

Envisioning an Integrative Paradigm for the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality

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Chapter 1A

Introduction

China Protests Obama Meeting with Dalai Lama Buddhist. . .

Lutheran Church Seeing Fallout over Gay Clergy Issue. . .

Meditation Boosts Concentration Skills. . . Thousands Attend

Ground Zero Mosque Protest Rally

If current news headlines are any judge, pronouncements about the decline of religion in modern society have been a bit premature. Religious and spiritual issues continue to take center stage in the dramas that are regularly played out among individuals, families, communities, and nations. And it is difficult to ignore the religious dimension that underlies the event that has shaken our globe in the new millennium, the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001.

Newspaper headlines are only the most sensational indicators that religious and spiritual concerns remain alive and well in our times. There is no shortage of less sensational signs. Consider, for instance, the tremendous popularity of recent books, fiction and non-fiction, that address religion and spirituality – *The God Delusion*, *The Purpose Driven Life*, *Eat, Pray, Love* -- to name a few. Or scan the national surveys which continue to show that a majority of Americans attend religious congregations at least once a month, pray at least once a day, state that religion is a very important part of their lives, and believe in heaven, hell, angels, demons, and miracles (e.g., U. S. Religious Landscape Survey, 2008).

What these signs cannot convey are the ways that religion and spirituality are embedded in the greatest hopes and dreams of many people, their deepest disappointments and frustrations, the ways they understand and deal with themselves and the larger world, and their everyday

experiences across the lifespan, from birth to death. Summarizing his survey findings over the years, George Gallup Jr. (1999) concluded that: “The depth of religious commitment often has more to do with how Americans act and think than do other key background characteristics, such as level of education, age and political affiliation.” In short, religion and spirituality continue to hold tremendous power for large numbers in the world today.

However, with power comes emotion. It is hard to find anyone who is neutral when it comes to religion and spirituality, including those who define themselves as non-religious and non-spiritual, scientists among them. It is also difficult to engage in calm and dispassionate conversations about this domain. As with politics, people may decide to steer clear of religious and spiritual talk to spare themselves the discomfort of a tense exchange and to preserve and protect their relationships.

The end result has been unfortunate. Instead of conversation and dialogue about such critical and emotionally-charged domains, we have either silence or opinion and provocation. The problem is compounded by a lack of education about religion and spirituality within the public school system in the United States, as well as religious education programs within many denominations that are limited in depth and scope. Conversations about religious and spiritual matters at home are not an everyday occurrence and do not fill this gap (Bartkowski, Xu, & Levin, 2008). All of this adds up to “religious and spiritual neglect” – a type of neglect less publicized than other forms but one that may have equally significant implications for individuals, families, and our culture. Today, significant numbers of people are left religiously and spiritually uninformed, or to use the stronger language of sociologist Christian Smith, “spiritually illiterate” (cf. Smith & Denton, 2005).

The consequences of this widespread spiritual neglect are not trivial. Take one example. Recently a flight from New York to Louisville was diverted to Philadelphia when crew members were alarmed by a young 17- year-old observant Jewish adolescent who was engaged in his regular prayers wearing tefillin

(http://www.cleveland.com/nation/index.ssf/2010/01/phylacteries_abort_flight_jewi.html).

Tefillin are boxes containing biblical passages and straps that are attached to head and arm during morning prayers. Uninformed about this religious practice, crew members feared that the tefillin might be a bomb. As one FBI agent commented afterward, “It’s something that the average person is not going to see very often, if ever.” And yet, we might ask, why should the average person be uninformed about a religious practice that is a part of the daily lives of observant Jews all over the world? Perhaps the average person might also benefit from more information and knowledge about religion and spirituality and the part that they play in the lives of so many people.

What, if anything, does all of this have to do with psychology? A lot, potentially. A central thesis underlying these two volumes is that the psychology of religion and spirituality has a great deal to offer the effort to understand religion and spirituality and promote health and well-being. With its emphases on skepticism, objectivity, and the scientific method, psychology can shed light on many critical questions: Are religion and spirituality forces for personal wholeness, health and healing, or fragmentation, problems and pathology? Do religion and spirituality encourage social connectedness and compassion or prejudice and condemnation? Why are people religious and spiritual in the first place? How do we explain the troubling links of religion and spirituality with extremist behaviors on the one hand, and their links with altruistic behaviors on the other? Are there better ways to address religious and spiritual

problems in individual's lives and the world at large? Could we draw more fully on religious and spiritual resources to create more fulfilling lives and relationships? The psychology of religion and spirituality does not offer easy answers to questions such as these. In fact, as this field has advanced, we have learned that we need to replace oversimplified questions with more precise questions. But in spite of the challenges of studying phenomena as rich, complex and elusive as religion and spirituality, our field is rapidly developing a significant, systematically-based body of knowledge about these processes.

Some of this knowledge is profoundly important. For instance, we know that people who attend religious services frequently live considerably longer on average than those who attend less frequently or not at all (McCullough, Hoyt, Larson, Koenig, & Thoresen, 2000). Other knowledge is of great importance, but raises as many questions as it answers. For example, Phelps et al. (2009) studied a sample of patients with advanced cancer, and found that those who made more use of positive religious and spiritual coping were more likely to receive extremely expensive and intensive life-prolonging care during the last week of life. Were these patients demonstrating their fighting spirit through these coping efforts, or were they demonstrating instead their fear of death and refusal to accept the reality of their plight? Still other knowledge may be less profound or less clear in its practical implications, but nonetheless remains fascinating. For example, in one recent study, participants completed a target detection task; God-related words generated attentional shifts in an upward direction of the visual field, while devil-related words led to downward shifts in the visual field (Chasteen, Brudzy, & Pratt, 2009). The researchers concluded that terms such as God and devil are quite strongly tied to the ways we orient ourselves to the physical world. In short, we know a lot more about the links of religion and spirituality to human behavior than we did 25 years ago.

“Multiplicity” and “diversity” might be the terms that most accurately describe the current status of the psychology of religion and spirituality. No single paradigm dominates the field. No single definition of religion or spirituality has achieved acceptance by most researchers and practitioners. Neither does there exist a single methodological approach or a dominant set of measures in the discipline, though the field is largely reliant on self-report instruments. Instead, the psychology of religion and spirituality is marked by exceptional diversity in concepts, theories, methods, and measures. This is, perhaps, as it should be; the multiplicity in the field is an accurate reflection of the richness of religious and spiritual life. As comparative religionist William Paden (1994) noted, the religious world of every individual is in some sense unique, even among individuals identified with the same religious denomination. “Within a single tradition like Christianity,” he wrote, “there are thousands of religious worlds” (p. viii).

The rapid growth, multiplicity, and diversity in the field, however, is accompanied by the danger of fragmentation – a field that becomes so large, so ill-defined, and so unwieldy that it carries a serious risk of fracture among researchers and practitioners who can pursue their own particular interests while remaining unaware of the relevant work of others. To propel the field forward, we believe that an overarching organizing vision is needed, one that can lend greater coherence to the multiplicity and diversity in the discipline.

We have labeled our proposed organizing perspective the *integrative paradigm* for the psychology of religion and spirituality. This paradigm rests on a deep appreciation for both diversity and integration in the field. To grasp the extraordinary breadth and depth of religion and spirituality, psychologists cannot rely exclusively on one set of theoretical, methodological, or practical instruments. What is called for, instead, are multiple concepts and methods. However, to create coherence and wholeness, it is equally essential at this critical junction in the

development of the field that we identify points of connection and interaction, possibilities for convergence and synthesis, and unanticipated questions and challenges that can only come from dialogue and exchange within the field itself.

Our aim for this *APA Handbook* is to capture the current state of the field, what we know (and don't know) about religion and spirituality today, the part they play in individual and social life, and the ways we can apply this knowledge to advance the human welfare. But our interest goes beyond describing what we currently know. We also hope to push the field forward by encouraging greater integration. To bring the meaning of our integrative paradigm to life, we identified five guiding integrative themes. In the remainder of this introductory chapter, we describe these themes that underlie our vision of an integrative paradigm for the psychology of religion and spirituality. The final theme elaborates on the meanings of religion and spirituality that were used to shape and guide the *APA Handbook*.

Theme 1: Integrating the Multiple Dimensions and Multiple Levels of Religion and Spirituality

Religion and spirituality as multi-dimensional. Donald Capps (1977) once wrote that “the religious is not elusive because it lurks behind ordinary phenomena but because it is woven into the phenomena” (p. 48). We find religion and spirituality in every dimension of life.

Theoretical and empirical studies clarify that religion and spirituality are multi-dimensional constructs, made up of a myriad of thoughts, feelings, actions, experiences, relationships, and physiological responses which serve many purposes and yield a number of consequences (e.g., Glock, 1962; Idler et al., 2004).

But the extraordinary multiplicity and diversity of religion and spirituality make these processes even more difficult to understand. How can we simplify this task? One overarching

metaphor is particularly helpful in this regard; this is the metaphor of the journey, one consisting of pathways and destinations (Pargament, 1997, 2007). Think of the individual entering the world and embarking on a religious and spiritual journey which takes him/her on multiple pathways over time. Over the course of the lifespan, the individual's religious and spiritual travels may be marked by rites of passage, a developing system of beliefs and practices oriented to matters of ultimate importance, critical forks in the journey that lead to greater religious and spiritual involvement in one direction and disengagement in the other, and the merging of the person's travels with those of others. The individual's religious and spiritual pathways say something very important about who that person is; no one's routes in life are identical to those of another.

This is not a farfetched metaphor. Virtually every major religious tradition speaks of life as a journey and provides its adherents with a map for the pathways they should take in life. We hear of the Eightfold Path in Buddhism. The Pillars of Islam describe the central pathway of living as submission to the will of Allah. Within Taoism, the word Tao literally means "the Way." It is important to note, however, that while some people may follow the "pre-constructed" pathways that have been made available to them through their traditions, others prefer to construct their own paths. Religious and spiritual pathways are constructed out of the raw materials of cognition, affect, behavior, relationship, and biology. To understand religious and spiritual pathways then, we have to take a close look at these ingredients and how they come together to form distinctive paths. In this *APA Handbook* we consider many of these vital religious and spiritual raw materials, their place in a larger religious or spiritual way of life, and their implications for health and well-being (see Volume 1, Part 2)

The pathways that mark life journeys are also directed toward particular destinations. Over the years, social scientists have articulated a variety of religious and spiritual destinations, or to put it in more scientific language, religious and spiritual functions. Religion and spirituality have been described as serving functions which range from impulse control and anxiety-reduction to meaning-making and evolutionary adaptation. And, as we will elaborate later, to those who are most devout, the ultimate destination of religion is spirituality itself. Several chapters in this APA Handbook are devoted to these functional explanations, and to the fascinating question of why people are religious and spiritual (see Volume 1, Part 3).

Religion and spirituality as multi-level. People do not follow their religious and spiritual paths in isolation. They undertake their journeys within a larger field of social and cultural forces, including religious group, age, ethnicity, family, community, and culture. These forces shape the nature of the individual's religious and spiritual trek over the lifespan (see Volume 1, Part 4). Thus, religion and spirituality are not only multi-dimensional constructs; they are multi-level phenomena as well.

This point deserves special emphasis. Founding father of the field, William James (1902), focused his religious inquiry on “individual men in their solitude,” and since that time the psychology of religion and spirituality has been concerned largely with *individual* beliefs, experiences, and behaviors. This body of work has been enriched more recently by studies which have differentiated a more conscious – explicit level of personal belief from a less-conscious – implicit level of religious understanding (see Hall, Volume 1). Nevertheless, our discipline remains individualistic. This bias is certainly a reflection of larger trends toward what has been described as “self-contained individualism” in Western culture and the larger field of psychology in the United States (Sampson, 1977). It is problematic, however. Commenting on the

individualism of research on religion, Barton (1971) wrote: “Researchers have proceeded to take people out of their actual social contexts and to limit their analysis to individual variables – this is like a biologist putting his experimental animals through a meat grinder and taking every hundredth cell to examine under a microscope; almost all information about anatomy and physiology, about structure and function gets lost” (p. 847). Important as the individual level of analysis is, other levels of analysis are also relevant foci for religious and spiritual study and practice. In fact, researchers and practitioners have begun to shed fascinating new light on the ways religion and spirituality manifest themselves within intimate relationships, families, organizations, institutions, communities, and cultures. Religion, after all, derives from the idea of “binding,” or as Guntrip (1968) put it, “Religion is relationship to the *nth* degree” (p. 324).

The chapters in the two volumes of the *APA Handbook* highlight the tremendous varieties of religiousness and spirituality experienced and expressed at multiple levels. Many of the chapters focus on specific aspects of religion and spirituality within particular levels of analysis. There is no need to pick a winner from among them; each has its own legitimacy. Thus, we have discouraged attempts to reduce religion and spirituality to one primary overarching theory, one primary explanatory framework, or one primary methodology (see Volume 1, Part 1). Given the complexity of religion and spirituality, no single tool is sufficient to the psychologist’s task. Bertocci (1972) put it well: “Especially in the area of the psychology of religion, psychologists may be likened to fishermen throwing their lines into an unexplored lake. What fish they catch depends upon the nature of the hook and of the bait used. It seems clear that a wise psychologist will bring with him a variety of hooks and bait, and try to be aware of his own limitations as a fisherman” (p. 38). The lake is, however, beginning to get more crowded. To prevent our lines from getting tangled, we have encouraged our contributors to reach beyond their own areas of

interest and, where possible, acknowledge and draw on the contributions of other researchers and practitioners in the field. As you will see, this integrative approach makes for some interesting and innovative exchanges between seemingly disparate sub-areas within the field.

Theme 2: Integrating the Multiple Valences of Religion and Spirituality

Are religion and spirituality good or bad for your health and well-being? This is perhaps the most controversial of all questions in the field. Nowadays, we can find many offerings in the popular press that take one position or the other. For instance, Christopher Hitchens' (2007) wrote a best-selling book, none-too-subtly entitled, "God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything" with chapters equally provocative: "Revelation: The Nightmare of the 'Old' Testament" and "The 'New' Testament Exceeds the Evil of the Old One." This type of rhetoric can certainly stimulate strong passions (and perhaps book sales), but it is not new. Consider some of these "old sayings": "religion is an opiate," "religion is a crutch," "there are no atheists in foxholes," "religion is the root cause of violence in the world," and "religion is a form of denial." Though there may be a grain of truth to each of these stereotypes, they are oversimplified and could prove terribly misleading. Empirical study, in contrast, challenges oversimplifications and may suggest a different set of conclusions (for a review see Pargament, 1997). For example, while stressful situations generally prompt a "quickening" of the religious impulse, significant numbers of individuals are atheists before, during and after the "foxhole" experiences of their lives. Granted, some people look to their faith as a crutch or a way of avoiding the confrontation with reality; in many cases, however, religion and spirituality encourage active rather than passive forms of coping. It is true that religion can foster denial, but more often than not it encourages people to place their pain and suffering into a larger, benign framework of meaning. Similarly, we hear a lot these days about how religious groups promote

terrorism and inter-group conflict and certainly that can be true (Jones, 2008; Stern, 2003); but religious groups also sponsor movements for peace and reconciliation and social justice (Silberman, Higgins, & Dweck, 2005).

We believe that debates about whether religion and spirituality are helpful versus harmful are ultimately misdirected, for they rest on the assumption that there is an all-or-none answer; religion and spirituality are either good or bad, in simple, black-and-white terms. To the contrary, the psychology of religion and spirituality makes very clear that these phenomena are multivalent; they can be helpful, but they can also be harmful. The critical question isn't *whether* religion and spirituality are good or bad, but *when, how, and why* they take constructive or destructive forms. Or to raise the question in more scientific (and considerably drier) language: "How helpful or harmful are particular religious (and spiritual) expressions for particular people dealing with particular situations in particular social contexts according to particular criteria of helpfulness and harmfulness" (Pargament, 2002, p. 178)? Obviously, this latter question will not be the title of a best-selling book. It does, however, come closer to reflecting a basic reality, that religion and spirituality have the capacity for both good and bad. Moreover, this question, complex as it is, points to the need for a massive body of research to disentangle the intricacies of the linkages between religion, spirituality, and human functioning.

The chapters in the *APA Handbook* steer clear of overgeneralizations, stereotypes, and simplistic evaluations of religion and spirituality. Instead, they treat these phenomena as rich and complex processes, processes that could have constructive or destructive implications for our lives.

Theme 3: Integrating Theory, Research and Practice

The need for integration is perhaps most apparent in the gap between research and practice which marks the psychology of religion and spirituality. In some respects, our discipline is simply reflecting the split between science and practice in the larger field of psychology (Kazdin, 2008), a split illustrated by the relatively recent rift between the more science-oriented American Psychological Society and more practice-oriented American Psychological Association. The psychology of religion and spirituality, like other disciplines in the field, struggles with the difference in purpose that has come to characterize modern science and practice. While scientists are especially interested in discovering generalizable rules and principles of human functioning, practitioners are most concerned with the particular case, be it an individual, couple, family, organization or community. Findings from the nomothetic methods of science are not especially useful to practitioners, who may be more interested in idiographically-based knowledge that would guide them with specific cases, cases that often represent exceptions to the generalized rule.

The science-practice schism may be especially pronounced in the psychology of religion and spirituality. In an effort to establish our discipline as a legitimate area of scientific inquiry, researchers distanced themselves from the field's roots in philosophy, theology, pastoral care, healing, and moral treatment (Shafranske, 2002). Compounding this problem is the fact that much of the research in the field is produced by theorists and researchers who are not themselves involved in application and fail to elaborate on the practical implications of their work. Thus, we find that scientific journals, texts, and handbooks in the psychology of religion and spirituality are generally research-oriented; with some important exceptions, relatively few articles and chapters exist that translate research findings into action. To illustrate this point, Bartoli (2007) conducted a review of the psychological literature on religion and spirituality since 1980,

discovering that only 10% of the articles on this topic addressed the roles of religion and spirituality in treatment. Practitioners, for their part, are often personally committed to a particular religious or spiritual perspective. Many of them find that theory and research in the discipline overlooks topics and concepts of greatest meaning within their theological frame of reference or, even worse, promotes reductionistic explanations that discount the legitimacy of their religious and spiritual experience. Perhaps not surprisingly then, many practitioners neglect the theoretical and empirical literature in the field. Furthermore, practitioners in the psychology of religion and spirituality do not often contribute to the scholarly literature.

Integrating theory, research, and practice is one of the most critical themes of the *APA Handbook*. In the tradition of social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1951) who famously remarked that “there is nothing so practical as a good theory (p. 169),” we believe that theory and research have a great deal to offer practice, especially if the scientific enterprise is conducted with an eye toward potential application. In the last twenty years, the psychology of religion and spirituality has opened up to a host of new topics -- virtues, attachment, coping, meaning-making, modeling, struggles, evil, meditation, relational spirituality, and spiritually integrated interventions, to name just a few. The findings from these studies clarify that religion and spirituality can be potent resources for many people or sources of stress in and of themselves. These findings are not simply of great scientific interest; they should also be of tremendous interest to applied psychologists, both within and outside of religious traditions. Though some psychologists might fear intruding on sacred ground, many people have voiced their interest in more spiritually integrated approaches to psychological care. For instance, in one survey of clients at six mental health centers, 55% reported that they would like to discuss religious or spiritual concerns in counseling (Rose, Westefeld, & Ansley, 2001). Others, psychologists among them, have called

for an injection of spiritual concern within our major institutions – educational, correctional, work, and healthcare (e.g., Astin, 2004). These are good reasons why practitioners should stay abreast of the knowledge that is emerging from research in the field and begin to move from this research to practice.

Of course, applied psychologists can do more than simply consume research. Just as theorists and researchers can contribute to an applied psychology, practitioners can help to advance scientific psychology. By virtue of their closeness to the religious and spiritual experiences of individuals and groups, practitioners have a vital role to play in the process of knowledge generation (Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009). Through case studies and qualitative investigations, applied psychologists are well-positioned to identify new phenomena and hypotheses that deserve further study. Moreover, they can serve as gatekeepers of scientific information by critically evaluating the degree to which scientific findings speak to and enhance the lived experiences of people.

In the two volumes of *APA Handbook*, we strive for greater integration between theory, research, and practice. The emphasis of the first volume is on research and theory. However, we have asked our contributors to attend to the practical implications of theory and research in their area of interest. The second volume specifically emphasizes applications of the psychology of religion and spirituality from the perspective of different theoretical orientations (Volume 2, Part 2), in dealing with different problems (Volume 2, Part 3), in different applied contexts (Volume 2, Part 4). However, we have also encouraged our authors to draw upon the theoretical and empirical foundations of the field, suggesting new research questions that grow out of practice. It is important to note that we are using the term “practice” broadly in both volumes. Practice encompasses not only clinical activities, such as counseling and psychotherapy, but also

applications across a variety of settings (e.g., schools, workplace, correctional), problems (physical illness, prejudice, political violence, mental health symptoms, couple distress) and potential times for intervention (e.g., early education, prevention, treatment). Thus, the vision here incorporates clinical interests and concerns within a broader *applied psychology of religion and spirituality* (Shafranske, 2005).

Theme 4: Integrating the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality with the Broader Field

Even though religion and spirituality were central topics of interest to the founding fathers of psychology, the discipline was marginalized from the mainstream field during much of the past century (see Hathaway, Volume 1). Fortunately, this picture has begun to change. The decision of APA Press to publish this two volume *Handbook* as one of a series of handbooks on major disciplines in the field is a sign that our field is coming of age. Nevertheless, we still have a long way to go. In a recent survey of APA leaders, only 40.3% strongly agreed that “religion and spirituality are important topics for psychologists to consider,” 36.5% strongly agreed that “religion and spirituality are important to consider when providing professional services,” and 30.6% strongly agreed that religion and spirituality can be studied with scientific rigor” (McMinn, Hathaway, Woods, & Snow, 2009). In an effort to bring the psychology of religion and spirituality further into the mainstream of psychology, we selected contributors to the *APA Handbook* who have linked their work to theory, research, and practice within the larger field. For instance, we provide coverage to recent efforts to integrate religion and spirituality within theory and research on topics that include terror management, evolutionary theory, cognitive theory, personality theory, social learning theory, couples and family psychology, and positive psychology. We also link advances in the applied psychology of religion to broader approaches

to personal and social change within clinical, industrial/organizational, educational, pastoral, and community psychology.

The psychology of religion and spirituality has much to gain by drawing on advances in the larger field. The converse is also true: the larger field has much to gain by drawing on advances in the psychology of religion and spirituality (Hill & Gibson, 2008). In fact, we would argue that a mainstream psychology that overlooks the religious and spiritual dimension of human functioning remains incomplete. For example, how can we fully understand community life if we overlook the place of religious institutions and individuals within communities? How can we make sense of the major political conflicts of our day if we fail to appreciate the religious and spiritual dimension underlying tensions in the world? How can the core concepts of positive psychology – from forgiveness and gratitude to growth, transformation and love -- be understood without attention to their religious and spiritual roots and expressions? How can we grasp human resilience if we neglect some of the most common ways people deal with major life stressors? To facilitate integration in this domain, we asked our authors to link their topic of interest to developments in the larger field of psychology. We also requested that they highlight the distinctive contributions of the psychology of religion and spirituality to the larger field.

Although the APA Handbook is firmly rooted in psychology, it is important to note that our contributors come from other disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, theology, and medicine. Thus, integration can be envisioned not only among the disciplines within psychology, but also between psychology and other disciplines, as Emmons and Paloutzian (2003) noted in their call for a multilevel, interdisciplinary paradigm.

Theme 5: Integrating Perspectives on the Meanings of Religion and Spirituality

Where do religion and spirituality start and stop? What distinguishes religion and spirituality from other phenomena, such as meaning and purpose, positive psychology, and a sense of community? How do religion and spirituality overlap and differ from each other? These boundary questions are critical to the psychology of religion and spirituality. Without some shared sense of its key parameters, the boundaries of our sub-discipline become so diffuse that we can lose our professional identity. Hill and colleagues (2001) put it this way: “If any belief or activity that provides individuals with a sense of identity or meaning (e.g., involvement in a social club) is defined as a religious or spiritual endeavor, then this field literally knows no bounds” (p. 71). Because definitional questions about religion and spirituality are so vital to our discipline (and this Handbook), we devote extended attention to this aspect of the integrative paradigm in the remainder of this introductory chapter.

To be fair to the psychology of religion and spirituality, ours is not the only field that struggles to define its parameters. Other disciplines within the social sciences must step carefully around slippery definitional boundaries of their own. Nevertheless, the task of reaching some shared sense of the essential nature of religion and spirituality was and continues to be particularly daunting. In 1958, eminent psychologist of religion, Walter Houston Clark (1958) asked 68 social scientists how they define religion and concluded that “social scientists may mean very different things by the term ‘religion’” (p.146). Questions about the meanings of religion have only increased over the last 50 years as the distance between members of different faiths and cultures has decreased and people are exposed to greater diversity in religious attitudes and expressions. Hood and colleagues (2009) capture a sense of this diversity: “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

defy circumscription and definition” (p. 7). How do we arrive at a coherent definition of religion in an increasingly multi-cultural, multi-faith world?

Complicating matters even further is the reality that the boundaries of our discipline have been in flux over the past several decades, due in large part to the introduction of a new concept for the field: spirituality. Granted, trying to reach stable definitions of religion and spirituality may be as difficult as trying to capture movement through a few snapshots, and we fully acknowledge this difficulty. Nonetheless, we see it as a worthwhile endeavor. Before presenting the perspective on the meanings of religion and spirituality that we used for the *APA Handbook*, we will briefly provide some background on the evolving meanings of religion and spirituality.

The Evolving Meanings of Religion and Spirituality

It is useful to distinguish between classic and contemporary meanings of religion and spirituality (see Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999). For much of the 20th century, religion was seen by psychologists and other social scientists as a broad, multifaceted domain that encompassed both individual and institutional levels of analysis, both constructive and destructive expressions, both traditional and newer forms, both structure and function, and both intrinsic and extrinsic forms of motivation. In fact, some classic definitions of religion would be hard to distinguish from modern-day conceptions of spirituality. Consider, for instance, James’ (1902) definition of religion as “the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider divine” (p. 32). In the latter part of the century, the term *spirituality* was introduced and began to appropriate some of the meanings of religiousness. In the process, broad-based views of religion gave way to more constricted perspectives (Wulff, 1997), and the terms *religion* and *spirituality* became increasingly polarized from each other. Today, social scientists often form striking

contrasts between these two terms: religion as institutional vs. spirituality as individual, religion as external and objective vs. spirituality as internal and subjective, religion as old vs. spirituality as new, religion as structural vs. spirituality as functional, religion as fixed and frozen vs. spirituality as flexible and dynamic, and even religion as bad vs. spirituality as good (Zinnbauer et al. 1999).

Judging from studies of the meanings of these terms to the general population, many people have also begun to distinguish religion and spirituality from each other (Mattis, 2000; Schlehofer, Omoto, & Adelman, 2008; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). These studies show that people often associate the term religion with predefined belief and rituals along with institutionally-based involvement. Spirituality more often connotes an individualized, experientially-based pursuit of positive values such as connectedness, meaning, self-actualization, and authenticity. A growing percentage of the population, though still a minority, defines itself as “spiritual not religious.” This orientation is reflected in what has become something of a mantra today, “You don’t need to be religious to be spiritual” (Marler & Hadaway, 2002).

Some have taken the split even further. Hood (2003) has argued cogently that a sub-group of the “spiritual not religious” might be more accurately described as “spiritual against religion.” For this group, religion is seen as a defense against spirituality (cf. Jung), a form of bondage which must be escaped for personal growth to occur. Spirituality provides the vehicle by which people can free themselves from religious servitude. We can sense undercurrents of this anti-religious spirituality in some definitions today, such as one offered by the President of the World Psychiatric Association: “Spirituality shares with religion the personal belief in ideas of religious significance such as God, the Soul, or Heaven, but rejects the administrative, often

bureaucratic and hierarchical, structure and creeds of a particular organized religion” (Maj, 2010, xiii).

The reasons behind the shifting meanings of religion and spirituality are far from clear and cannot be reviewed in any detail here. Some implicate the defining events of the 20th century in these changes. Wuthnow (1998) asserts that religious institutions have failed to provide their adherents with “safe homes” and plausible explanations to live securely and deal effectively with the host of problems that have marked the last 100 years – world wars, the Holocaust, nuclear threats, intractable global hunger and poverty, AIDS, racism, and terrorism. Institutional religion has also struggled to adjust to radical changes in modern societies brought about by the women’s movement, civil rights movements, biotechnology, and changing norms regarding human sexuality and family life. As a result, the religious tradition “of inhabiting sacred places has given way to a new spirituality of seeking” in which people construct their own distinctive paths toward the sacred (p. 3). Others believe that changes in the language of religion and spirituality are reflective of a growing religious pluralization in the United States, particularly the rise of interest in Eastern religions with their emphasis on internal subjective experience rather than institutionalized beliefs and practices (Roof, 2003). Still others have suggested that the trend toward differentiating spirituality from religion is simply one among many manifestations of larger forces at play pushing Western culture toward social fragmentation, de-institutionalization and the privatization of experience (Bellah, Mardsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1996). Finally, some have described the growing emphasis on spirituality as the latest in a series of religious revitalization movements that have arisen throughout history to inject new energy and fervor into the quest for the sacred and institutions which are perceived as having lost touch with the essential spirit (Roof, 2000).

Regardless of the reasons why, it seems clear that we are witnessing a shift in the meanings of religion and spirituality. How far are these changes likely to go? It is hard to say. Perhaps the term spirituality will take on “full independence” from religion. But perhaps not. It is important to note that, even though the number of “spiritual only” people may be growing, a majority in the United States continue to label themselves as both religious and spiritual (Marler & Hadaway, 2002), and most believe that religiousness and spirituality are overlapping concepts (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). In other words, not all people seem to experience a tension between religion and spirituality. For many, if not most, religion continues to be the home of spirituality; it is their haven, the nest where their spirituality is enhanced and enriched.

Opportunities, Problems and Challenges Associated with the Evolving Meanings of Religion and Spirituality

The evolving meanings of religion and spirituality raise some opportunities, problems, and challenges for psychologists interested in understanding and addressing these constructs in research and practice. With respect to opportunities, the shifts in meaning alert us to the importance of attending to newer as well as more established forms of religious and spiritual expression. The lion’s share of research and practice in the field has focused on religious “dwellers” (cf. Wuthnow, 1998) — that is, people who reside within traditional religious denominations and institutions. The emergence of interest in spirituality opens the door to studies of new movements and a wider range of highly personalized, non-traditional beliefs, practices, and experiences. Perhaps even more importantly, the growing interest in spirituality serves as a reminder that the spiritual dimension is the heart and soul of religious life. As psychologist Paul Johnson once wrote: “It is the ultimate Thou whom the religious person seeks most of all” (p. 70). With some important exceptions, psychologists have tended to overlook the

spiritual motivation that lies at the root of many forms of religious expression. Certainly religion works through many mechanisms including psychological, social and physical. However, in the effort to explain religion through these factors, the most parsimonious explanation has been neglected, the possibility that religion may have direct spiritual effects on human functioning. The contemporary point of view, however, underscores the possibility that spirituality is a significant dimension of life (and religion) in and of itself, one that cannot be explained away (see Pargament, Volume 1).

We also believe that the growing polarization in the meanings of religion and spirituality is problematic for several reasons (see Pargament, 1999). We will focus on two of the most significant problems here.

Religion as Institutional vs. Spirituality as Individual. This dichotomization creates problems from both the religious and spiritual sides. Focusing on the religious side, the view of religion as purely institutional overlooks the fact that these organizations are concerned with the well-being of their individual members. Of course, some do a better job of caring for their flock than others, but it remains true that they are designed to meet the needs of their members. Toward that end, religious institutions must transmit values, beliefs, and practices to their adherents. This does not mean that most people simply swallow religious teachings hook, line and sinker. Many are involved in a more active process, selecting, interpreting, and re-constructing institutionally-based world views and practices. In this sense, religion involves dynamic patterns of exchange between individuals and institutions. When religion is constricted in its definition to a static, institutionalized set of beliefs and practices, we lose sight of the important ways in which individuals form, sustain, and at times transform religious institutions.

Conversely, by treating spirituality as a purely individual phenomena, we lose sight of the rich and varied ways spirituality expresses itself in intimate relationships, marriages, families, friendships, organizations, communities, and cultures. Even personal spiritual expressions unfold in a larger religious, social and cultural milieu. As noted above, many people prefer to practice their spirituality within the context of an established religious tradition. Others seek out alternative social outlets for their spirituality, such as healing groups, meditation groups, yoga groups, 12-step groups, and online discussion groups, which may reject traditional religious beliefs and practices but retain a social organization; in essence, these alternative groups become “a religion of no religion” (cf, Spiegelberg in Kripal, 2007). And many people disengage from religious institutions for a period of time only to seek out other like-minded individuals at a later point in time with whom they can share their spiritual interests. True, there are those who remain disengaged from religious institutions, preferring to construct their own personalized spiritual pathways. It would be a mistake, however, to see their spiritual journeys as context-free. Privatized as they are, their spiritual experiences are taking place within a larger system of cultural forces that has helped shape this privatization. The perception that they have removed themselves from the influence of a larger religious context is as illusory as the belief that young adults who have moved out of their family homes are no longer affected by their families. For better or worse, religion is in the air we breathe. In short, defining religion as a purely institutional expression and spirituality as a purely individualistic expression can only lead to a distorted understanding of what we have described in Theme 1 of our integrative paradigm as multi-level phenomena.

Spirituality as Good vs. Religion as Bad. The polarization in the meanings of spirituality and religion has led to a second significant problem – a tendency to view spirituality

as the “good guy” and religion as the “bad guy.” We have avoided this kind of dichotomization in our integrative paradigm (see Theme 2) and prefer a multi-valent perspective for several reasons. First and foremost, this dichotomization does not square with empirical realities. Be it church attendance, beliefs in an afterlife, or religious commitment, traditional religious beliefs and practices in the United States appear to have largely positive implications for health and well-being (Koenig, King, & Carver, 2012). Certainly, we can also identify more harmful forms of religiousness, such as over-scrupulosity or raging against the divine (e.g., see Exline, Volume 1; Exline & Rose, 2005; Zinnbauer, Volume 2), and we do not intend to argue that religion is invariably constructive. Rather, we contend that religion can take both constructive and destructive forms. The same point holds true for spirituality. Though many spiritual expressions can be linked to positive outcomes, spirituality also has a darker side: the individual whose ultimate goals in life are marked by narrow self-interest; the animosity, even rage, of spiritual seekers against those who prefer to dwell in established religious homes, and; the failure of “spiritual not religious” parents to anticipate and respond to the spiritually-related questions, concerns, and needs of their children.

Defining spirituality as good and religion as bad is also poor science. If spirituality and religion are, *a priori*, good and bad, then we have predetermined the answers to critical questions about the value of these constructs for health and well-being. To put it in more scientific language, defining spirituality and religion as good and bad confounds processes (i.e., the ways in which an individual is spiritual or religious) with outcomes (i.e., the degree to which an individual experiences spiritual or religious benefits or harm), thereby obscuring the distinction between measures of religiousness and spirituality and measures of religious and spiritual

well-being. For this reason, Koenig (2008) calls for definitions and indices of spirituality and religiousness that are uncontaminated by outcomes.

Finally, the polarization of spirituality and religion into “good guy” and “bad guy” is likely to offend many of those who participate in organized religious life (a majority of Americans and citizens of the globe). Psychologists should be especially attentive to this point, for we are “religiously atypical” of the U.S. population at large. As a whole, psychologists are likely to be over-represented in the group that defines itself as “spiritual only.” While 73% of counseling and clinical psychologists indicate that spirituality is fairly or very important to them, only 48% report that religion is fairly or very important to them (in contrast to 88% of the general population) (Shafranske, 1996; Shafranske & Cummings, Volume 2). Even more to the point, psychologists may be over-represented in the “spiritual against religion” group. It is not hard to find pro-spiritual/anti-religious sentiments in psychological writings. As Hood (2003) notes, “a hostility to religion as thwarting or even falsifying spirituality is evident” (p. 252). Thus, psychologists may be among the vanguard of those who polarize the meanings of religion and spirituality. However, the “religious mismatch” between psychologists and the majority of people in the U. S. should provide a warning against overestimating the tensions between religion and spirituality (McMinn et al., 2009) and “declaring in advance the triumph of a spirituality that itself is not religious” (Hood, 2003, p. 261). Moreover, antipathy to organized religion is certainly not compatible with efforts to promote the health and well-being of the large numbers of Americans who affiliate themselves with religious institutions.

We are left then with a definitional challenge. How do we: (1) provide definitional boundaries that lend coherence to the field, (2) ensure that these definitions reflect sensitivity to

the evolving meanings of religion and spirituality, and (3) sidestep the problems that these shifting meanings pose for scientific study and practice?

Definitional Boundaries of Religion and Spirituality

Given the evolving nature of meanings of religion and spirituality, we do not believe it is possible to arrive at hard and fast definitions of these terms that would be agreed upon by all contributors to this volume (or, much less, by the field as a whole). However, some definitional clarity is needed. Thus, we have taken the more modest approach of offering tentative definitions of religion and spirituality, and then several guiding thoughts about the similarities and dissimilarities between the two constructs. We have also created several guidelines to help the authors in their decisions about whether (and when) to use the language of religion and/or spirituality in their chapters. A brief description of our perspective on the meanings of these terms follows.

Tentative Definitions. Drawing on the work of Pargament (1999), we define spirituality as “*the search for the sacred*.” There are two important terms here: search and sacred. Let’s start with the meaning of sacred. The term *sacred* is used inclusively here to refer not only to concepts of God and higher powers, but also to other aspects of life that are perceived to be manifestations of the divine or imbued with divine-like qualities, such as transcendence, immanence, boundlessness and ultimacy (Pargament & Mahoney, 2005; see Pargament, Volume 1). Beliefs, practices, experiences, relationships, motivations, art, nature, war – virtually any part of life, positive or negative, can be endowed with sacred status (Mahoney, Pargament, & Hernandez, in press). In short, the sacred can be perceived, experienced, and approached in many ways. This may account in part for the multi-faced character of spirituality; people can take any number of sacred pathways in search of any number of sacred destinations, from a

connection with a loving God, daily transcendent experiences, and a satisfying vocation in life to the creation of a divine kingdom on earth, devotion to an exalted figure, and the avoidance of eternal damnation. The choice of sacred pathways and destinations is not trivial; the chapters of the *APA Handbook* demonstrate that it makes a great deal of difference which destinations people pursue and which pathways they take toward these destinations.

By search, we are referring to an ongoing journey, a process that begins with the discovery of something sacred. Discovery can be experienced as a personal accomplishment (the individual succeeds in finding the sacred) or as a revelation (the sacred reveals itself to the individual) (Pargament, 2007). In either case, the search for the sacred does not end there. In response to the discovery of the sacred, the task shifts to building and conserving a connection with it. At times, particularly during periods of stress and turmoil, the searching process also involves the transformation of the individual's tie to what is held to be sacred (Pargament, 1997; see also Pargament, Volume 1). Following transformation, the task shifts to building and sustaining a reconnection with the sacred as it is now understood and experienced. And the journey, the search for the sacred, continues.

It is important to note that our definition of spirituality does not specify a particular context in which the journey unfolds. Rather, people can engage in the search for the sacred within any context, traditional or nontraditional; they can follow well-trodden pathways established by traditional institutions or they can construct their own distinctive pathways that have little if anything to do with established religions.

Building on the work of Hill et al. (2001) and Pargament (1997), we define religion as *“the search for significance that occurs within the context of established institutions that are designed to facilitate spirituality.”* The term “search” refers once again to the ongoing journey

of discovery, conservation, and transformation. In this case, however, the destination of the search is “significance:” a term which encompasses a full range of potential goals including those that are psychological (e.g., anxiety reduction, meaning, impulse control), social (e.g., belonging, identity, dominance), and physical (e.g., longevity, evolutionary adaptation, death), as well as those that are spiritual (Mahoney, 2010; Pargament, 1997; see Volume 1, Part 2).

Religion occurs within the larger context of established institutions and traditions that have as their primary goal, the facilitation of spirituality. In contrast to the modern tendency among scholars to dissociate spirituality from religion, our view is that spirituality represents the function most central to institutional religious life. It is the spiritual character of its mission that makes religious institutions distinctive; no other social institution has spirituality as its primary goal (Mahoney, 2010). Towards this end, religious institutions also encourage their members to follow a set of pathways in life that are embedded with sacred character – engaging in religious rituals, attending religious services, studying sacred literature, avoiding religious vices and practicing religious virtues, and participating in the life of the religious community.

Similarities. With these definitions in mind, we can see that spirituality and religion are similar in several respects. First, the sacred lies at the core of both religion and spirituality. We have defined the sacred broadly and by doing so, we open the doors of the psychology of religion and spirituality to a wide range of phenomena of interest, both traditional and nontraditional. However, by insisting that the sacred is central to both religion and spirituality, we also highlight the distinctiveness of these constructs and help to provide clearer boundaries for the sub-discipline. After all, without a sacred substance, religion and spirituality would be indistinguishable from other constructs within the larger field of psychology, such as well-being, community, meaning, hope, and authenticity. Hill and colleagues (2000) make just this point:

“To say ‘I find my spirituality in gardening’ or ‘Music is my spirituality’ might indeed suggest that a person finds great satisfaction and subjective well-being through gardening or playing music. . . , but unless such lifestyles are responses to a perception of the Sacred (e.g., the person gardens because caring for nature is a way of experiencing the creative forces of the universe, the person plays and listens to music because its beauty and the complex mathematical structures underlying music cause the person to contemplate the beauty and order of God or the entire universe) then it is inappropriate to refer to gardening or music as ‘spiritual.’” (p. 64).

Second, both spirituality and religion are dynamic, searching processes. Neither construct is static; rather, each changes and evolves over time through the processes of discovery, conservation, and transformation. In this sense, we can think of religion and spirituality as developmental phenomena that can be an integral part of the journey over the lifespan.

Third, both spirituality and religion are multi-dimensional and multi-level processes, as we noted earlier in the first theme of our integrative paradigm. In their spiritual and religious journeys, people can draw on a rich variety of beliefs, practices, experiences, and relationships. To put it another way, people can take a number of pathways in their efforts to reach and realize the significant destinations in their lives. These paths are not necessarily followed in isolation from each other or in isolation from other people. We can understand both religion and spirituality at individual, dyadic, familial, organizational, community and cultural levels of analysis.

Fourth, both spirituality and religion are multi-valent. As we delineated earlier under Theme 2 of our integrative paradigm, each process can express itself in constructive and destructive ways.

Finally, both spirituality and religion matter because they are concerned about issues of great value. Spirituality is directed toward sacred destinations. Religion is directed toward significant goals, goals which may be sacred in nature. In fact, when religion is focused on the sacred it becomes indistinguishable from spirituality. However, religion can focus on other destinations as well and, when it does, it takes on a different appearance.

Dissimilarities. Although religion and spirituality are similar in important respects, they also differ from each other on key two dimensions: function and context. Function refers to the destinations or significant goals associated with spirituality and religion. Context refers to the larger social milieu in which spirituality and religion unfold. In terms of function, religion is directed toward the pursuit of a broader array of destinations or significant goals than spirituality. Religion serves the important function of facilitating spirituality itself, but it serves other functions as well, including those that are psychological, social, and physical. In contrast, spirituality focuses on the search for one particular significant destination, the sacred. It is important to reiterate that spirituality is not restricted to an individual's relationship with the sacred understood traditionally as God or a higher power. Seemingly secular functions – psychological, social and physical – can also be imbued with sacred status. When they are, they also fall beneath the spiritual umbrella (Pargament, Volume 1).

With respect to context, religion is more circumscribed than spirituality. Religion is embedded within an established, institutional context. By “established” we are speaking of long-standing organizations and institutions whose mission is to facilitate members' connection with the sacred (see Hill et al., 2001). In contrast, although spirituality can be a vital part of traditional religious life, it can also be embedded in nontraditional contexts.

Guidelines for the Use of the Language of Religion and Spirituality. With these points of similarity and dissimilarity in mind, we offer some general guidelines for when to use the terms *religion* and/or *spirituality* along with a few illustrations. Again, our goal here is not to insist on a “one-size-fits-all” approach to the definition of our key constructs, but rather to encourage greater intentionality in the choice of language to promote clarity, coherence, continuity, and integration within the field.

Our definitions make clear that religion and spirituality have different points of emphasis with respect to the functions they serve and their larger context. Thus, at times, it is appropriate to refer exclusively to religion or spirituality.

(1) We recommend using the language of religion when emphasizing: (a) the search for significant psychological, social, or physical destinations within established institutional contexts designed to facilitate spirituality; or (b) beliefs, practices, experiences or relationships that are embedded within established institutional contexts designed to facilitate spirituality. Example of the use of religious include: *religiously*-based programs to prevent cancer; *religious* conversion as compensation for insecure parental attachment; *religious* beliefs and practices of Hindus; *religious* support from the church.

(2) We recommend using the language of spirituality when emphasizing: (a) the search for the sacred; or (b) sacred beliefs, practices, experiences or relationships that are embedded in nontraditional contexts. Examples of the use of spiritual include: the *spiritual* quest, outdoor *spiritual* retreat; daily *spiritual* experiences; *spiritual* intimacy in marriage; *spiritual* meditation to attain transcendence.

Because religion and spirituality are neither totally independent nor opposed to each other, the two constructs can also be used inclusively in a non-polarized fashion.

(3) We recommend using the language of both religion and spirituality when referring to (a) the search for the full range of significant destinations, sacred and secular; and (b) beliefs, practices, experiences or relationships that are embedded within both nontraditional, secular contexts and established institutional contexts designed to facilitate the sacred search. Examples of the use of both terms include: links of *religious and spiritual* coping methods to holistic well-being; the psychology of *religion and spirituality*; brief multidimensional measure of *religiousness/spirituality*; accessing *religious and spiritual* resources to facilitate pastoral and mental health counseling; *religious and spiritual* healing practices.

Conclusion

In this introductory chapter, we have presented our vision of an integrative paradigm for the psychology of religion and spirituality. It is important to recognize that this is a psychological paradigm. It does not offer verification of God's existence, the ontological reality of Biblical accounts, or the truths of fundamental religious and spiritual claims. There is tremendous interest in questions about the ultimate truth and value of religion and spirituality, as even the quickest scan of a bestseller list shows, but the chapters in this *APA Handbook* do not aim to answer these questions. What they can and will do, however, is to provide some insights into the implications of religion and spirituality for human behavior. The focus here is on the footprints that lead to and are left by faith (cf. Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993).

We believe that our readers will be educated, enlightened and informed by these chapters. As a group, these contributions highlight the tremendous progress that has been made in the psychological study of religion and spirituality. Of course, questions continue to far outnumber answers. The field continues to be marked by mystery. Furthermore, our integrative paradigm for the psychology of religion and spirituality is more of a vision than a reality. In our view, this

young field still has a long way to go before it reaches maturity. Nevertheless, it is our hope that the *APA Handbook* will push the field toward a more coherent, integrated approach to understanding and addressing what may well be the most elusive dimension of human nature.

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