneself or others; (2) how important it is; (3) whether it is positive or negative; and (4) what its domain is (economic, social, or medical)? Given these possible influences, the emphasis of this study was on the degree to which attributions are made to God.
>
>   A total of 135 youths from introductory psychology classes and from a church participated in the study. Twelve short stories were written to depict various social, economic, and medical occurrences. Of the four stories in each of these domains, two described incidents of minor to moderate significance, and two described important happenings. One of each pair was positive, and one was negative. In half of the stories, the referent person was the responder; the other half of the stories referred to someone else. The participants were thus dealing with variations in incident domain, plus the dimensions of how important the incident was, whether the occurrence was positive or negative, and whether it was personal or impersonal. In addition, each participant was able to make attributions to (1) the characteristics of the person in the story; (2) possible others, even if not present in the story; (3) the role of chance; (4) God; or (5) the personal faith of the individual in the story. Lastly, two experiments were constructed. In the first, all of the participants filled out the forms in a school setting; in the second study, half the participants were in a church and half in school. This was an attempt to determine situational influences.
>
>   No situational differences were found, but all of the other conditions yielded significance. Attributions to God were mostly made for occurrences that were medical, positive, and important. Many significant interactions among these factors occurred, and though the personal–impersonal factor per se was not statistically significant, it was in its relationships to the other effects. Other research on attributions to God has revealed similar influences (Gorsuch & Smith, 1983).

or strongly agree with such survey items as "My life has a real purpose." Of course, meaning can be found through a variety of sources, such as family and friends (Lambert, Stillman, et al., 2010), generativity to future generations (Erikson, 1964), or provision through occupation (Steger, Dik, & Duffy, 2012). Religion is only one source of meaning, but it is an important source (Park, Edmonson, & Hale-Smith, 2013; Stroope et al., 2013). For example, J. H. Jung (2015) has found that people who believe in direct divine involvement in life are more likely to see life as meaningful. When we turn to religion, we focus on higher-level cognitions and some understanding of ourselves and our relationship to others and the world. The result is meaning—the cognitive significance of sensory and perceptual stimulation and information to us.

Religion and the Search for Meaning

Contemporary forms of Aristotle's dictum "All men by nature desire to know" (McKeon, 1941, p. 689) include Argyle's (1959) claim that "a major mechanism behind religious beliefs is a purely cognitive desire to understand" (p. 57), or Budd's (1973) view that "religion as a form

of knowledge . . . answers preexistent and eternal problems of meaning" (p. 79). Clark (1958) maintained that "religion more than any other human function satisfies the need for meaning in life" (p. 419). Why? What is it specifically about religion that entices so many people to look to it to find meaning? For some religious people, the answer is simple: It speaks truth, so they believe, and for some the truth it speaks is so exclusive that no other claims of truth can even compete. Others, of course, find such claims preposterous, even though they too may find meaning through religion. Religion fills in the blanks in our knowledge of life and the world, and offers us a sense of security. This is especially true when we are confronted with crisis and death. Religion is therefore a normal, natural, functional development whereby "persons are prepared intellectually and emotionally to meet the non-manipulable aspects of existence positively by means of a reinterpretation of the total situation" (Bernhardt, 1958, p. 157).

Park (2005) provides an important distinction between what she calls "global meaning," which refers to a general life meaning that involves beliefs, goals, and subjective feelings, and "meaning making," which occurs during times of crisis or difficult circumstances. The two concepts are not independent of each other, and religion is invoked in both senses of the term. "Meaning making" is "a *process* of working to restore global life meaning when it has been disrupted or violated, typically by some major or unpleasant life event" (Park, 2005, p. 299; emphasis in original), and we focus on this throughout many chapters in this book. In this introductory chapter, however, we wish to focus on global meaning, which in Park's model is important to everyday life.

Why Turn to Religion for Meaning?

Why is religion the framework to which so many people turn in their quest to find meaning? First, it must be acknowledged that not all people attempt to find the meaning of life through religion. For many, including those who have tried religion and found it unfulfilling, a sub- jective sense of meaning is often successfully found through means other than religion. We live, in the words of the social philosopher Charles Taylor (2007), in a "secular age," where the roles and functions of religion in society have changed. Taylor argues not so much that religion has been replaced, but that it has been transformed through an ever-continuing change of options. Each option becomes a new departure point through which new spiritual landscapes are explored; in some cases, people have traveled so far that the old religious mooring can no longer even be identified. So we have gone from a world where belief in God was a given to a world where even atheism is a legitimate option, as we discuss in Chapter 9. One set of continual changes described by Taylor has resulted in a redefined understanding of meaning or fullness from something that comes totally from "beyond" human life to some- thing that can come from "within" human life. Thus, in our secular age, a sense of "transcen- dence" (something that goes beyond our usual limits) is no longer a necessary requirement for meaning; fullness or meaning in life may also be found in the "immanent" (the state of being within) order of nature, such as in our sense of human flourishing.

For many people, however, religion continues to serve well as a provider of meaning. Hood et al. (2005) have identified four criteria by which religion is *uniquely* capable of pro- viding global meaning: "comprehensiveness," "accessibility," transcendence," and "direct claims." Let us consider each criterion. First, religion is the most comprehensive of all mean- ing systems in that it can subsume many other sources of meaning, such as work, family, achievement, personal relationships, and enduring values and ideals. Silberman (2005a) demonstrates religion's comprehensiveness by pointing out the extensive range of issues that

religion addresses at both descriptive and prescriptive levels: beliefs about the world and self (e.g., about human nature, the social and natural environment, the afterlife); contingencies and expectations (e.g., rewards for righteousness and punishment for doing evil); goals (e.g., benevolence, altruism, supremacy); actions (e.g., compassion, charity, violence); and emotions (e.g., love, joy, peace). Religion's special meaning-making power is due in part to its comprehensive nature.

The second major reason for religion's success as a meaning maker is that it is so accessible (Hood et al., 2005). Many conservative religious groups often stress the importance of a religious "world view"—a religious belief that contributes to global meaning. The accessibility of such a view is often promoted through doctrinal teachings and creeds, religious education, and sometimes even rules of acceptable and unacceptable behavioral practices—often in the name of developing a system of values compatible with the religious tradition. Such people are what Robert Wuthnow (1998) refers to as "religious dwellers." Religious dwellers, as the term implies, are comfortable in establishing and living by the "rules of the house"; they find great comfort in a religion that is not only comprehensive, but also comprehensible. However, not all religious people are dwellers, and some may find religion useful as a different avenue of meaning making. Viktor Frankl (2000) maintained that "the more comprehensive the meaning, the less comprehensible it is" (p. 143), and indeed it is precisely religion's or spirituality's elusive character that makes it so attractive for many people. In contrast to the religious dwellers, Wuthnow (1998) calls these individuals "spiritual seekers"—people who are willing to explore "new spiritual vistas" and are comfortable negotiating "among complex and confusing meanings of spirituality" (p. 5). Such individuals may be more fascinated with the questions than the answers, and may enjoy the freedom from what are otherwise perceived to be the restraints of a religious community connection. Such individuals may still find meaning through their religion, but this meaning is often found more in the process of the search itself than in the answers uncovered or derived.

Religion, by its very nature for many, involves a sense of transcendence—the third reason identified by Hood et al. (2005) for religion's success as a meaning provider. S. M. Taylor (2007) persuasively argues that transcendence should not be insisted upon as a necessary criterion for a sense of significance and fullness. Nevertheless, a belief in a transcendent and authoritative being, especially when complete sovereignty is attributed to that being (as in the case of Western monotheistic religion), is the basis of the most convincing and fulfilling sense of meaning for many (Wong, 1998). Perhaps more than any other system of meaning, religion provides a focus on that which is "beyond me." Thus many people have "ultimate concerns" (Emmons, 1999) that require some belief in an ultimate authority, be it God or some other conception of transcendence in which higher meaning is found. Walter Houston Clark (1958) put it this way: "At the end of the road lies God, the Beyond, the final essence of the Cosmos, yet so secretly hidden with the soul that no man is able to persuade another that he has fulfilled the quest" (p. 419).

Finally, no other system of meaning is so bold in its proclaimed ability to provide a sense of significance. Meaning is embedded within religion's sacred character, so that it points to humanity's ultimate purpose—in the Judeo-Christian tradition, for example, to love and worship God. As S. M. Taylor (2007) notes, for the committed Christian, devotion to a loving or even judgmental God (as in the injunction "Thy will be done") is contingent on nothing else. Christ's sacrificial love for humans, a staple of Christian theology, caused the well-known 18th-century Christian hymn writer Isaac Watts (1707) to put it this way: "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all." For some, such bold and sometimes exclusive

claims are perhaps reason enough for suspicion. Others find these claims so convincing that religion demands their "all."

The Motivational Search for Meaning: The Need for Control

Why is personal meaning so important in the first place? Philosophers and theologians have long debated the underlying causes of the search for meaning and significance. From the myriad of possibilities, one that is particularly intriguing and of heuristic value to psychologists of religion is that meaning helps meet perhaps an even greater underlying need for control—an idea that also has a long history in both philosophy and psychology. Control in the sense of power is central in the philosophies of Hobbes and Nietzsche. Reid (1969) spoke of power as one of the basic human desires. Adler termed it "an intrinsic 'necessity of life'" (quoted in Vyse, 1997, p. 131). Though the ideal in life is *actual* control, the need to perceive personal mastery is often so great that the *illusion* of control will suffice. Lefcourt (1973) even suggests that this illusion "may be the bedrock on which life flourishes" (p. 425). Baumeister (1991) believes the subjective sense of personal efficacy to be the essence of control.

The attribution process described earlier represents not just a need for meaning, but also for mastery and control. Especially when threatened with harm or pain, all higher organisms seek to predict and/or control the outcomes of the events that affect them (Seligman, 1975). This fact has been linked by attribution theorists and researchers with novelty, frustration/failure, lack of control, and restriction of personal freedom (Berlyne, 1960; Wong, 1979; Wong & Weiner, 1981; Wortman, 1976). It may be that people gain a sense of control by making sense out of what is happening and being able to predict what will occur, even if the result is undesirable. Hence we sometimes hear of people who, after being given a bad health prognosis, still feel relieved because they at least now know something and are no longer left wondering.

Early attribution research demonstrated individual-difference patterns in identifying causes of events: themselves, luck/chance, or powerful other individuals (Levenson, 1974; Rotter, 1966, 1990). Religious populations appear to downplay the role of luck or fate (Gabbard, Howard, & Tageson, 1986). Welton, Adkins, Ingle, and Dixon (1996) argued that God control represented an additional control construct to those observed by Levenson (1974). They found not only that God control was independent of belief in chance and powerful others, but that it was also positively related to well-being—benefits normally only associated with internal control (Myers & Diener, 1995). Thus much current research exploring the connections between religion and health (see Chapter 13) utilizes such newly created measures as the God Locus of Health Control Scale (Wallston et al., 1999).

Religion and the Need for Control

Religion's ability to offer meaning for virtually every life situation—particularly those that are most distressing, such as death and dying—also provides a measure of control over life's vast uncertainties. Various techniques strengthen a person's feeling of mastery, such as prayer and participation in religious rituals and ceremonies. An argument can be made that religious ritual and prayer are mechanisms for enhancing the sense of self-control and control of one's world. Gibbs (1994) claims that supernaturalism arises when secular control efforts fail. Vyse (1997) further shows how lack of control relates to the development of and belief in superstition and magic. Indeed, the historic interplay of magic and religion has often been

viewed as a response to uncertainty and helplessness. When other attempts at control are limited (e.g., when a death is impending), religious faith alone may provide an illusory, subjective sense of control to help people regain the feeling that they are doing something that may work. This enhanced subjective feeling of control is often capable of offering people the strength they need to succeed.

Religion and Self-Control

Yet another important sense of control addressed by religion is self-control. "Self-control" can be defined as the active inhibition of unwanted responses that might interfere with desired achievement (Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, 2007). Self-control, as an internal restraining mechanism, is a core psychological function underlying many of the virtues addressed by religion: compassion, justice, wisdom, humility, and so forth. Baumeister and Exline (1999) point out that a life of virtue frequently necessitates putting the collective interests of society and community above pure self-interest. In their estimation, the natural proclivity toward self-interest and personal gratification (the very definition in some religions of sin or personal evil), often at the expense of others, requires the necessity of self-regulation for the good of society. Self-control can thus be viewed as personality's "moral muscle," and therefore in some sense as a master virtue. Suggesting that "virtues seem based on the positive exercise of self-control, whereas sin and vice often revolve around failures of self-control" (p. 1175), Baumeister and Exline (1999) maintain that the seven deadly sins in traditional Christianity (gluttony, sloth, greed, lust, envy, anger, and pride) can best be thought of as the absence of self-regulation in overcoming excessive desire or striving toward inappropriate goals.

At the heart of the "self-control as a master virtue" argument is a view that human nature's general tendency is toward self-interest, and that the development of virtue must counteract this tendency. But this counteraction will require work. If indeed self-control is like a muscle, we should see evidence of both fatigue and eventual strengthening after continued use. Ironically, religion may be a contributor to both moral fatigue and moral fortitude. Consider, for example, both the person who feels defeated because of an inability to live according to the ideal expectations of the religious teachings, and the person who has developed healthy spiritual disciplines that provide a sense of meaning and joy.

The Social Embeddedness of Meaning: The Need for Relationships

Our emphasis on the cognitive and motivational aspects of the search for meaning should not be taken to mean that the search itself is conducted in isolation from others. Though it is perhaps true that the search for significance for those who profess to be "spiritual but not religious" does not, at first glance, require that the search receive validation and support from an identifiable group of people (Hill et al., 2000), the *need to belong* is a powerful human drive (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). A truly fundamental principle is that we humans cannot live without others. We are conceived and born in relationship and interdependence, and connections and interactions with others are indispensable throughout our entire lives.

Defining Sociality

"Sociality" refers to behaviors that relate organisms to one another, and that keep an individual identified with a group (Brewer, 1997). Included here are expressions of social support,

cooperation, adherence to group standards, attachment to others, altruism, and many other actions that maintain effectively functioning groups. Faith systems accomplish these goals for many people, and in return the cultural order embraces religion.

Religion and Sociality

Religion connects individuals to each other and their groups; it socializes members into a community, and concurrently suppresses deviant behavior. As Lumsden and Wilson (1983) put it, religion is a "powerful device by which people are absorbed into a tribe and psychically strengthened" (p. 7). In this way, both religious bodies and the societies of which they are components strengthen themselves in numbers and importance.

There is a circular pattern in this linking of social life to faith. Religion fosters social group unity, which further strengthens religious sentiments. Current data show that church members possess larger social support networks than nonmembers do; in addition, there is more positive involvement in intrafamily relationships among the religiously committed than among their less religious peers (Pargament, 1997). Many of these observations have been attributed to enhanced feelings of social belonging and integration into a community of like-minded thinkers. This may mean that church members and those reared in churchgoing families also join more social groups than nonmembers do in later life. Data support this inference (Graves, Wang, Mead, Johnson, & Klag, 1998).

Moreover, the importance of marriage and reproduction is invariably stressed by religious traditions (Hoult, 1958). Expectations to marry and have children probably influence reproductive success in couples where both spouses attend the same church, as such couples generally show high birth rates (Moberg, 1962). There is a strong need for new research in this area, as there may be much variation across different religious bodies. It does seem to be true of some growing conservative groups, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (also known as the Mormons). This mutually reinforcing pattern is also likely to limit access to those whose religious beliefs differ, and could contribute to relatively high divorce rates plus low marital satisfaction when people of diverse religious affiliations marry (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993; Levinger, 1979; Shortz & Worthington, 1994).

We may thus view religious faith as strengthening group bonds, welfare, and positive social evaluation. In addition, religion appears to eventuate in heightened reproductive and genetic potential. Obviously, religious affiliation opens important social channels for interpersonal approval and integration into society on many levels. We also note that the search for meaning is not one-sided, and that the psychology of religion is also focused upon the response to what may be perceived as ultimately real (Hick, 2010; Hood, 2012b).

OVERVIEW

In this introductory chapter, we have tried to present some broad contours of our field, and have done so in a rather condensed manner. We have proposed that the search for meaning provides a useful and integrating theoretical framework for investigating the psychology of religion. We have also stressed the importance of theory and objectivity. We seek knowledge that is both public and reproducible. Our aim is to achieve a scientific circumscription of the psychology of religion, and to convey the importance of such a framework. However, we caution the reader that although we attempt to cover a great deal

of information in this text, psychologists and social scientists produce a massive literature, and hence our efforts have had to be selective. We have tried to choose and emphasize major points and issues, but such efforts can rapidly grow into volumes in themselves. It is worth noting that for almost every chapter in this text, there is at least one major handbook devoted to its topic. This is frustrating to all of us. We think, however, that even though we may not have covered the entire waterfront, we have treated a massive amount of information in the psychology of religion that remains indispensable for any overview of the field.

The next chapter describes this approach in further detail. When this effort has been completed, we show how religion relates to biology, as well as to individual development throughout the lifespan; describe the experiential expressions of religion; and finally discuss the significance of faith in social life, coping, adjustment, and mental disorder. Simply put, religion is a central feature of human existence, the psychological appreciation of which we try to communicate in these pages.

From a scientific point of view, the most important feature of our integrating framework is that it is testable. In brief, religious commitment should relate positively to measures tapping the cognitive, motivational, and social needs for meaning. Yet we must admit that such findings cannot prove that religion totally originates from the needs specified here. Religious and spiritual experiences are far too complex to be reduced to single sets of psychological principles, as compelling as they may be. However, many of the research findings reviewed in this book speak strongly to the idea that religion is a powerful factor in meeting human needs for meaning making, control, and sociality.