

Cindy Miller-Perrin  
Elizabeth Krumrei Mancuso

# Faith from a Positive Psychology Perspective

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## Author Biography

**Cindy Miller-Perrin** earned her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from Washington State University and is Distinguished Professor of Psychology at Pepperdine University. She enjoys teaching Child Clinical Psychology, Positive Psychology, Advanced Research Seminar (Psychology Honors Program), and Introductory Psychology. She also enjoys researching with undergraduates and is the recipient of the 2008 Howard A. White Award for Teaching Excellence. Dr. Miller-Perrin has authored numerous journal articles and book chapters covering a range of topics, including child maltreatment, family violence, vocation and life purpose, and faith development in college students. She has co-authored three books, including *Family Violence Across the Lifespan* (with O. Barnett & R. Perrin, Sage 1997, 2005, 2011), *Child Maltreatment* (with R. Perrin, Sage 1999, 2007, 2013), and *Child Sexual Abuse: Sharing the Responsibility* (with S. Wurtele, University of Nebraska Press, 1992). She is an APA Fellow in the American Psychological Association and has served with APA as the President of the Section on Child Maltreatment and Member-At-Large for Advocacy for Division 37 Society for Child and Family Policy and Practice. She is currently President-Elect of APA's Division 37.

**Elizabeth Krumrei Mancuso** earned an M.A. in Religion and Counseling from Pepperdine University in 2004 and a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from Bowling Green State University in 2009. She joined the faculty at Pepperdine University's Seaver College in 2009, where she is now Associate Professor of Psychology and teaches courses in psychotherapy, family therapy, basic and advanced research methodology, and psychology of religion. She has published journal articles on topics such as religious coping, spiritual struggles, gratitude, forgiveness, divorce, and college student mental health. She has also authored book chapters on spirituality in psychotherapy, religious coping, and spiritual struggles. Dr. Krumrei Mancuso has received grants and fellowships for research on the topics of religious coping, spiritual struggles, spiritual movement meditation, community-based

research, prostitution, and intellectual humility. She has also received grants for supervising undergraduate research and for teaching courses in the areas of Judaism and service learning. She has enjoyed mentoring students and conducting clinical work. She has provided psychotherapy at a children's resource center, a community mental health center, and college counseling centers.

# Chapter 1

## Religion, Spirituality, and Positive Psychology: History and Definitions

The significance of religion within society has a long history that has withstood the test of time. Although the great social thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries predicted the eventual decline of religion through what is now known as secularization theory – a theory that predicts the demise of religion as societies become more modern and industrialized – recent views reflect growing criticism of traditional secularization theory and suggest that the world is just as religious as it ever has been (Berger, 1999; Norris & Inglehart, 2011; Stark & Finke, 2000). Despite the critiques of religion by Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and others, religion – in some form – is a pervasive phenomenon both within and outside the United States. Dawkins (2008), in his famously titled book *The God Delusion*, suggests that religious faith is a non-reality based on a false sense of belief in a Higher Power that has biologically evolved. Nevertheless, practically, religion and spirituality are a reality for millions across the globe. As sociology's well-known Thomas Theorem stipulates, situations defined as real are in fact real in their consequences (Thomas & Thomas, 1928). Regardless of ontology, religious beliefs have very real consequences in people's lives.

Determining the precise number of individuals who claim some degree of religiosity and/or spirituality, however, is no easy task. A great deal of research has examined the role of religion and spirituality for Americans living in the United States. Such research has been criticized for various methodological reasons. There is little official data, for example, that is available because the U.S. Census Bureau does not collect such information. Numerous nongovernmental surveys, although flawed, have provided fairly consistent findings. One of the most frequently cited sources of information on religious behavior and beliefs in the United States is the General Social Survey (GSS), conducted nationally by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) annually or biannually since 1972. According to the 2010 GSS, 71 % of the U.S. population attends religious services with some frequency with approximately 31 % attending nearly every week or more (Smith, Marsden, & Hout, 2011). In terms of religious beliefs, the most recent American Religious Identification Survey found that when a 2008 nationally representative

sample was asked about the existence of God, 70 % of Americans responded “There is definitely a personal God” (Kosmin & Keysar, 2009). Most such surveys also reveal that the majority of Americans pray at least once a day and endorse religion as a very important part of their lives (e.g., Smith et al., 2011; Pew Research Center, 2008). In his recent book entitled, *God is Alive and Well*, Frank Newport (2012) described findings from the Gallup Daily tracking project which involved more than 350,000 interviews with randomly selected Americans per year since 2008. When Americans were asked the question, “Do you believe in God?” in 2011, approximately 90 % responded affirmatively, a figure only slightly lower than the 96 % of Americans responding affirmatively in a Gallup sample in 1944 (Newport, 2012). Newport also reported on various other indicators of religiosity such as attendance at religious services, a belief that religion can answer all or most of today’s problems, and the degree to which religion is an important part of their daily lives, with approximately 40–60 % of Americans responding affirmatively.

The large majority of Americans, then, profess some form of religious faith as measured in a variety of ways. With which religious identity do the majority of Americans identify? The data suggest that America is a Christian nation. According to both GSS and Gallup data, the overwhelming majority of all Americans are classified as either Catholics or Protestants (Newport, 2012; Smith et al., 2011). Stated another way, since 16 % of Americans claim no religious identity, of those Americans who identify as religious, approximately 95 % are Christian (Newport, 2012).

As these data suggest, the majority of Americans define themselves as Christians. However, the percentage of the U.S. population identifying with other religious and spiritual traditions, including native-born Americans and new Americans or members of immigrant communities, is increasing (Smith, 2002). Increases were noted between 1990 and 2000 in the percentage of the population identifying as New Age (240 %), Hindu (237 %), Buddhist (170 %), and Muslim (109 %) (Barrett, Kurian, & Johnson, 2001). More recent data from the U.S. Religious Landscape Survey conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life suggests that these trends are continuing (Pew Research Center, 2008). Muslims, for example, accounted for roughly 0.6 % of the U.S. adult population in 2007 and Hindus accounted for approximately 0.4 % of the population. In addition, while the number of individuals who identify with no particular religious affiliation (i.e., “religious nones”) is increasing other measures of religiosity and spirituality, such as the importance of religion in their lives, have remained stable (e.g., Newport, 2012). In addition, the number who identify as “spiritual not religious” is also increasing (Newport, 2012; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). These findings suggest that researchers and practitioners need to be aware of the increasing religious diversity within America, as well as the distinctions that the public are making between religiosity and spirituality.

There is also evidence that religiosity and spirituality are alive and well, not just in the U.S., but globally. According to the International Social Survey (Smith, 2012), for example, cross-national indices also suggest significant numbers of people expressing a belief in God, although rates vary across countries. Examining 30 countries that were surveyed during 2 of 3 years (1991, 1998, or 2008), Smith

found that the majority of individuals in several non U.S. countries endorsed a belief in God when presented with the following statement: “I know God really exists and have no doubts about it.” Compared to 61 % of U.S. respondents, the majority of respondents from the Philippines (84 %), Chile (79 %), Israel (66 %), Poland (62 %), Cyprus (59 %), and Portugal (51 %) also endorsed this statement. Respondents were also asked whether they believe in a personal God “who concerns himself with every human being personally.” For 37 % of countries surveyed, the majority of respondents endorsed this item. Compared to 68 % of U.S. respondents, the majority of respondents from the following countries also endorsed this item: Philippines (92 %), Chile (72 %), Israel (67 %), Ireland (64 %), Poland (60 %), Northern Ireland (60 %), Portugal (58 %), Cyprus (56 %), Italy (54 %), and Slovakia (51 %).

The impact of this worldwide adherence to religious faith is evident across multiple societal levels and systems from the macro level (e.g., including social and cultural practices, politics, and economics) to the micro level (e.g., including communities and institutions and relationships among individuals and within families) to the individual level. At the macro level, the influence of religion may be most obvious in various cultural practices. For example, there has been a long tradition in both the United States and the United Kingdom that witnesses in court swear on the Bible to profess the truth before testifying. Many national holidays within the U.S. are tied to religious observances such as Christmas and Easter. Furthermore, in 1956 the words “In God We Trust,” which is stamped on U.S. coins and paper currency, became the national motto of the U.S. and was recently reaffirmed as such in 2011 (Wing, 2013).

Religion has also become a significant sociocultural force in both domestic and international politics. In the U.S., national election news coverage has frequently focused attention on the religious affiliations of the candidates from Kennedy’s Catholicism in 1960 to Obama’s connection with the controversial church pastor of the Trinity United Church of Christ in 2008 to Romney’s Mormonism in 2012. In addition, recent surveys highlight the important role of religion in partisan support and electoral behavior. Indeed, surveys of U.S. citizens have repeatedly shown that those who attend church most frequently are most likely to vote for Republican candidates while those who seldom or never attend church tend to vote for Democratic candidates (Newport, 2012; Norris, 2000). Broader research examining international voting trends tends to support this finding. In an examination of the Values Surveys from 1981 to 2001, representative national surveys carried out in 80 different countries, Norris and Inglehart (2011) found that religion was the strongest predictor of voting behavior, above and beyond alternative indicators such as education, social class, income, age, and sex. Similar to the findings of U.S. surveys, those who reported attending religious services most frequently were more likely to vote for parties on the right while those who reported attending religious services least frequently were more likely to vote for parties on the left. In most countries, the religious right has been associated with espousing conservative politics such as the U.S. Republican’s stance on the issues of abortion and gay marriage; however, in some countries such as Latin America, religion has been

associated with more liberal movements (Jelen & Wilcox, 2002; Wilcox, 1992). In addition, some research suggests that religious participation is negatively associated with political right affiliation, particularly in agrarian societies (Norris & Inglehart, 2011). Therefore, although religion does appear to impact politics, the nature of this relationship is complex and not always consistent.

Religion and spirituality are not only influential at the macro level but also at the micro and individual levels. Micro level systems include intimate relationships between parents and children, friends, and romantic partners, as well as families and communities. Religion and spirituality can impact the values and beliefs associated with various unions such as the circumstances under which one can legally marry or divorce or the circumstances surrounding conception and abortion. Religion and spirituality can also impact micro level systems on an interpersonal level and new research evidence has examined the various ways that religion and spirituality impact circumstances of various relationships such as marital conflict, perceived spousal support, parenting styles, and relationships between adolescents and their parents (e.g., Brody, Stoneman, Flor, & McCrary, 1994; Mahoney et al., 1999). The influence of religion at the individual level is evidenced in recent research findings suggesting that religion and spirituality impact health, both physical and emotional (Koenig, 1998; Koenig, King, & Carson, 2012; Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001; Newport, 2012; Pargament, 2013).

That religion and spirituality have an impact on these various social systems, from the macro level to the micro level to the individual level, is undeniable. What is less clear is the precise nature of its impact. Is religion helpful or harmful? Does it propagate good or evil? Anecdotally, examples of both types of outcomes abound. The tragic events of 9/11 were most certainly motivated in part by religious beliefs. Honor killings – which have occurred in many countries across the world – primarily impact women who were murdered because their perpetrators viewed their actions as a violation of rules of religious conduct such as dressing in a manner unacceptable to the family or community, desiring to marry by one's own choice, or engaging in sexual acts outside marriage (e.g., Chesler, 2009; United Nations, 2002). Religion and the rise of religious extremists have often played an arguably negative role in the political conflicts of the Middle East, North Africa, Asia, and Northern Ireland. In the Middle East, individuals are stoned to death for violating religious customs. The Crusades, where millions died, were justified through religious beliefs. But religious beliefs have also played a role in what are viewed as positive outcomes. Most experts believe that religion played a central and critical role in the U.S. Civil Rights Movement (Schultz & Harvey, 2010). Throughout history, churches have also been a source of a variety of prosocial opportunities such as volunteerism and services such as counseling, education, and financial support (Billingsley, 1999; Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). But the impact of religion is not always clear-cut as in the role that religion played with regard to the issue of slavery in the U.S. Biblical scripture, for example, was at the same time used to argue both for and against slavery, as have other religious teachings for other social issues such as the unequal treatment of women and homosexuals (e.g., Moghadam, 1999; Schultz & Harvey, 2010).

Although the valence of the impact of religion is not solely positive or negative, what is clear is that religion and spirituality are both pervasive and significant in their impact. Despite the fact that religion and spirituality have been studied by philosophers, sociologists, and political scientists for a long time, the primary focus of investigation has centered on a macro level of analysis. The topic of religion and spirituality at the micro and individual levels has received far less attention until relatively recently. This reality is due no doubt, in part, to the historically contentious relationship between science and religion, in general, and between the field of psychology and religion, in particular. These tensions have begun to dissipate in recent years and over the past 15 years or so there has been a virtual explosion of research aimed at determining the precise effects of religion and spirituality on human functioning and interaction. A review of the history of the relationship between religion, science, and the field of psychology, and the subfield of positive psychology in particular, will provide a context helpful to understanding the study of why faith matters to individual human functioning and human interpersonal interaction, the focus of this book.

## **1.1 A History of the Relationship Between Religion and Science**

Although religion appears to play a prominent role in the lives of the lay public, this is less true among scientists and academicians. Indeed, the relationship between science and religion has a controversial history. Since the positivist era, these two areas have been largely viewed as incompatible. The controversy is essentially that religious knowledge and practice is based on belief and faith in the supernatural, while scientific knowledge is based on empirical observation and rigorous testing of hypotheses (Turbott, 2004). Others have suggested further that the function of science is to test hypotheses about events in the natural world while the function of religion is to address questions of meaning and ultimate purpose and causality (Brown, 2012). As a result of this dichotomy, the scientific community has viewed science and religion as separate and unrelated entities. Indeed, in 1981 the U.S. National Academy of Sciences stated its policy on the topic as follows: “Religion and science are separate and mutually exclusive realms of human thought whose presentation in the same context leads to misunderstanding of both scientific theory and religious belief” (U.S. National Academy of Sciences, 1984, p. 6).

Given the historical divide between science and religion, it is perhaps not surprising that the personal beliefs and values of scientists are largely antagonistic toward religion. Many studies have examined the religious beliefs of scientists in the United States, for example, and generally find that scientists are less likely than the general public to believe in God. In an oft cited survey study conducted by Larson and Witham in 1997, the researchers present the results of a replication of 1913 and 1933 surveys by James H. Leuba (Larson & Witham, 1998). In those



surveys, Leuba mailed a questionnaire to leading scientists asking about their belief in “a God in intellectual and affective communication with humankind” and in “personal immortality.” Larson and Witham used the same wording as in the Leuba studies, and sent their questionnaire to 517 members of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences from the biological and physical sciences (the latter including mathematicians, physicists and astronomers). Consistent with the findings of Leuba, Larson and Witham found similar results indicating that 40 % of scientists believed in a personal God while 45 % said they did not.

In a more recent study conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2009, scientist members of the American Association for the Advancement of Science were much less religious as a group compared to the general public. For example, survey results indicated that “scientists are roughly half as likely as the general public to believe in God or a higher power” compared to 95 % of Americans who believe in some form of deity or higher power based on findings from a 2006 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center (Masci, 2009, p. 1). Furthermore, the Pew poll found that while 17 % of the general public indicated no religious affiliation (e.g., describing themselves as atheist, agnostic, or nothing in particular), nearly 50 % of scientists indicated no religious affiliation.

It would appear, however, that despite a greater amount of religious skepticism within the halls of academia, the majority of academics are religious believers. The recent nationally representative Politics of the American Professoriate study examined religious beliefs of American college and university professors and found that although atheism and agnosticism were more common among professors compared to the general population, such skepticism represented a minority view (Gross & Simmons, 2009). Among a wide variety of faculty members teaching at community colleges, 4-year colleges and universities, and both elite and nonelite doctoral universities, approximately 52 % of professors either agreed that “While I have doubts, I feel that I do believe in God” or “I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it.” In this study, religious belief among academics did vary by type of institution with professors employed by elite doctoral universities being the least likely to endorse religious beliefs.

Religious belief also tends to vary by scientific or academic field. According to the survey conducted by Larson and Witham (1998), a belief in God was most popular among mathematicians (approximately 45 %) and least popular among physicists (approximately 22 %). The Pew Research Center poll described above also found scientists in the field of physics and astronomy to be the least likely, compared to those who work in other major scientific fields, to believe in God (approximately 29 %) (Masci, 2009). Surveys assessing a broader range of academic disciplines, such as the Politics of the American Professoriate study, have found similar results in that approximately 51 % of biologists surveyed were either atheists or agnostics (Gross & Simmons, 2009). Other academic fields were significantly more religious with the majority of accounting, elementary education, finance, marketing, art, criminal justice, nursing, management information, electrical engineering, computer science, business, history, and communication professors expressing some degree of belief in God. Professors in fields within

the social sciences were some of the least likely to express religious belief including economics, sociology, political science, and psychology. In this study, psychologists included the largest number of atheists and agnostics (61 %).

Other studies have also found low levels of religiosity among social scientists, and in particular, psychologists (e.g., Bergin & Jensen, 1990; Stark & Finke, 2000). Edward Shafranske (2001), for example, has conducted a number of different studies in which he compares the religious beliefs, attitudes, and practices of psychologists to those of the general population. In one study, 24 % of U.S. clinical and counseling psychologists reported a belief in a personal God compared to 90 % of Americans. Further, while only 26 % of clinical and counseling psychologists indicated that religion was very important to them, 58 % of a national sample of Americans did so. These findings suggest that the personal beliefs of many therapists are at odds with most of the clients they serve.

Although the majority of social scientists, as individuals, may not be particularly religious, the study of religion within the social sciences, has a rich history among psychologists, sociologists, and religious scholars. In recent years, in fact, there has been a growth in research and study among social scientists in religion, and nowhere is this more evident than in the field of the psychology of religion (Hart, 1999; Marks, 2006; Pargament et al., 2013). The field of psychology, over time, has developed an approach to integrating its foundation in science with the study of religion.

## 1.2 A History of the Relationship Between Religion, Spirituality, and Psychology

Although today the psychological study of religion – referred to as the field of the psychology of religion and spirituality – is a vibrant and growing field, enthusiasm and interest in the field has varied throughout its history. Scientific interest in the psychology of religion began in the 1880s and was a major area of study until the 1930s (Jones, 1994). William James, for example, published his seminal and influential work, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, in 1902. James believed that religious experiences should be studied empirically just like any other psychological experience. In particular, he argued the importance of the subjective experience of religion for the individual in contrast to naturalistic or deistic explanations. As a result, he discussed both positive and negative outcomes of religious experiences and focused on a variety of topics such as religious faith, conversion, mysticism, saintliness, and repentance. James believed that religion was a significant part of human experience and as a result required empirical study.

In contrast, several significant historical figures within psychology have taken an antagonistic stance toward religion. Sigmund Freud, for example, described religion as a belief in a father-god which includes obligatory rituals. He theorized that in the early years of life, children perceive parents and especially the father as

an all-powerful, yet loving figure, who provides protection from all woes of life. In later years, when internal and external factors in a person's life arouse a sense of helplessness, the person's longing for a powerful father figure finds its fulfillment in religion (Freud, 1912). Freud declared religion as an optimistic illusion, which was the result of wish fulfillment rather than reason. In *Future of an Illusion*, Freud (1927/1961) argued that the optimistic belief in a benevolent father-like God, who would reward us in the afterlife if we controlled our aggressive and sexual instincts, was an illusion essential for civilization. Without this illusion, people would be tempted to act out their aggressive and sexual instincts. However, this optimistic illusion came at a price. It entailed denial of the reality of sexual and aggressive instincts. Through the process of psychoanalysis, people could attain insight into the various defenses, neurotic compromises, and optimistic illusions they used to balance their need to fulfill sexual and aggressive impulses with their need to behave in a socially acceptable way. The goal of analysis was to attain a level of psychological maturity, where reality could be clearly perceived and where optimistic illusions could be discarded. Freud further contended that the only healthy solution was to forsake religion and rely on science, thus allowing a person and society to enjoy growth beyond the infantile stage.

Another important figure, B.F. Skinner, maintained that religious behavior is the same as all other behavior, which occurs or does not occur because it is either followed by reinforcement or punishment, respectively. Skinner described belief in God as an "archetype pattern of an explanatory fiction" maintained largely by fears promulgated by religious institutions (1971, p. 201). Individual behavior, therefore, was shaped and controlled through what Skinner believed were fear-inducing punitive practices to discourage "sinful" behavior such as threats of hell and damnation. Similarly, Albert Ellis, in his early writings, maintained that religion incorporated the concepts of sin and guilt which contributed to an unhealthy rather than healthy belief system. In other words, religious beliefs were pathological and could lead to self-defeating behavior or even neurosis (Ellis, 1960, 1962). Ellis later revised his position suggesting that this negative impact of religious belief may only be applicable to the devoutly religious (Ellis, 1992).

Although Freud's psychoanalysis and Skinner's behaviorism were the two major psychological paradigms during the twentieth century, there remained other psychologists who argued that religion could be beneficial. Carl Jung, for example, considered religion as an essential function of the human psyche in the *absence* of which individuals fall victim to various neuroses and psychoses (see Read, Fordham, & Adler, 1968). Erik Erickson was another proponent of religion who described how religion universalizes the qualities of faith, trust, and ego in the growing child and asserted that religion was vital in achieving a fully developed healthy personality (Erikson, 1963). Humanistic psychologists also concluded that human beings have a need for spirituality as they attempt to reach self-actualization (Kung, 1979).

In recent years, particularly beginning in the 1990s, attitudes of those in the field of psychology toward religion began to shift again toward more acceptance of religion and spirituality as a legitimate topic of inquiry. Many experts within the

field began to argue that the differences between scientific fields of study and religion are not that distinct or, at the least, that any differences suggest the need for dialogue and interplay between the fields (Gould, 1997; Haque, 1998; Jones, 1994). In 1997, Harvard University professor of biology, Stephen Jay Gould, invited dialogue between the fields of science and religion by proposing the concept of nonoverlapping magisteria (NOMA: Gould, 1997). This principle suggests that because the magisteria of science and religion do not overlap, the recognition of such allows, and perhaps requires, that the two realms provide feedback to one another with the common goal of uncovering knowledge, understanding, and truth. In a 1994 article, Jones similarly argued for an explicit and constructive relationship between psychology and religion. Jones called for recognition that the difference between science and other forms of human knowing are not as distinct as others have previously argued and cannot be viewed as mutually exclusive fields. Candy Gunther Brown (2012) in her recent book entitled *Testing Prayer*, argues that “empirical questions (even about matters involving religious practice) are valid topics for empirical study” and that “**both** science and religion are ways of **constructing** what is ‘real’ in the world rather than offering transparent windows onto reality” (emphasis added, pp. 6, 3).

Since the mid-twentieth century there have been many attempts to integrate psychology and religion and those efforts have met with some success. For example, several professional psychological and psychiatric organizations have been formed such as the Christian Association for Psychological Studies in 1953, the National Academy of Religion and Mental Health in 1954, and the American Foundation of Religion and Psychiatry in 1958. Within the American Psychological Association (APA), there is a separate division that focuses on issues of religion and spirituality. The division began in 1949, as a small group of individuals interested in psychology and religion that called themselves the American Catholic Psychological Association. This group later changed its name in 1970 to Psychologists Interested in Religious Issues and achieved division status (Division 36) within the APA in 1976. The Division changed its name once again in 1993 to the Psychology of Religion and recently adopted its current, more inclusive title, the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality in 2012 (Piedmont, 2013).

The field has also progressed in status with the creation of several psychology journals that focus specifically on the topic of psychology of religion. The publications that have emerged include the *Journal of Religion and Health* created in 1961, the *Journal of Psychology and Theology* established in 1973, the *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* formed in 1982, and *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* which originated in 1990. Most recently, the APA journal of *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* was established in 2009. A number of handbooks and textbooks have also recently appeared, including the *APA Handbook of Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality* published in 2013 – the eighth publication in its reference line of handbooks focusing on core subfields within the field of psychology.

Yet, there continue to be many challenges in integrating the fields of psychology and religion. As noted by several leaders in the field, “The state of the discipline

today can be characterized as sufficiently developed but still overlooked, if not bypassed, by the whole of psychology” (Hill et al., 2000, p. 51). Indeed, as Jones noted in 1994, the topics of religion and religious belief are not included in most psychology textbooks. In addition, in a recent survey of APA leaders, just 40 % strongly agreed that “religion and spirituality are important topics for psychologists to consider when providing professional services,” and only 31 % strongly agreed that “religion and spirituality can be studied with scientific rigor” (McMinn, Hathaway, Woods, & Snow, 2009). In addition to the subfield’s marginal status within the field of psychology, psychologists in general lack training in the area of psychology and religion. According to a survey of training directors of counseling psychology programs in the U.S., for example, only 18 % of training directors indicated that their graduate program offered a course on religion or spirituality (Schulte, Skinner, & Claiborn, 2002). In another more inclusive study, only 13 % of training directors of clinical psychology programs in the United States and Canada reported that their curriculum included a course on religion and spirituality (Brawer, Handal, Fabricatore, Roberts, & Wajda-Johnston, 2002).

The subfield of Positive Psychology has a great deal to offer in efforts to address the challenges facing the field of psychology and religion. Positive psychology’s emphasis on meaning and life purpose along with its focus on core concepts, many of which have religious origins and are evident in religious practices, can provide a natural bridge for furthering understanding about the role of religion and spirituality in human functioning and interaction. In addition, a Positive Psychology perspective can be helpful in efforts to further integrate the study of psychology and religion as well as foster further integration of religion and spirituality into the broader field of psychology. Indeed, as noted by Christopher Peterson (2006), a key founder of this relatively new subfield, Positive Psychology’s emphasis “places the psychology of religion in a central place it has rarely occupied in the history of the discipline” (p. 6).

### ***1.2.1 Religion, Spirituality, and the Field of Positive Psychology***

Prior to World War II, psychology had three main missions: make the lives of all people fulfilling; identify and enhance human excellence; and treat pathology. In the last half-century, however, psychology has largely focused on decreasing maladaptive emotions and behaviors, while ignoring optimal functioning (e.g., character strengths and virtues). Psychologists have traditionally focused on the treatment of mental illness from a perspective of repairing damaged habits, damaged drives, damaged childhoods, and damaged brains. In recent years, however, many psychological researchers and practitioners have attempted to re-focus the field away from the study of human weakness and damage toward the promotion of well-being among individuals, families, and communities (Peterson, 2006;

Seligman, 2005; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This new movement within the field of psychology has been labeled Positive Psychology and its goal is to identify and enhance the human strengths and virtues that make life worth living (“The good life”) and allow individuals and communities to thrive (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

In 2004, Peterson and Seligman created a handbook for classifying character strengths and virtues. Based on their review of virtues and strengths referred to in major religious and philosophical traditions around the world, they identified 24 character strengths and organized them into “six core moral virtues that emerge consistently across cultures and throughout time” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 28). One of the six core virtues is transcendence, which includes several different character strengths including religiousness. Many of the other character strengths identified by Peterson and Seligman as important constructs within the field of Positive Psychology have long traditions within various religions (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003), including concepts such as love, gratitude, forgiveness, hope, wisdom, kindness, fairness, humility, prudence, and self-control. Therefore, one domain within the field of positive psychology is the study of religion/spirituality and related constructs as human strengths that have the potential to enhance an individual’s optimal existence and well-being.

Recent research supports the notion that religion and spirituality is associated with optimal existence and well-being, at least in part, through its function of providing life purpose and meaning. According to Seligman (2002) there are three elements that contribute to optimal human functioning and these have been termed the three pillars of positive psychology and include the pleasant life, the engaged life, and the meaningful life. All three of these pillars are associated with well-being and life satisfaction (Park, Peterson, & Ruch, 2009; Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005). However, engagement and meaning have been shown to be the most strongly associated with life satisfaction. Engagement occurs when one is using his or her strengths as much as possible and meaning emerges when one is using his or her strengths to belong and contribute to something greater than the self (Seligman, 2002). In 2007, Peterson, Ruch, Beermann, Park, and Seligman surveyed a U.S. sample of 12,439 and a Swiss sample of 445 adults and found that for both samples, religiousness was most strongly associated with a meaningful life orientation, thus providing evidence that religion and spirituality are associated with life meaning. There have been numerous additional studies that have researched the relationship between religion/spirituality and life purpose, and findings indicate a positive relationship between various constructs and life purpose, such as mysticism (Byrd, Lear, & Schwenka, 2000), spiritual experiences (Kass, Friedman, Leserman, Zuttermeister, & Benson, 1991), religious conversion (Paloutzian et al., 1999), strength of religious faith (Byron & Miller-Perrin, 2009), and spiritual strivings (Emmons, 2005).

Positive Psychology is therefore an exemplary context, and provides a useful framework, within which to conceptualize the role of religion and spirituality in human behavior, relationships, and communities. In particular, it offers a great deal in our efforts to understand the various forces that promote health and well-being.

In addition, positive psychology emphasizes objectivity and the scientific method to answer critical questions about the impact of religion and spirituality on individuals' health and well-being as well as the health and well-being of various interpersonal relationships along with relationships within broader communities. Before examining the role of religion and spirituality in promoting optimal human functioning and interaction, it is imperative to examine how these constructs are typically defined and measured.

### 1.3 Definition and Measurement of Constructs

Social science researchers and practitioners have used a variety of conceptual and operational definitions in an attempt to capture the very complex constructs of religiosity, faith, spirituality, and optimal human functioning. Indeed, there are no universally accepted definitions for these terms. In the paragraphs that follow, we will attempt to provide some conceptual definitions of these constructs along with a discussion of several important issues to consider when defining and measuring them.

#### 1.3.1 *Religiosity and Spirituality*

Various sociological, legal, and psychological conceptual definitions of religiosity and spirituality have been offered in the research literature. During the latter part of the twentieth century, the term *religiosity* has come to be used to refer to an organized system of beliefs and rituals associated with an institutional structure while the term *spirituality* has come to be used to refer to a personal quest or connection to the divine that can occur either within or outside formal religion. In recent years, however, the relationship between these terms has been recognized by many experts as relatively complex (Hill et al., 2000; Pargament, Mahoney, Exline, Jones, & Shafranske, 2013; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). For example, several studies indicate that the general population views the meanings of these terms quite differently (Mattis, 2000; Schlehofer, Omoto, & Adelman, 2008; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). In addition, there are a significant number of U.S. citizens who identify as “spiritual not religious” (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Therefore, it is important to keep in mind both the complexity inherent in defining these terms as well as the inadequacy of researchers to do so.

There have been many conceptual definitions of religiosity offered by researchers. In terms of psychology's original definition of religion, William James (1902/1999), frequently referred to as the father of psychology, wrote that religiosity refers to “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 the divine” (pp. 31–32). Stark and Glock (1968), in their influential sociological model of religiosity, identified five dimensions of religious

commitment including: (1) *ideological*, which refers to the beliefs that a religious person holds, (2) *practice*, which refers to engaging in acts such as church services, Bible study, and prayer, (3) *experience*, which refers to one's feeling of closeness to, or power of, God, (4) *knowledge*, which refers to having a general understanding of the basic tenets of a particular religion, and (5) *consequential*, which refers to the manifestation of the previous four dimensions in one's day-to-day behavior. More recently, Wulff (1997) described that scholars have defined three important dimensions of religiosity based on his analysis of the main references in the literature which include the presence of: (1) motivation and commitment to a supernatural power, (2) affective states associated with a supernatural power, and (3) behavioral acts carried out in reference of the supernatural power. Others have additionally incorporated the importance of religion's role in urging individuals to search for answers to life's ultimate questions, thereby providing life meaning and purpose (Geertz, 1973; Heschel, 1958; Tillich, 1952).

Of note is the fact that these conceptual definitions of religiosity are broad enough to incorporate a spiritual component (Hill et al., 2000). In the recently released *APA Handbook of Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality*, Pargament and his colleagues (Pargament, Mahoney, Exline, Jones, & Shafranske, 2013) define religion as "the search for significance that occurs within the context of established institutions that are designed to facilitate spirituality" (p. 15). In this definition, the researchers highlight the fact that religiosity involves: a *search* that involves an ongoing journey of discovery and transformation, a *destination toward significance* which could include any number of goals such as psychological, social, physical, or spiritual, and an *institutional context* which refers to organizations whose goal is to foster individuals' connection with the sacred (Pargament et al., 2013).

Like religiosity, spirituality lacks a universally agreed upon conceptual definition. Some have defined spirituality as a relationship to something sacred. As noted by Sawatzky, Ratner, and Chiu (2005), spirituality refers to a unique relationship to an entity beyond the physical, psychological or social dimensions of life. Social scientists have also defined spirituality as a search for the sacred. According to the *APA Handbook of Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality*, for example, spirituality involves a search that involves an ongoing journey of discovery of something sacred and a commitment to maintaining a connection to it (Pargament et al., 2013). Two elements are common to most definitions of spirituality and include the idea that spirituality involves an ongoing, motivated journey or pursuit and that the focus is on the sacred. Spirituality, for example, is commonly associated with an existential search for meaning and purpose (Larson et al., 1998; Thoresen, 1999; Chiu et al., 2004). Several researchers suggest that spirituality can be distinguished from other existential pursuits, ideologies, or life-giving practices by its orientation toward the sacred. The sacred refers to that which is set apart from the ordinary, or that which is divine, transcendent, immanent, ultimate, or boundless (Pargament et al., 2013; Pargament & Mahoney, 2005). Sacred entities can include God, a god-or divine-being, a Higher Power, or an ultimate reality (Sawatzky et al., 2005).

Others have argued that a unique aspect of spirituality is that it is typically defined by a person's subjective experiences and need not be expressed through predefined behaviors and practices, thus distinguishing it from religion (Sawatzky



et al., 2005). Spirituality is often viewed as separate from religion and may or may not be connected with it. What is determined to be spiritually “sacred” can vary from concepts such as various forms of deity (e.g., God or a Higher Power) to existential concerns (e.g., ultimate concerns, meaningful identity and purpose) to virtually any part of life (e.g., relationships, art, nature, etc.) and ultimately depends on the individual (Bollinger, 1969; Magill & McGreal, 1988; Pargament et al., 2013; Tillich, 1952). Spilka (1993) divided contemporary definitions of spirituality into one of three categories: (1) God-oriented (e.g., thought and practice are embedded in theologies), (2) world-oriented (e.g., the focus is on ecology or nature), and (3) people-oriented (e.g., human achievement and potential are stressed). Thus, conceptual definitions of spirituality often include broad definitions that extend beyond the boundaries of what has been traditionally viewed as religiosity or religiousness.

For our purposes, we adopt the broader term *faith* to refer to both elements of religion and spirituality to include a search for, and relationship to, the sacred or divine, both within and outside an institutional context. Although, as noted above, several studies indicate that the general population views the meanings of religion and spirituality to be quite different, and there are a significant number of U.S. citizens who identify as “spiritual not religious,” the majority of individuals in the U.S. label themselves as both religious and spiritual and there is consistent evidence of overlap between the two constructs (Marler & Hadaway, 2002; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Indeed, some have argued that the conceptual distinction between religion and spirituality is somewhat artificial because the two share many qualities that are often indistinguishable (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003). We adopt the term *faith*, then, to refer to the gamut of theological beliefs, attitudes, moral norms, as well as behaviors and practices that individuals engage in, in connection with the sacred or divine. Like other researchers (e.g., Barrett, 2007), rather than narrowly specifying what faith is and attempting to explain it in whole, we have chosen to approach faith as various parts of a greater whole, identifying human emotions, thoughts, behaviors, and interactions that *might* be conceptualized as faith variables in an attempt to explain various links to optimal human functioning.

Conceptual definitions aside, many different operational definitions of religion and spirituality have been used in the research literature. Operational definitions focus on faith beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and experiences involved in people’s connection with the sacred in their lives, such as belief in God, personal religious commitment, attendance at religious services, prayer, spiritual experiences, and sense of calling. Researchers have also considered faith maturity as an indicator of faith, involving greater complexity, inclusivity, and figurative thinking on matters of faith. Finally, researchers have operationally defined faith in terms of orientation toward religion, involving whether the person is motivated to engage in religion by factors inherent or tangential to religious pursuits (Allport & Ross, 1967; Batson, 1976). These various operational definitions have been contextualized with regard to specific research questions, for example, within relationship research, studies have examined religious beliefs about a relationship, praying for a relationship

partner, discussing spiritual topics within a relationship, and attending church or engaging in religious activities together. Sanctification is another faith variable that has been contextualized within various research domains. Sanctification is a faith-based belief that an aspect of life has divine character or significance (Mahoney et al., 1999; Pargament & Mahoney, 2005), which has been applied specifically to behaviors, relationships, work, and other factors in life.

For the host of faith variables reviewed in this volume, it is important to note that the constructs used are not employed in a theological sense, but rather as psychological constructs. The variables are religious and spiritual to the extent that their point of reference is the sacred, however, they are psychological in nature because they focus on people's feelings, perceptions, and behaviors associated with the sacred and are studied with social scientific rather than theological methods. Although we include a broad and diverse range of faith variables, which might contribute to the complexity in communicating about research findings, we believe that including a variety of different definitions of faith will lead to a broader range of research findings. We hope that this inclusiveness will lead to a greater understanding of how and why faith is related to optimal human functioning. One exception to this inclusiveness is our focus on findings related to Judeo/Christian religious faith. Our primary focus on the Judeo/Christian perspective is driven by the fact that most research and available assessment measures are consistent with this perspective. However, where possible, we will highlight similarities and differences among different faith perspectives.

### ***1.3.2 Optimal Psychological Functioning***

Optimal psychological functioning can be operationally defined in a variety of ways. The various outcomes associated with religious faith that we include in the following chapters are many and varied. From a broad perspective, we consider psychological variables related to mental and emotional health on both individual and interpersonal levels. The variables we examine will be different for each topic discussed in this volume. For example, a great many research studies have included measures of subjective well-being as an outcome measure of "the good life." Most subjective well-being measures utilize self-report methodology whereby participants rate their subjective well-being on a numerical scale ranging, for example, from 1 to 10 (e.g., Davis, Smith, & Marsden, 2001; Diener, Kesbir, & Lucas, 2008; Gallup Organization, 2006). Other research focused on emotional outcomes has examined high positive and low negative affect, satisfaction with life, purpose in life, meaning in life, and perceived well-being in specific domains of life.

Research examining various behavioral outcomes related to faith has focused on a number of different prosocial behaviors including altruism/helping behavior, forgiveness, and ethical and moral choices as well as various health-risk behaviors including alcohol consumption and sexual behavior. Operational definitions not only have varied across these topics, but also within a given subject area. The research on

altruism and forgiveness, for example, sometimes focuses on behavioral dispositions or intentions (e.g., one's tendency to help/forgive across situations or self-reported intention to help/forgive) and sometimes on overt behavior.

Research examining the impact of faith at the micro level, including communities and institutions and relationships among individuals and within families, has also included a range of outcome variables. When examining faith and relationships, we focus on relational outcome measures; specifically how faith variables relate to the quality of personal relationships, such as relationship partners being loving to one another, providing one another with emotional support, engaging in forgiveness, handling relationship conflicts in beneficial ways, and reporting high levels of relationship satisfaction. Our review of faith within communities focuses primarily on educational- and workplace-related outcomes at the individual-level such as academic achievement, educational aspirations, education satisfaction, work satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Throughout this volume, we will describe the unique operational definitions of outcome variables used by researchers that relate to faith.

### ***1.3.3 Goals and Objectives of This Book***

Faith matters because it often provides a sense of meaning and purpose that impacts the greater good. Faith also matters because it is associated with positive outcomes for individuals, for relationships, and for communities. This book will highlight faith from a positive psychology perspective, examining the relationship between faith, including religiosity and spirituality, and optimal psychological functioning. A study of faith from a positive psychology perspective takes a psychological rather than religious approach. It is the empirical study of faith-based thoughts, feelings, behavior, and social interaction as they relate to favorable outcomes. Hood et al. (2009) suggested that “psychologists of religion do not study religion per se; they study people in relation to their faith” (p. 4). In this book we focus more narrowly on the positive psychology of faith.

Our review will specifically incorporate the empirical literature on the role of faith and cognition, faith and emotion, and faith and behavior. We will focus on how these topics relate to individuals' sense of well-being, character strengths, virtues, and resilience. We will also incorporate information on how these faith concepts are relevant to interpersonal functioning in the context of family interactions (e.g., marriage/parenting) and friendships. Finally, we will take a community perspective to examine research on the role of faith constructs for well-being among individuals in various organizations and institutions. Each chapter will begin with an introduction to the topic, including essential definitions; will then provide an overview and discussion of the empirical literature; and will end with clinical implications for the field of psychology as well as suggestions for future research. Each chapter will also include a Chapter Summary which will provide a synopsis of the main empirical research findings described in each chapter.