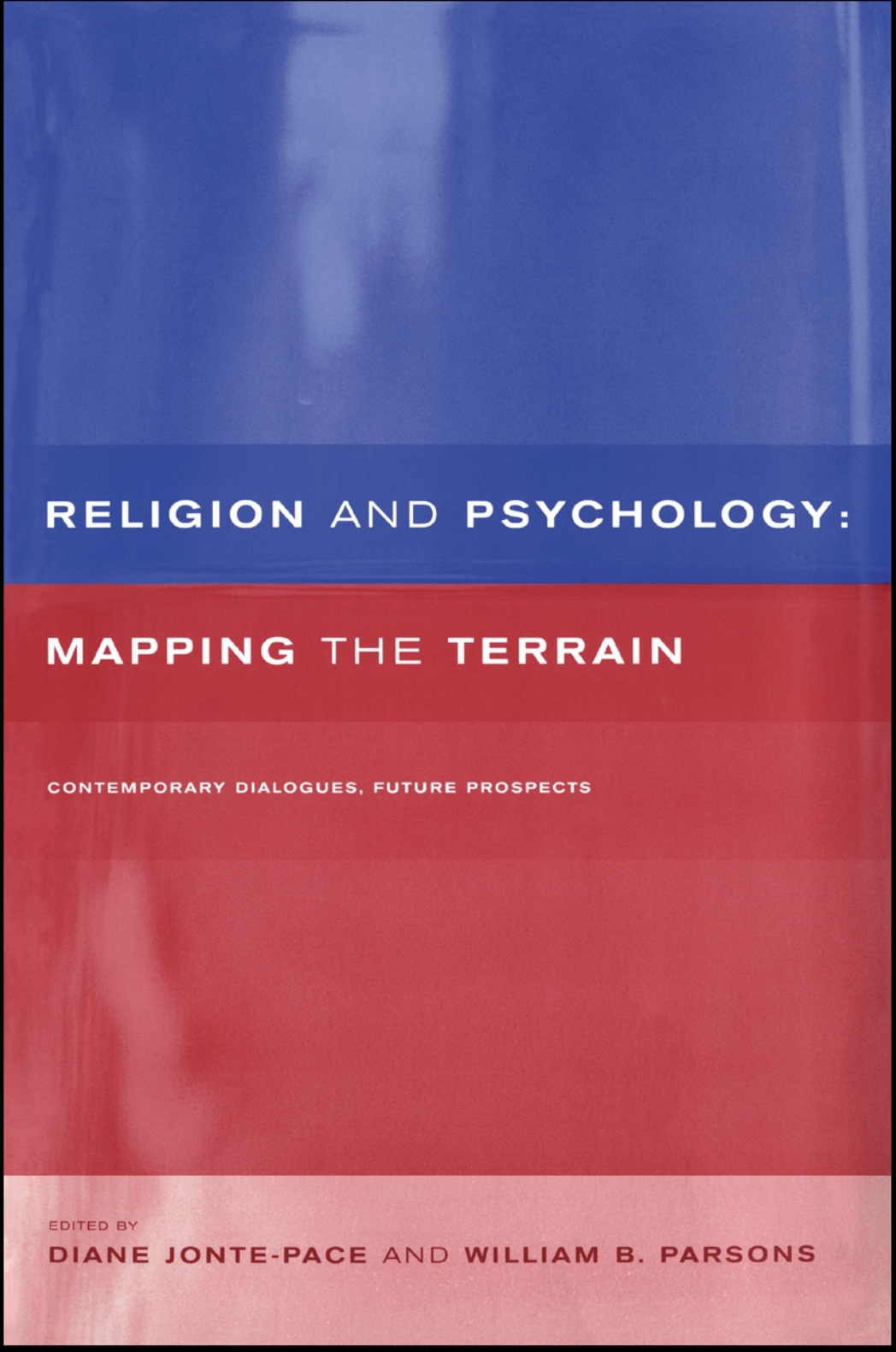

Religion and Psychology: Mapping the Terrain

Religion and Psychology: Mapping the Terrain is a thorough and incisive survey of the current state of the relationship between religion and psychology from the leading scholars in the field. The issues addressed are:

- the psychology-theology dialogue in the West
- psychological perspectives on non-Western religions
- psychology, religion and gender studies
- perspectives on modernity and post-modernity
- psychology "as" religion
- empirical, cultural and social scientific approaches
- international perspectives

An essential resource for students and researchers in the area of psychology of religion, this collection systematically examines the whole range of ways in which the psychology/religion debate has developed.

Diane Jonte-Pace teaches in the department of Religious Studies at Santa Clara University and is the editor of *Religious Studies Review*. **William Parsons** teaches Religious Studies at Rice University.

Religion and Psychology: Mapping the Terrain

Contemporary dialogues, future prospects

Edited by Diane Jonte-Pace and William B.Parsons

London and New York

First published 2001
by Routledge
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2002.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
A catalog record has been requested for this title

ISBN 0-203-45935-0 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-203-76759-4 (Adobe eReader Format)
ISBN 0-415-20617-0 (hbk)
ISBN 0-415-20618-9 (pbk)

To our students, for nourishing this project,
and our colleagues, for making it possible

Contents

Contributors

G.William Barnard is Associate Professor at Southern Methodist University. He teaches in the areas of comparative religion and the social-scientific study of religion. He is the author of *Exploring Unseen Worlds: William James and the Philosophy of Mysticism* (SUNY Press 1997) and the co-editor of *Crossing Boundaries: Essays on the Ethical Status of Mysticism* (Seven Bridges Press 2000).

Jacob A.Belzen has degrees in psychology, philosophy, and history. He holds an endowed chair at the University of Amsterdam in the psychology of religion. He serves in several international scholarly organizations. He is the editor of *Hermeneutical Approaches in Psychology of Religion* (Rodopi 1997).

Lucy Bregman is Professor of Religion at Temple University. She has authored several books on psychology, death and spirituality in contemporary life. These include *Death in the Midst of Life: Perspectives on Death from Christianity and Depth Psychology* (Baker Book House 1992) and *Beyond Silence and Denial: Death and Dying Reconsidered* (Westminster John Knox 1999).

Don Browning is Alexander Campbell Professor of Religious Ethics and the Social Sciences at the University of Chicago. He is currently director of the Lilly Endowment project for Religion, Culture, and Family. His recent books have been *A Fundamental Practical Theology* (Fortress Press 1991), and, with Bonnie Miller-McLemore, Pam Couture, Bernie Lyon, and Robert Franklin, *From Culture Wars to Common Ground: Religion and the American Family Debate* (Westminster John Knox 1997).

Donald Capps is William Harte Felmeth Professor of Pastoral Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary. His recent books include *Men, Religion, and Melancholia* (Yale University Press 1997), *Living Stories* (Fortress Press 1998), *Social Phobia* (Chalice Press 1999), and *Jesus: A Psychological Biography* (Chalice Press 2000).

Jeremy R.Carrette is Lecturer in Religious Studies at the University of Stirling, Scotland, UK. He is the editor of *Religion and Culture by Michel Foucault* (UK: Manchester University Press and USA: Routledge 1999) and the author of *Foucault and Religion: Spiritual Corporality and Political Spirituality* (Routledge 2000).

Volney P.Gay is Professor and Chair of Religion, Professor of Psychiatry, and Professor of Anthropology at Vanderbilt University. He is a Training and Supervising Analyst at the St. Louis Psychoanalytic Institute. He serves on the editorial boards of several scholarly journals. He is also Vice-Chair of the Committee on Research and Special Training, American Psychoanalytic Association, and Chair of the the Liddle-Hymowitz Fund of the American Psychoanalytic Association. His last book, *Freud on Sublimation* (SUNY Press 1992), won the Heinz Hartmann Award from the New York Psychoanalytic Institute. His forthcoming book, *The Objects of Psychoanalysis,* will be published by SUNY Press.

Luis O.Gómez holds appointments in the Departments of Psychology and Asian Languages and Cultures at the University of Michigan. His interests span Buddhism in India, early Zen and Pure Land, and the psychology of religion. Professor Gómez has published in the area of Indian Buddhism and is editor of several books, including *Land of Bliss* (University of Hawaii Press 1996). He is also a clinical psychologist at the University of Michigan's Psychological Clinic.

Susan E.Henking is Associate Professor of Religious Studies and Interim Dean of the Faculty at Hobart and William Smith Colleges. She is co-editor of *Que(e)rying Religion: A Critical Anthology* (with Gary David Comstock of Wesleyan University; Continuum 1997) and author of a variety of work on the history of American sociology, feminist perspectives in religious studies, and the intersection of religious studies with lesbian and gay studies. In addition, she is series editor of the AAR book series, *Teaching Religious Studies*.

Diane E.Jonte-Pace is Associate Professor of Religious Studies and Acting Associate Dean at Santa Clara University. She serves as chair of the editorial board of *The Religious Studies Review*. Her publications include *Speaking the Unspeakable: Religion, Misogyny, and the Uncanny Mother in Freud's Cultural Texts,* forthcoming from the University of California Press.

Jeffrey J.Kripal is the Vira I.Heinz Associate Professor of Religion at Westminster College. His publications include *Kali's Child: The Mystical and the Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna* (University of Chicago Press 1995), which won the American Academy of Religion's History of Religions Prize, and *Vishnu on Freud's Desk: A Reader in Psychoanalysis and Hinduism* (Oxford University Press 1998), which he co-edited with T.G.Vaidyanathan of Bangalore, India.

Bonnie J.Miller-McLemore is Professor of Pastoral Theology at Vanderbilt University Divinity School. Her most recent publications include *Also a Mother: Work and Family as Theological Dilemma* (Abingdon 1994), a co-authored book, *From Culture Wars to Common Ground: Religion and the American Family Debate* (with Don S.Browning, Pamela D.Couture, Brynolf Lyon and Robert Franklin; Westminster John Knox 1997), and a co-edited book, *Feminist and Womanist Pastoral Theology* (with Brita L. Gill-Austern; Abingdon 1999).

Kathleen V.O'Connor is a trained historian, psychologist and psychotherapist. Formerly at the University of Sydney, currently she teaches the psychology of religion at the Catholic Institute of Sydney, conducts a private practice and supervises the training of psychologists. She has published on religion, personality, and mental health and is on the editorial boards of *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* and *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*.

William B.Parsons is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Rice University. He is the author of *The Enigma of the Oceanic Feeling* (Oxford 1999) and numerous articles in edited books and journals, including *The Journal of Religion*.

Jonathan Shear, Affiliated Associate Professor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University, was a Fullbright Scholar in philosophy of science. For the past thirty-eight years his work has focused on the significance of basic meditation experiences for questions of Western philosophy and psychology. Recent publications include *The View From Within: First-Person Approaches to the Study of Consciousness,* co-edited with Francisco Varela (UK: Imprint Academic 1999), and *Models of the Self,* co-edited with Shaun Gallagher (UK: Imprint Academic 1999). He is Managing Editor of *The Journal of Consciousness Studies*.

Bernard Spilka, Professor Emeritus at the University of Denver, is author, co-author and editor of a number of books and many other publications. He is a past-President of the Psychology of Religion Division of the American Psychological Association and recipient of its William James Award.

David M.Wulff is Professor of Psychology at Wheaton College, Norton, Massachusetts. He is the author of *Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary* (Wiley, 2nd edn 1997) and is a past president of Division 36, Psychology of Religion, of the American Psychological Association.

Introduction

Mapping religion and psychology

William B.Parsons and
Diane Jonte-Pace

What is the relation of psychology to religion? Does psychology attack, critique, and challenge religion? Or does psychology collaborate with religion in promoting mental and spiritual wholeness? Do psychological models contain implicit cultural assumptions and visions of personhood and relationality that interfere with its ability to study and interpret religion objectively? Has a modern or even postmodern psychological worldview replaced a pre-modern religious worldview? How can we describe the terrain where psychology and religion intersect?

The scholars contributing to this volume each map a portion of this terrain. Unlike ordinary maps, which are schematic pictures of space, these essays offer both cartographies and chronologies of the intersections between psychology and religion. The contributors to this volume describe how and where psychology has encountered religion earlier in this century and in recent decades: they look back to the past. At the same time, they look forward: a major aim of the contributions is to provoke sustained debate over future directions for the field. The essays thus represent and "map" the parameters of distinct approaches and dialogues found in that domain which designates the intersection between religion and psychological studies.

Framing the debate: "and," "of," "in dialogue with"

Even a cursory historical overview reveals that the domain which is the subject of this volume has been circumscribed by various designations. There is good reason for this fact. The differences between psychological models utilized, the religious responses evoked, and the inclusion of internationally based scholars and religious professionals who locate themselves and their institutions in multiple social settings (the clinic, the seminary, the church, and the university) have invariably led to specialization, segmentation, and the development of distinct approaches and arenas of dialogue. Indeed, the perspectives have become so diverse that it is questionable whether the multiplicity of dialogues and approaches gathered here can be said to constitute a single "field"; that, for example, what has been called the

psychology "of" religion should be marked as a single field apart from those enterprises that champion more religiously toned, dialogical approaches. On the other hand, it is important to note that there have been numerous attempts to create cohesion (a singular "field") out of the chaos of multiplicity and diversity. "Religion and the human sciences," "religion and culture studies," "pastoral psychology," "practical theology," "religion and personality," "religion, person, and culture"—these are some of the designations that have been used to characterize the domain that this volume maps in graduate programs in universities and seminaries over the last few decades.

The categories utilized in this volume do not necessarily preclude other ways of framing the intersection between psychology and religion. Indeed, as we shall see, the contributors sometimes disagree on precisely how it is that this domain should be framed and "mapped." Nevertheless, in order to encompass the various cartographies and chronologies found in this volume, the editors have preferred to utilize the broad designation "religion and psychological studies" (or RPS). As opposed to other designations, this terminology does not privilege either term. Rather, the designation has the advantage of being both inclusive—recognizing that diversity and dialogue have come to characterize the intersection between psychology and religion—and neutral, for it understands that its participants champion differing, sometimes opposed, intellectual agendas.

In soliciting contributions from leading scholars, the editors sought to avoid imposing any conceptual schema that might prejudice their remarks. Subsequently, the editors found that the finished essays fall almost seamlessly into two major enterprises associated with the field. In order to reflect this, we have specified within the inclusive designation "religion and psychological studies" the more restrictive subsets: "psychology of religion" and "religion in dialogue with psychology."

Historically, the origins of the interaction between psychology and religion are usually located in the period 1880–1930. During this period the field was commonly known as the psychology "of" religion. It assumed a method ("psychology"), a series of cultural phenomena ("religion"), and a specific relation between the two: the psychology of religion referred to the analysis of the psychological meanings, origins, and patterns in religious ideation and practice. It found expression in the depth psychologies of Freud and Jung, the descriptive surveys and pragmatic evaluations of William James, the folk-psychological forays of Wilhelm Wundt, and the diverse studies authored by related scholars in Europe and North America (e.g., William E.Hocking, James Leuba, Pierre Janet, Theodore Flournoy, Frederick Meyers, R.M.Bucke, James Pratt, etc.). Topics that commanded interest varied from prayer, conversion, the paranormal, and mysticism, to the broad array of issues connected with the comparative study of religion and the relation between religion and society.

Since that time, the field has expanded in several ways. With regard to advances within psychological theory, the field has incorporated the virtual

explosion of metapsychological advances found throughout the course of the century: the development of experimental and empirical approaches; the mid-century projects initiated by ego-psychologists, object-relations theorists, proponents of phenomenology, existentialism, and humanistic psychology; and the more recent advances of transpersonal psychology, sociobiology and neurocognition. As with many other academic enterprises, the field has also become more interdisciplinary, integrating social scientific partners such as sociology, anthropology and political theory in order to illuminate religious phenomena. The latter have proven useful in linking issues regarding religion and individual biography to the wider historical and socio-cultural surround. More recently, those in the field have had to take account of postmodern analyses and the rise of gender studies and related cultural modes of reflection. The latter have ignited epistemological and cultural self-reflection concerning the normative, apologetic and ethnopsychological dimensions of psychological theory, calling into question its supposed value-neutral and objective stance *vis-à-vis* religion.

In a fundamental sense all interpretative forays within the field can be referred to as engaging in the intellectual discipline known as the psychology of religion. Our second major subset, "Religion in dialogue with psychology", is thus not to be understood as wholly separate from the first. The two categories are not mutually exclusive, often drawing on the same body of theory, engaging common issues and generally overlapping to the extent that blurs sharp distinctions between them. On the other hand, the contributions that make up our second section can be characterized as exhibiting a marked difference in perspective from the first. Psychology is used not simply to explore and interpret religious phenomena. It is utilized to further, through dialogue, the very aims of religion, be they conceived of as the primordial, the theological, or the sacred unconscious. Religion is understood as a category *sui generis* that maps an area of human subjectivity extending beyond the conceptual parameters of secular psychology. The rubric "religion in dialogue with psychology" aptly captures this difference in perspective.

Dialogical enterprise of various kinds has long animated RPS. The essays which comprise the second section of the volume engage three distinct dialogical enterprises, each of which has a definitive history within the field. The most familiar of these is the psychology-theology dialogue. The apex of the latter is usually located in the period between 1950 and 1970. During this time theologians and religious philosophers like Paul Tillich, Martin Buber, and Reinhold Niehbuhr were culturally significant moral figures. In the aftermath of the Second World War, with the onset of modernity and what appeared at that time to be a cultural trend towards secularization, questions of ultimate concern became an existential, intellectual, and cultural priority. But in their efforts to reframe matters of faith, religious intellectuals could not dispense with psychology. The depth-psychologies of Freud and Jung were exciting and popular. As noted above other psychologies (ego-

psychology, humanistic psychology and existentialism) and psychologists (e.g., Erik Erikson, Carl Rogers, Rollo May) were meeting with cultural acceptance and approval. The various psychologies of that time were, as Tillich's "correlational method" made abundantly evident, American culture's way of formulating central existential questions about the nature and condition of the human spirit. At the same time, psychological analyses of religion went so far as to undercut religious claims to transcendence and cast suspicion on the conceptual categories of theological discourse: faith, morality, sin, redemption. This intellectual and cultural atmosphere made the dialogue between psychology and theology necessary, fruitful, and particularly creative. Paradigmatically represented by the collected essays, under the editorship of Peter Homans, in the University of Chicago volume *The Dialogue Between Theology and Psychology* (1968), the general nature of the dialogue and the debates it created affected many of the classic works in religious studies of this era: Paul Tillich's *The Courage to Be* (1952), Paul Ricoeur's *Freud and Philosophy* (1970), Gordon Allport's *The Individual and His Religion* (1950). Central issues included the relation between unconscious determinants and the conscious avowal of religious tenets and practices, the psychological meaning of heteronomy and the heteronomous God, the developmental infrastructure of morality and faith, the nature of mature religious sentiments, the psycho-social dynamics of religious relationships, and the value of a "hermeneutics of suspicion." This period also saw the birth of significant social institutions: pastoral psychology emerged as a cultural force, as did the role of the pastoral counselor.

With the waning of Protestant culture, the visibility and hegemony of the dialogue between psychology and theology has declined. However, the psychology-theology dialogue is still very much extant, having expanded and engaged a wider spectrum of issues with theoretical aplomb. Indeed, over the past few decades voices from mainstream Protestantism have been joined by increasing representation from Catholic, Jewish, and African-American perspectives.

More recently, another arena of dialogue, the psychology-comparativist dialogue, has reached maturity. The origins of this dialogue go back to the formation of the field at the turn of the century. At that time several related factors converged to create a sustained interest in Eastern religions: the influx of Eastern adepts and their practices; the impact of the World Parliament of Religions (1893); the translation of Eastern texts (e.g., Max Müller's *Sacred Books of the East*); the formation of university positions in comparative religions, and the cultural dissemination of Eastern worldviews by socially prominent sympathizers (e.g., Emerson, Paul Carus, the Theosophists); William James's accounts of Buddhist and Hindu mysticism; Sigmund Freud's correspondences with Girindrasekhar Bose and Romain Rolland's "oceanic feeling;" C.G.Jung's exchanges with Richard Wilhelm, D.T.Suzuki, Heinrich Zimmer and commentaries on Taoist, Buddhist and Hindu texts; and James Bisset Pratt's sojourns to India and the Far East. All these are

testimonies to the strength of the emerging psychology-comparativist dialogue.

In the 1950s and 1960s the psychology-comparativist dialogue was spurred on by social unrest and the gaze eastwards. The seeming disillusionment with the heteronomy of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the rise of the Beat and Hippie generations, a new cadre of socially prominent Buddhist and Hindu sympathizers (e.g., Aldous Huxley, Allen Ginsberg, Richard Baker, Timothy Leary, etc.), and the development of the human potential movement all contributed to the surging popularity of Eastern religions. Zen and its colorful proponents (notably D.T.Suzuki, Shin'ichi Hisamatsu, Shunryu Suzuki) as well as Hindu gurus like Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (Transcendental Meditation) and A.C. Bhakytivedanta Swami Prabhupada (Hare Krishna) made a strong impact on the Western cultural scene. Like their theological counterparts of this period, comparativists included psychological perspectives in their works. A notable example is Mircea Eliade, who in his *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries* (1960) utilized the depth-psychologies of Freud and Jung to enhance the phenomenological study of comparative religions, as is the oeuvre of Joseph Campbell, utilizing as it does a Jungian approach to discerning the universal significance and meaning of myths. Psychologists followed suit, as is exemplified in Jung's conversation with the noted Buddhist scholar Shin'ichi Hisamatsu, Erich Fromm's collaboration with D.T.Suzuki and Richard DeMartino, the surge of experimental studies on meditation and the engagement of existential and humanistic psychologists with Eastern worldviews.

The efforts of the above have flowered in contemporary comparativist and psychological scholarship. One can point to the Indologist Wendy Doniger's attempt to synthesize depth-psychology with historical and philological studies for the interpretation of Hindu myths and symbols, and Luis Gomez's careful evaluation of Jungian approaches to the texts of Indian Buddhism (Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty 1980; Gomez 1995). Psychologically informed anthropological works on Eastern religions (e.g., Stanley Kurtz's *All the Mothers Are One,* 1992; Gananath Obeyesekere's *The Work of Culture,* 1990) have further contributed to the dialogue, while psychological studies on Buddhism (e.g., Wilber *et al.'s Transformations in Consciousness,* 1986; Jeffrey Rubin's *Psychotherapy and Buddhism,* 1996) and Hinduism (e.g., Jeffrey Kripal's *Kali's Child,* 1995; Sudhir Kakar's *The Inner World,* 1981) continue the trend towards interdisciplinary sophistication.

Certainly the psychology-comparativist dialogue depends on many of the same originative psychological and culture theorists utilized by those in the psychology-theology dialogue. At the same time, just as the psychology-theology dialogue has concentrated on issues germane to the Judeo-Christian tradition, particularly Protestantism, the psychology-comparativist dialogue has afforded the field the opportunity to develop new ways of thinking about religion commensurate with its subject matter. The cultural relativity of conceptions of self, world and other; the differing aims conceptions of self,

world and other; the differing aims and conceptions of health and maturity of healing enterprises East and West; the relativity of developmental themes and gender solutions; the possible existence of a "contemplative line of development" and the complexity of saintly eroticism and mysticism—these are but some of the many themes that presently engage studies in the psychology-comparativist dialogue.

The final dialogical enterprise stems from analyses of the socio-historical effects of psychology, particularly the ways in which, in its efforts to understand and analyze religion, psychology has acted "like a religion." This enterprise, which we, following Vitz (1977) and Van Herik (1984), call psychology as religion, is often utilized for the purpose of organizing and expressing the existential search for wholeness, numinous experiences, and individuation. It seeks not simply to interpret religious phenomena but quite intentionally offers itself as a modern, unchurched way to map one's religiosity. Like the psychology-theology and psychology-comparativist dialogues, this approach developed out of a complex interaction between powerful cultural forces and seminal psychological theoreticians of the past. As Michel de Certeau reminds us, it was as far back as the seventeenth century that a form of generic and psychological religiosity began to emerge. Religion was no longer confined only to particular religious institutions. Rather, one finds the notion of an "Absolute," framed in generic terms as "an obscure, universal dimension of man, perceived or experienced as a reality *(un réel)* hidden beneath a diversity of institutions, religions, and doctrines" (de Certeau 1992:14). Around the turn of the century many psychologists studying religion gave further impetus to this movement. William James's championing of immediate religious experience, construal of religion as essentially individualistic and even unchurched (James 1936); Carl Jung's similar stress on the individual and his view of the church and its inventory of myths and symbols as derivative, defining them as "codified and dogmatized forms of original religious experience" (Jung 1977:6); Richard Maurice Bucke's attempt to insert a psychological mysticism into culture at large (Bucke 1993)—all these point to an emerging psychological way of framing, expressing and monitoring one's religiosity.

Certainly other social movements in the beginning of this century, such as Mesmerism, Theosophy, Neopaganism, New England Transcendentalism, and New Thought further contributed to a cultural acceptance of the development of an unchurched, psychological form of spirituality. With the development of humanistic and then transpersonal psychology as found operating in the works of theorists like Abraham Maslow, Stanislav Grof, and Ken Wilber, and the promotion of unchurched, psychological spirituality by contemporary popular authors like M.Scott Peck, the case has become clear. Large segments of the population now configure their religiosity in overtly psychological ways; psychology as religion is a cultural reality.

Maps

In asking each scholar to contribute to this volume we put to them but one question: what they perceived to be the present status of the field and the probable paths for its future. We have endeavored to let the contributors present their own views on the contemporary status and likely or hoped for future of RPS from the perspectives they represent. In that sense the essays represent fresh, original attempts to map religion and psychological studies. At the same time, the individual contributions which make up this collection are not meant to, and indeed cannot, exhaust the complex and multiple theoretical perspectives which currently animate the field. Limitations of space prohibit total representation; the essays presented here can only begin a conversation that we hope will be taken up by unrepresented others.

The editors have found it appropriate to organize the essays in Part I, "Psychology of religion," under three headings. Each heading reflects the general orientation and approach of the essays in question. In the first, "Empirical and cultural approaches," David Wulff describes the major phases of the history of the field, outlining the pastoral and theological backgrounds of some early psychologists of religion; noting the concern to expose the "irrationality" of religion in the backgrounds of others; and exploring the systematic descriptive approaches of still others. He points out a dramatic decline in the scholarship in the field in the period between the wars, tracing a recovery from that decline in the emergence of empirical perspectives and depth psychological interpretations in the post-war years. Bernard Spilka follows by giving us a thorough overview and assessment of the major forms of empirical approaches found within the psychology of religion. In surveying the central issues, research strategies, goals and successes of empirical approaches, Spilka links the future of the field to the continued development of objective-empirical methods. Jacob Belzen counters by surveying past and present European contributions to the psychology of religion. While noting the prevalence of empirical and mechanistic-experimental approaches within the psychology of religion, Belzen argues for the value of an interdisciplinary, cultural, and hermeneutical psychological approach to religion.

In "Perspectives on modernity and post-modernity," Susan Henking leads off by drawing attention to the socio-cultural and historical context that serves to manufacture alternate understandings of the nature and future of RPS. Henking argues for a demythologization of the field, the critical reflection on the sites of its manufacture, and the mapping of a future which highlights the role of RPS as a form of cultural criticism. Asking "What is our present?" Kathleen O'Connor offers a consideration of modernity, and of the dynamics of certainty-uncertainty and belief-unbelief, for psychology and religion. Volney Gay similarly seizes on the theme of modernity. Focusing his analysis on that aspect of the field which champions the use of social scientific methodology and reductionism, Gay argues for the use of

information theory to correct the errors wrought by modern interpreters of religion. Jeremy Carrette ends this sub-section by bringing to bear post-structuralist critiques of the foundations of psychology, arguing that the future of the field should proceed with respect to overcoming its "disciplinary amnesia" and the development of a "history of the present."

In "Psychology, religion and gender studies," Diane Jonte-Pace begins by providing an overview of feminist contributions to the psychology of religion. Concentrating on studies of morality, ritual, and God imagery, and dividing such studies into three kinds of projects (analytic, critical and inclusive), Jonte-Pace shows how these endeavors developed in the work of Freud, Jung, the object-relations theorists and the post-structuralists, examining the impact of feminist theory on the field. Don Capps takes the analysis further by arguing that gender studies, by grounding RPS in everyday struggles, is a welcome antidote to the prevalence of social scientific and theological-ethical theorizing in the field. Capps then goes on to argue for sustained research on a specific aspect of psychology, religion and gender studies: male melancholia.

In Part II, "Religion in dialogue with psychology," we have located the essays in the three sub-sections described earlier. Don Browning initiates the reflections on "Theology and psychology in the West" by surveying salient historical developments in practical theology and in the field as a whole. Browning argues that the continued success of RPS is dependent on grounding itself in critical hermeneutical theory. Bonnie Miller-McLemore follows by highlighting the impact of feminist scholarship on pastoral and practical theology, arguing for its importance in assessing the contemporary nature of and future possibilities for the field as a whole. Luis Gómez finishes up the section through a meditation on history, culture and the alternate ways in which psychology and religion frame the value of madness and ritual.

In "Comparative studies: psychological perspectives on non-Western religions," William Parsons opens the proceedings by arguing that "the psychology-comparativist dialogue" is and has been a legitimate enterprise within RPS. Surveying depth-psychological, humanistic and experimental forays into Eastern religions, he argues that such analyses have moved from early twentieth-century reductive, orientalist beginnings through mid twentieth-century halting attempts at collaboration to a contemporary split between a leveling discourse and an interdisciplinary dialogue that is respectful of real differences, taking into account as it does comparative research, culture studies, and the legitimacy of alternate modes of construing self, world and Other. Jeffrey J.Kripal specifies the analysis further by concentrating on depth-psychological treatments of Hindu mythology and mysticism. Noting in particular the contributions of Sudhir Kakar, Kripal shows how new developments in psychoanalysis have emerged which suggest the emergence of a bona fide, non-reductive, dialogical collaboration with proponents of Eastern religions. Jonathan Shear ends this section by surveying past and contemporary experimental analyses of meditation,

arguing that such studies must take into account the claims made in Eastern textual sources that meditation can lead to potentially transformational and mystical modes of consciousness.

Finally, in "Psychology 'as' religion," G.William Barnard begins by providing us with an analysis of the multiple historical sources responsible for the cultural emergence of psychologies that act "like" a religion. Through an analysis of sources from Mesmerism and the researches of William James and Carl Jung to transpersonal psychology and the New Age, Barnard argues that scholarly engagement with this form of religio-cultural expression is a legitimate and cutting-edge enterprise. Continuing the analysis, Lucy Bregman traces the theme of psychology as religion into an arena of contemporary cultural concern: the death awareness movement. Contrasting psychological and traditional religious modes of engaging loss and mourning, Bregman evaluates the adequacy of the popular and clinical literature on death which pervades the movement.

Futures

In assembling the essays for publication, the editors were not surprised to find what can be framed as two central conclusions of the contributors' efforts. First, the contributors almost unanimously agree that the field is rich and vibrant, more varied and more sophisticated than ever. Second, the contributors concur that there is no single future, no one definitive path, for RPS. The essays reveal multiple conceptions of the status of the field and multiple prescriptions for its future growth. The contributors to this volume champion a variety of psychological models and predict increasing attention to a broad spectrum of diverse issues: sustained critical reflection on methods in experimental and empirical research; an array of epistemological and cultural issues associated with gender studies; the field's reflection in popular psychology and popular religiosity; an increasing analysis of the sites of secularization; the articulation of a new dialogical relation with other social sciences, comparative studies and culture studies; an increasing focus on critical hermeneutics and postmodern reflection.

Given the liminal and interdisciplinary nature of RPS, such diversity is to be expected. RPS has long been noted by its proponents as a creative discipline that is betwixt and between all others, demanding acquaintance with and dialogue between multiple viewpoints. In that sense this book does not aim at dogmatic statement, nor does it promote a unified agenda. Rather, it embodies what Nietzsche once said about the aphoristic spirit: it is a book for chewing. The editors assume that transcendence of given frameworks and the development of new vistas of reconceptualization will be the inevitable outcome of the reflections offered in this volume. It is our collective hope, then, that those reading it will be spurred on to formulate new responses and reflect on new directions for the field; to challenge, through communication

and collaboration, the segmentation and divisiveness that one all too often finds among its participants.

References

Allport, G.W. (1950) *The Individual and His Religion,* New York: Macmillan.
Bucke, R.M. (1993) *Cosmic Consciousness,* New York: Citadel Press.
de Certeau, M. (1992) "Mysticism," *Diacritics* 22:11–25.
Eliade, M. (1960) *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries,* New York: Harper & Row.
Erikson, E. (1958) *Young Man Luther,* New York: W.W.Norton.
Gómez, L. (1995) "Oriental wisdom and the cure of souls: Jung and the Indian East," in D.Lopez Jr (ed.), *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism,* 197–250. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
Homans, P. (ed.) (1968) *The Dialogue Between Theology and Psychology,* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
James, W. (1936) *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* New York: The Modern Library.
Jung, C. (1977) *Psychology and Religion,* New Haven: Yale University Press.
Kakar, S. (1981) *The Inner World,* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
Kripal, J. (1995) *Kali's Child,* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
Kurtz, S. (1992) *All the Mothers Are One,* New York: Columbia University Press.
Obeyesekere, G. (1990) *The Work of Culture,* Chicago: The University of ChicagoPress .
O'Flaherty, W.Doniger (1980) *Women, Androgynes and Other Mythical Beasts,* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
Ricoeur, P. (1970) *Freud and Philosophy,* New Haven: Yale University Press.
Rubin, J. (1996) *Psychotherapy and Buddhism,* New York: Plenum Press.
Tillich, P. (1952) *The Courage to Be,* New Haven: Yale University Press.
Van Herik, J. (1984) "'Thick description' and the psychology of religion," in F. Reynolds and B.Moore (eds), *Anthropology and the Study of Religion,* 56–74. Chicago: Center for the Scientific Study of Religion.
Vitz, P. (1977) *Psychology as Religion,* Grand Rapids: William B.Eerdmans.
Wilber, K., Engler, J. and Brown, D. (eds) (1986) *Transformations in Consciousness,* Boston: Shambhala.

Part I

Psychology of religion

Section 1

Empirical and cultural approaches

1 Psychology of religion

An overview

David M.Wulff

If we set aside "religious psychology"—the psychology that, in varying degrees, is implicit in the historic religious traditions—the psychology of religion constitutes the oldest form of encounter between psychology and religion. It is also the easiest to define. Strictly conceived, psychology of religion comprises the systematic application of psychological theories and methods to the contents of the religious traditions and to the related experiences, attitudes, and actions of individuals. In this configuration, "religion" is understood not as a system of reflection or scholarship that might actively engage in dialogue with psychology but as a domain of human ideation and activity that may—without its consent—be taken as the object of systematic psychological investigation. In contrast to religious psychology, which remains uncritically submerged in a specific religious worldview, the psychology of religion stands in principle outside of all religious tradition. It is thus often thought to call into question the entirety of the religious life, including the fundamental conviction of having made connection with some higher order.

The impulse toward reinterpretation and reform

Historically, however, the psychology of religion has seldom been carried out at such remove from religious commitment. Rather than conceiving of the field as a disinterested science, most of the earliest proponents saw it as a means of advancing certain religious agendas or of justifying religion as a whole. Whereas the psychology of religion was in some measure yet another expression of the burgeoning, nineteenth-century interest in applying scientific methods in the human realm, it was also a manifestation of the reform-minded Progressive movement and in particular the Social Gospel. Some of the leading figures in the field started out in theology, found it unexpectedly problematical, and then shifted to psychology as a base for reconstructing their conceptions of religion. Their ultimate goal was to make religion compatible with twentieth-century understandings and serviceable to a society that had been profoundly disrupted by the momentous and ramifying changes of industrialization.

Stanley Hall, for example, who, as the founding president of Clark University, established the Clark school of the psychology of religion, had earlier prepared for the ministry. But the increasingly liberal views he developed during his studies at Union Theological Seminary and his work on the streets of New York City finally led him to psychology instead. His interest in religion remained strong, however, expressed first in his studies of conversion and religious development and, later, in his reflections on the figure of Christ. The objective of religion, Hall was to conclude, is not contact with some transcendent realm but adjustment in the human one. His last work in the field, *Jesus, the Christ, in the Light of Psychology* (1917), was intended to convince others of this humanistic point of view.

George Coe, another major contributor in the inaugural period, underwent a similar evolution. At first he expected to follow his father into the Methodist ministry, but his theological studies at Boston University left him troubled by theology's apparent incompatibility with both scientific method and historical criticism. He shifted, then, to the study of philosophy and world religions and finally to psychology. According to the functional view of religion that emerged out of Coe's reading of Walter Rauschenbusch and others prominent in the Social Gospel movement as well as his involvement in settlement work and local political reform, the essence of religion lies in the heightening and fostering of personal and social values. Having concluded from his early studies of conversion and mystical experience that the Christian tradition is one-sided in its emphasis on feeling, Coe gave the rest of his professional life to promoting his social theory of religious education, in the department of Religious Education and Psychology that he established at Union Theological Seminary and through a series of books that profoundly influenced several generations of liberal religious educators (Wulff 1999).

Unlike Hall and Coe, Edward Scribner Ames (1910) followed through on his theological education by becoming a preacher. Yet he, too, was deeply influenced by the Social Gospel movement (see Ames 1959) and saw psychology as a way of liberating religion from dogmatic authority and transforming it into a non-theological, adventurous, and scientifically respectable way of dealing with social problems (Ames 1929). As a professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago and concurrently a minister of the University Church of the Disciplines of Christ, Ames saw the church as "a kind of laboratory for cultivation and observation of the living processes of religion, while the university was a place for their systematic study" (96).

Although in Europe the psychology of religion never threatened to displace theology as it did in the United States early in the twentieth century, even on the Continent the new field was perceived by some as either an alternative to theology or a means of revolutionizing it. The Swiss psychologist Theodore Flournoy, for example, was another early contributor who started off in theological studies; but he dropped out after only a semester and turned to medicine instead. Much like Coe, he found theology

to be filled with unnecessary intellectual difficulties (Le Clair 1966:xvii). Later on, when Flournoy (1903b) published a collection of brief religious autobiographies, he concluded that emancipation from traditional theological doctrine is for some people a prerequisite for the development of an inner religious life. In the classic principles that he laid down for the psychology of religion, Flournoy (1903a) carefully excluded theological presuppositions, most notably assumptions about the nature of the religious object. At the same time he advocated the broadest possible application to religion of the diverse perspectives of psychology. In his subsequent case study of "Cécile Vé," Flournoy (1915) further illustrated how a deepening faith can become increasingly alienated from traditional religious forms at the same time that he demonstrated the possibility of a non-reductionistic psychological understanding of exceptional religious experience.

Georges Berguer, who was the leading figure in a French eclectic tradition inspired by Flournoy and centered in Geneva, not only completed his theological studies but also became a pastor and then a professor in a Protestant school of theology. Yet, like the others introduced here, he saw psychology as an invaluable aid for reinterpreting religious history, symbols, and experience. Noting in particular the regrettable mythologizing of the life of Jesus, Berguer (1923) argued that what is ultimately asked of Christians is not dutiful belief in certain miraculous events but a dying and rebirth of the individual self. Thus, for Berguer, psychology offered a means of promoting a deeper and truer faith.

The critique of religion as irrational

There were other early contributors, on both sides of the ocean, who were far less interested in reinterpreting religion than in demonstrating its irrationality. One such psychologist of religion was James Henry Leuba, who, as a young man, immigrated to the United States from Switzerland and eventually wrote a doctoral dissertation on conversion under Stanley Hall's direction. Leuba is best known for his questionnaire investigations of belief in God and immortality among scientists and historians. He found that traditional religious belief tended to be low among these scholars, especially among those most knowledgeable about biological and psychological processes and eminent in their respective fields. Having noted the sheer improbability and pettiness of much religious content, Leuba (1925) set about demonstrating that mystical experiences can be accounted for in terms of basic principles of psychology and physiology, both normal and pathological. Yet even Leuba (1950), who especially regretted the inhibitory effects of conservative religious views on scientific progress, postulated a spiritual urge in humankind and proposed the founding of non-theistic religious societies.

In the inaugural period of the field—that is, from the 1890s to the 1920s—it was Sigmund Freud who was most famously thoroughgoing in his critique of religion. Equating it with fervent belief in a father-god and careful

observance of obligatory ritual, Freud viewed religion as an effort to reclaim, in moments of vulnerability, the protective care of the seemingly omniscient and omnipotent father of early childhood. The longing for the father, which Freud said was the origin of every form of religion, is marked by deep ambivalence, however, given the vicissitudes of the Oedipus complex. That is to say, the beloved father eventually becomes an object of resentment, fear, and guilt as well. Thus, only through obedient submission to the will of God can the devotee restore the long-lost relationship with the infantile father. Observing religious ritual's seemingly compulsive character and the devotee's proneness to feelings of guilt and to fear of divine retribution, Freud concluded that religion is a defensive maneuver akin to neurosis, a wish-fulfilling illusion that is dangerous for individuals and society alike. Only by abandoning religion and relying instead on science and reason, declared Freud (1961), can humankind grow into maturity and escape the oppressiveness of a society that operates through religious sanctions and rewards.

Systematic descriptive approaches

If the dominant trend in the early psychology of religion was toward the criticism and reconstruction of religion, there were nevertheless concurrent impulses toward more disinterested perspectives. William James, too, had undertaken a critique and evaluation of religion in his monumental *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), in an effort to justify religion in the eyes of his fellow intellectuals; yet he inexorably combined this agenda with two others: an empathic-descriptive exploration of religious experience and an explanatory account of it. These three agendas effectively established the fundamental trends in the field ever since: (1) systematic description of religious experience, ideation, and practice, both ordinary and exceptional; (2) theories of the origin and meaning of religious content and expression, in individual lives and in the human species as a whole; and (3) research on the fruits—the personal and social correlates—of the varieties of religious attitudes and experiences.

Both in James's day and in ours, the *Varieties* has been most highly regarded for the striking descriptive material that James carefully assembled to make religious experience accessible to the understanding of outsiders. Convinced as he was that ordinary piety is little more than imitation and dull habit, he features excerpts from personal documents written by persons—some famous, others not—who were subject to exceptional religious experiences. To help the reader understand such experiences, James places them in their personal and historical contexts, compares them to analogous and often non-religious phenomena that are more familiar and better understood, and adds his own incisive yet sympathetic comments that help to drive home the crucial point or distinction he wishes to make. Himself a

professed outsider to such experiences, James hoped through the testimony he gathered to make transparent their inner meaning and logic, if not also their value, for individuals as well as for society.

Among those who greatly admired James's sympathetic approach but took exception to his emphasis on extreme and even pathological cases was James Pratt, who completed a dissertation on the psychology of religious belief under James at Harvard. Likewise accenting description, Pratt (1920) championed the value of ordinary piety and explored with exceptional sensitivity such phenomena as religious beliefs, symbols, and ritual, all of which James was inclined to dismiss. And just as Pratt valorized the gradual and imperceptible "moral" type of conversion over James's "merely emotional" type, so he found greater value in commonplace mild mystical experiences than in the rarer—and in Pratt's view, dangerous—extreme forms that James favored. An authority on Eastern religious traditions who was thoroughly acquainted with the international literature on the psychology of religion, Pratt offered a rare model for systematic work in this field.

A precarious field in decline

In Europe, the decade during which Pratt labored on his *Religious Consciousness* (1920) produced several other classic works in the descriptive tradition, including Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy* (1950), Friedrich Heiler's *Prayer* (1932), and, from the Dorpat school of the psychology of religion, founded at Dorpat University in Estonia, Karl Girgensohn's (1930) weighty tome on the psychic structure of religious experience (Wulff 1985). But the ominously shifting social and political climates in both the United States and Europe were shortly to bring the promising inaugural period of the psychology of religion to a close. In America, the devastation of World War I and the subsequent economic crises dealt a death blow to Progressivism and fostered a resurgence of fundamentalism. In both Europe and the United States, the highly influential dialectical theology of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner succored a postliberal theocentric perspective that discouraged the interest in religious consciousness that the psychology of religion had promoted. More than that, it unequivocally rejected the field as offensively, reductionistic (Wulff 1997, 1998).

Religious experience was shut out from the side of psychology as well. The behaviorist movement, which caught fire in the 1920s and rapidly spread through academic circles in the United States, ruled out of order any serious discussion of subjective states. Following the model of the natural sciences, the behaviorists limited themselves to objectively observable behavior and developed mechanistic and deterministic theories for explaining it. A field that had never been hospitable to the study of religion now made such work far more difficult, though David Trout's *Religious Behavior* (1931) demonstrated that, with strategic compromises, it was not utterly impossible.

It must be emphasized that the psychology of religion was a precarious undertaking from the beginning, especially given the small number of scholars who were drawn to it and the virtual absence of academic positions in the field. It was the paucity of both contributors and subscribers that eventually forced Hall to discontinue his *Journal of Religious Psychology,* which appeared erratically from 1904 to 1915 (Wulff 1998:188n). Journals abroad faced similar difficulties. Taking into account, then, the hostile religious and psychological climates that emerged in the 1920s, the profound effects of the worldwide economic depression in the 1930s, and finally the rise of National Socialism and the massive destructiveness of World War II, it is not difficult to understand why scholarship in what had always been a marginal field sharply declined.

A revival in defense of religion: the empirical literature

Along with other fields interested in subjective experience, the psychology of religion underwent a gradual revival in the 1950s, as behaviorism's domination of psychology gradually receded. A major impetus for this revival came from the work of Gordon Allport, whose incursions into the field, like James's before him, significantly added to its visibility and prestige. As a humanistic personality psychologist, Allport (1950) was interested in the uniquely integrative role that the religious sentiment, in its mature forms, can play in the lives of individuals. But as a deeply religious person himself, Allport was also disturbed by the evidence that piety is often associated with negative social attitudes.

To resolve these conflicting impressions, Allport adopted a distinction, made earlier by Adorno and his associates (1950), between two forms of religious orientation: an *intrinsic* one that takes religion seriously as an end in itself and an *extrinsic* one that treats religion as a means toward personal and social ends. The first of these orientations, Adorno *et al.* had suggested, is associated with ethnocentric attitudes, whereas the second one is generally opposed to them. Allport and Ross (1967) developed questionnaire items to measure the two orientations and then to establish their relationships to various social attitudes.

The Allport-Ross Religious Orientation scales did not produce as clear a pattern of relationships as Allport had hoped, partly because of certain persistent psychometric problems with the scales (Burris 1999; Kirkpatrick and Hood 1990) but also because the Intrinsic items tend to correlate positively with conservative Christian views, which are associated in turn with conservative social attitudes (Wulff 1997). The scales have nevertheless been widely used in the psychology of religion, more than any other measures of religiousness. They have also been translated into several European languages, adapted for younger respondents, and—in the form of individual representative items—inserted into current Gallup polls.

Like Allport himself, proponents of the Allport-Ross scales have generally viewed the Intrinsic scale as a measure of religiousness at its best. Others, having noted that the scales correlate with measures of social desirability, have been more circumspect, suggesting that high scorers may be persons who, perhaps unconsciously, are trying to give a good impression (Leak and Fish, 1989). Sharing the suspicion that the intrinsic orientation is less genuine than it represents itself to be, and preferring a more existential definition of religion than the Allport-Ross scales embody, Daniel Batson set about to develop a third alternative, the quest orientation, which reflects "an open-ended, responsive dialogue with existential questions raised by the contradictions and tragedies of life" (Batson *et al.* 1993:169). The Quest scale he developed, Batson argues, incorporates three of the facets of the mature religious sentiment that Allport (1950) had characterized in his writings—complexity, tentativeness, and doubt—but left out of his scales.

Through a series of quasi-experimental studies, Batson found evidence, first, that the intrinsic orientation is associated with insistent helpfulness whereas the quest orientation is associated with greater sensitivity to the expressed wishes of the needy person; and, second, that the prosocial behavior of those high on the Intrinsic scale is motivated less by compassion for others and a desire to avoid feelings of guilt or shame than by a need to feel good about oneself and to be thought well of by others (Batson 1990; Batson *et al.* 1993). Researchers using Batson's Quest scale or an augmented version of it have found that the Quest orientation shows a more consistent relationship than the Intrinsic one to a variety of socially relevant variables, including level of moral judgment (Sapp and Jones 1986), the valuing of equality (Luce *et al.* 1987), and non-discriminatory attitudes (McFarland 1989). On the other hand, in the burgeoning empirical literature on religion and mental health, the Intrinsic scale tends to be positively correlated with measures of mental health whereas the Quest scale shows, if anything, a modest association with personal distress, including negative attitudes toward death (Wulff 1997:248–9).

While research on religious orientation is in various ways representative of the empirical approach in the psychology of religion, especially its current interest in establishing a positive pattern of correlates between religiousness or "spirituality" and mental health, it does not constitute the whole of this substantial literature. Alternate measures of religiosity are sometimes used (Hill and Hood 1999) and still others are under development (Hutsebaut 1996). Topics of investigation encompass a broad range of phenomena, including religious development at various stages of life, conversion, meditation, mysticism, and coping processes (Hood *et al.* 1996). Findings in this literature are far from consistent, however, and many issues remain under debate, including the adequacy of the various measures and the need for grounding research in more adequate theories. There is some interest in identifying the neurophysiological underpinnings of exceptional religious experience, but speculation of this sort is mainly found outside of formal

psychology-of-religion circles (e.g., d'Aquili and Newberg 1999; see also Wulff 2000a).

The contemporary empirical perspective has been promoted mainly by researchers trained in psychology—typically, social psychology. Anxious to gain the attention and respect of mainstream psychologists—attention to religion as a significant variable in human lives, respect for the research carried out by psychologists of religion—proponents of the empirical approach have aspired to as rigorous a science as the character of religion will allow (Batson 1977; Hood *et al* 1996). Toward the same ends, some have conducted their research within one or another theoretical framework developed apart from religion, notably attribution theory (Spilka *et al.* 1985), attachment theory (Kirkpatrick 1992), and coping theory (Pargament 1997). Most researchers, however, have proceeded in the fashion of "dust-bowl empiricism," simply correlating indicators of religiousness with demographic, social-attitude, and personality variables without the guidance of theory-derived hypotheses.

Interpretive perspectives: the meaning of religious content

Those who have come into the psychology of religion by way of religious studies typically conceive of the field as one of the sciences of religion *(Religionswissenschaften)* rather than a specialization within psychology. They correspondingly decline to follow the empirical approach and opt instead for one or another of the interpretive perspectives. Just as the empirical outlook can be traced back to the Clark school, so the interpretive approach has roots going back to James and Freud in the early twentieth century and, before them, to a tradition of reflection extending from Feuerbach and Hume, in the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries, back to the early Greek rationalists (Wulff 1997). Whereas the empirical approach is inherently a psychology of religious *persons* and is therefore focused on individual differences in piety, the interpretive perspective is foremost a psychology of religious *contents* and thus seeks out the *meaning* of the images, objects, stories, and rituals that together compose the religious traditions. Even when this content is idiosyncratically appropriated or transformed in individual lives, the accent remains on its meaning, not the range of its variations.

Much of the interpretive literature even today centers on reviewing, elaborating, and critiquing the views of the classic interpreters, especially Freud and Jung. James is also periodically revisited, as a wellspring of insights into individual religious experience and its consequences (Capps and Jacobs 1995). Yet given his disdain for religious symbols and rituals, James offers his readers little for interpreting specific contents. Thus it has been the depth psychologists, mainly, who have animated the interpretive literature.

Although Freud's views of religion are still affirmed and applied by occasional researchers, his interpretations are more often criticized, frequently becoming themselves the subject of psychological analysis. His narrowly patriarchal configuration of religion and his thoroughgoing rejection of it have been explored in terms of his personal history, his connection with the Jewish world, and the broader historic context in which he lived (e.g., Wallace 1984). Other critics have argued, however, that whatever limitations Freud's views may have suffered, there are nevertheless essential insights to be found in his work. These insights they have sought to appropriate and develop in a number of directions.

Foundations for a revised and more positive psychoanalytic view of religion were laid down by several of the British object relations theorists, notably Harry Guntrip (1956) and Donald Winnicott (1971). Whereas Freud took religion to be a regressive and stultifying effort to reclaim the illusory security of infancy, the object relations theorists argued that religion, by offering a sense of cosmic connection and validation, serves as a kind of psychotherapy that—as long as it resists neurotic distortion—promotes better and more satisfying interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, whereas Freud traced the dynamics of religion exclusively to the Oedipal father, the object relations theorists ascribed to the pre-Oedipal mother an equal if not more important role and allowed that still other caretakers might also be influential in the shaping of individual religious sensibilities. By ascribing to religious feelings and images a far more complex derivation than Freud offered, the object relations theorists provide a framework that is not only more adequate for understanding particular individuals but also more encompassing of the world's religious traditions.

Object relations theory similarly helps to recontextualize the discussion of the ontological status of religious content. Whereas Freud distinguished only two realms of human ideation, an infantile, autistic one (to which he consigned religious ideation) and a mature, reality-oriented one (preeminently the world of science), Winnicott posited an illusory, intermediate area of experience, the contents of which aid human beings of all ages to bridge inner and outer realities. Just as the young child gradually comes to recognize and accept objective reality with the help of cherished transitional objects—the ubiquitous blankets and teddy bears—so adults continue to make the world humanly inhabitable through continuing elaboration of the intermediate sphere, in the diverse forms of human culture, including religion.

From this perspective, then, religion is not something to be outgrown, but a potentially vital resource for the fullest realization of human ideals. As the outcome of creative human imagining, however, this "illusionistic world" is peculiarly subject to distortion, either through autistic elaborations ungrounded in reality or through literalistic misinterpretations, which transform the playfully conceived symbol into reified and obligatory doctrine or ritual (Pruyser 1983). Perhaps most idiosyncratic in its construction is the