Chapter 3
Religious Traditions

In the preceding chapters we began to sample the richness of the dialogue that has taken place between psychology and religion. However, it is impossible to really appreciate this conversation without an understanding of the religious traditions that have been involved. In this chapter, we will review the three main traditions that have been central in the psychology and religion dialogue: Hinduism and yogic practices, Buddhism and Zen practices, and Christianity.

The religious traditions we will discuss are the center of immense bodies of literature, produced both by adherents of the religions and the scholars who study them. Each tradition contains a tremendous amount of internal diversity in terms of beliefs and organizational structures. Thus, any summary given in the space of a few pages will leave out much of interest. In the following discussion, we will focus on those aspects of the traditions that will help us understand the psychology and religion dialogue, but a serious student will also wish to consult additional primary and secondary sources to gain a more comprehensive picture of these great religious traditions (see e.g., Ludwig, 2000; Smart, 1999a,b, 1998).

3.1 Hinduism

Hinduism is best understood as a grouping of diverse Indian religious traditions around a common core of sacred writings (Klostermaier, 2000a,b; Flood, 1996) (Figure 3.1). The beginnings of Hindu religious thought are found in the *Vedas,* an ancient collection of hymns, poetry, and text on a variety of religious subjects and rituals. It is believed that the earliest Vedic hymns originated in oral form before the 2nd millennium BCE and that they were present in written form sometime during the 1st millennium BCE. Four primary **samhitas** or collections of texts exist, the oldest and most important of which is the *Rig Veda*, which presents a number of ideas that became important in basic Hindu thought. Separate from the four samhitas, but also important for our purposes, is the *Ayur Veda*, a collection of texts that deals with healing practices and rituals (see Section 10.3.2).

Later writers began to reflect on the Vedas and develop other documents such as the *Upanishads* ("sitting down near" or "secret scriptures"), which include about

Fig. 3.1 *Hindu temple, Kathmandu.* Devotion and rituals of purification are important in most branches of Hinduism, and temples in various parts of the world provide pilgrimage sites, where people can come to engage in important ceremonies. Photo by the author
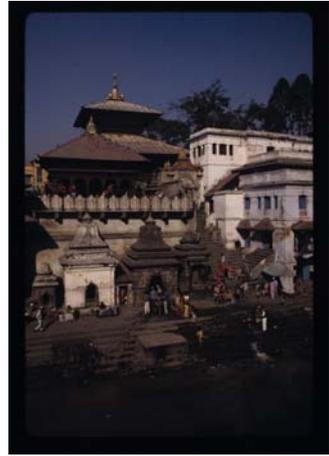
100 texts, a dozen of which are considered especially important and were composed early in the 1st millennium BCE. The Upanishad*s* contain a number of concepts that have been a central part of Hinduism, including the essential relationship between our inner selves and ultimate reality around us, and the ongoing cycle of death and rebirth or **reincarnation** known as **samsara**. Hindus believe that our position in this cycle is determined by our actions or **karma**. These actions can condemn us to endless lives of suffering, but it is also possible to achieve liberation from samsara. In Hinduism, this liberation is pursued through several related methods, the most important of which are the paths of devotion, philosophical understanding, action, and inner development.

3.1.1 Hindu Devotion and Philosophy

Devotion. Many gods and goddesses inhabit the Hindu pantheon, although sometimes these are seen as manifestations of one god or underlying reality. The most important of these are Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Shiva the Destroyer. **Vaisnavism** centers on devotion to Vishnu and his various **avatars** or incarnations such as Krishna, while **Saivism** focuses devotion to Shiva. Saivism also tends to be associated with ascetic and spiritual practices that promote inner development, such as yoga. Another stream of worship is **Saktism**, which centers on the female, the goddess Shakti who is the consort of Shiva. This form of devotion is often associated with secret practices of particular power, known as **tantra**.

Philosophy and Understanding. In Hinduism, individual spiritual practices or worship are more central to the religion than doctrinal beliefs (Flood, 1996, p. 12), but nevertheless systems of philosophy have developed that provide possible underlying metaphysics for Hindu belief. Philosophical writings in ancient India were put down in the form of **sutras** ("threads") or collections of pithy and often

enigmatic sayings. These are often accompanied by **bhasyas** or commentaries that provide interpretations of the sutras.

A key issue that runs through Hinduism, as well as many other religious traditions, is the problem of **dualism**. A dualistic religion sees an essential separation between the *physical world* of the senses or the body, and a *spiritual reality* that also may include the human mind. The early Vedas often imply a dualistic point of view that was developed in some versions of **Samkhya**, the philosophic school that forms the basis for classic yoga. In contrast to this, a monistic or **nondual** view of the world argues that all parts of reality are essentially one, and that differences we perceive between things are inconsequential or illusionary.

In later writings like the Upanishads and the *Bhagavad Gita*, authors began to explore the possibility of a monistic view of reality, and more attention was given to the individual spiritual quest. Systems of thought based on the Upanishads and the later *Vedanta* or *Brahma Sutra* are known as **Vedanta** ("end of the Vedas"), since the Upanishads are the final sacred works in the Vedic tradition. The most important of the schools is probably the systematization known as **Advaita Vedanta**, a nondualist position developed by Sankara (6th century CE). Advaita thought equates **Brahman**—the total, universal, transcendental reality or mind that lies behind subjective reality—with **Atman**, or the totality of our individual mind which includes but goes beyond the ego and the action-oriented parts of our psychological life (Brett, 2003). In Hinduism, our realization of this identity is thought to be the key to liberation and freedom (Sankaracarya, 1975). Some varieties of Vedanta are **theistic** and hold that there is a god or gods who are different than the world but may be involved in it. In the Hindu tradition, theism is associated with Vaisnavism or Saivism. The alternative is the **nontheistic** view, which denies the existence of a separate god or gods. In Hinduism and Buddhism, monistic or nondualist views of reality are generally nontheistic. Sankara's nondualist position became and remains to some extent the dominant school of thought in Indian philosophy. Influence of this nondualist position can be seen in later schools of Yoga practice that depart from the dualism of classic yoga.

3.1.2 Inner Development: Asceticism and yoga

Action and asceticism. The path of action is ethical and personal in nature. In the *Bhagavad-Gita*, growth comes through testing and finding the proper ethical path in life that combines detachment and action. Also part of the active path is **asceticism**, a lifestyle and set of practices designed to discipline the body or mind and further one's spiritual development. Hindu ascetics are often known as *renouncers* because they frequently choose a lifestyle of homelessness, depending upon alms and eschewing possessions. Specific ascetical practices can involve fasting, lying on a bed of nails, or holding unnatural positions for long lengths of time. Many ascetic techniques date to Vedic times, and influenced both the development of yoga and Buddhist spiritual practices.

Table 3.1 Some primary schools of Hindu yoga

Name	Focus/Emphasis	Key classic text
Raja Yoga	The most classical form of yoga Dualist	*Yoga Sutra* (Patanjali, 2003)
Hatha Yoga	Transformation of and through the body	*Hatha Yoga Pradipika*
Bhakti Yoga	Devotion to a god or goddess Dualist	*Bhakti Sutra* (Narada) *Sri Bhasya* (Ramanuja)
Jnana Yoga	Development of transforming wisdom Nondualist	*Bhagavad-Gita*
Karma Yoga	Transformation of and through action	*Bhagavad-Gita*
Kundalini Yoga	Arousal of kundalini power	*Yoga Kundalini Upanishad*
Mantra Yoga	Transformation through chanting	*Mantra Yoga Samhita*

Inner development. While ascetic practices are thought to be helpful to spiritual development, the key lies in **yoga**, a general term that refers to a number of schools of inner spiritual practice (Feuerstein, 2001; see Table 3.1) These are an essential part of **sadhana** or the process of growth in the spiritual life that is facilitated through practices. It is somewhat artificial to label yoga as a "practice" rather than a "philosophy," since it is considered one of the six classic schools of Vedic philosophy along with Samkhya and Vedanta. The classic formulation of yoga ("joining"), also called **Raja Yoga**, can be found in the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali (2003), composed around 200 BCE. It is built on a dualistic metaphysic with theistic overtones. Patanjali saw an essential split between Nature or matter (**prakrti**) and Spirit (**purusha**). This separation results in **duhkha** or suffering and is made worse by **klesas** or problematic patterns of thinking (Feuerstein, 1989, pp. 59–65) such as misperceptions (*avidya*), misidentifications (*asmita*), excessive desire (*raga*), avoidance (*dvesa*) and insecurity (*abhinivesa*). The basic idea of yoga is that it is possible for us to achieve contact or unity with the underlying reality of the universe. This experience of unity is **samadhi**, a blissful state of consciousness in which the distinction between self and other dissolves. This is the goal of all the various yoga pathways. While study and other religious practices are helpful, there is no substitute for this personal experience in the process of spiritual growth (Sankaracarya, 1975, p. 41).

Patanjali's raja yoga includes eight "branches" that are a sequenced set of techniques for achieving samadhi and allowing the individual to assimilate with their true self (Feuerstein, 1989; cf. Shah-Kazemi, 2006, p. 24):

1. *Yana*: abstinence from ethically objectionable behaviors like greed; negative thoughts should be opposed by positive ones.
2. *Niyama*: observance of various practices like worship and study; together with yana, this results in purification and the ability to achieve **ekagrata** or "one-pointed" concentration. **Bhakti yoga** emphasizes the practice of worship and devotion.
3. *Asana*: steady, comfortable bodily postures that help to still the mind.
4. *Pranayama*: breath control, which involves a slow steady breathing, sometimes with retention, that also helps calm the mind; counting is sometimes used as an aid to control.

5. *Pratyahara*: sense withdrawal, which allows one to begin experiencing the pure mind that lies within.
6. *Dharana*: concentration, the "binding of the mind to one place, object or idea" (Feuerstein, 1989, p. 95); the practice of this along with the next two stages is referred to as *samyama.*
7. *Dhyana*: meditation, a progressive focusing of attention that results from the practice of dharana.
8. *Samadhi*: contemplation, "when there is the shining of the object alone, as if devoid of form" (Feuerstein, 1989, p. 99), the distinction between subject and object disappears, and knowledge is gained as well as special psychic powers or *siddhis.*

Yoga can affect the individual at several levels. In Hindu thought, people are believed to have several "bodies" including our physical body and a set of **subtle bodies** that support mental processes and consciousness. Some forms of Yoga such as **Hatha Yoga** devote more concern to the physical body, preparing and strengthening it for the experience of samadhi through the use of special asanas, and purifying the body through diet or other means. In a number of classical works such as the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, a goal is also to awaken energy that resides at the base of the spine using additional techniques of pranayama and samyama drawn from Raja Yoga. This **kundalini** energy, which is associated with the goddess Shakti, then travels along a channel through a series of subtle body centers or **chakras**, eventually reaching the top of the head where it is united with Shiva and triggers the experience of samadhi. Yoga practice designed to arouse this energy is sometimes referred to as *kundalini yoga.*

Some schools of Yoga, especially Hatha Yoga, have been strongly influenced by *tantric* writings and practices. The term **tantra** is used in a couple of different ways. In one meaning, tantra is a kind of scripture that was secretly revealed and then hidden, as opposed to **sutras** or scriptures that contain teaching given openly. However, the more important use of the term tantra is to describe a group of intense practices designed to tap powerful sources of psychic or spiritual energy and provide a rapid path to enlightenment, allowing one to achieve release from samsara in a single lifetime. Because of this power, tantric practices have traditionally been treated as **esoteric**, reserved to a select group of followers who pass through an initiation ceremony and take a pledge of secrecy (Powers, 1995, pp. 219–282). Of course in modern times this prohibition has broken down to some extent, and web pages, DVDs, and books purporting to reveal the secrets of tantra abound (Flood, 2004, p. 98). While tantric practices can be found in several Asian religions, its chief place in modern spiritual practice is in **Vajrayana** or Tibetan Buddhism.

Tantras typically emphasize the role of the physical body in spiritual experience. If nondualism is true, and there are no real divisions, then the visible world—including our physical self—must be part of ultimate reality. This means that it should be possible to experience samadhi in the phenomenal world through the transformation of the body, integrating it with higher spiritual realities. In Hinduism, tantra developed primarily within Saivism and Saktism but also within

Vaisnavism. Theistic versions of tantra see the techniques as a way to achieve union with a god or goddess, thereby attaining divine status (e.g., becoming another Shiva as in Saiva Siddhanta tantrism), or being inhabited by the Divine during tantric rituals. In certain circumstances, this unity experience involves engaging in normally taboo practices like alcohol consumption and meat eating. Followers of kundalini and hatha yoga often use tantric practices, such as purification rituals, **mantras** (repeated words or phrases), **mudras** (hand gestures; in Hatha yoga, also various body postures) and **mandala** (circle) **drawings** that represent important spiritual realities (see Fig. 5.3). Other techniques used in tantra include sexual activity, which is thought to generate energy that can be channeled into arousing the kundalini and furthering spiritual growth (Powers, 1995). The combination of tantra and yoga has been of significant interest to psychologists, as in some of Carl Jung's work (see Section 5.2.3).

The development of yoga continues with the creation of new schools of thought. One of the most important modern systems is *Integral Yoga*, developed by the 20th-century Indian mystic Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950). Integral yoga attempts to combine the philosophy and techniques of various yoga schools with evolutionary ideas. It is especially important because Aurobindo has influenced a number of writers in the transpersonal psychology movement, such as Ken Wilber (see Section 7.5.1).

All major religious traditions believe that spiritual development must involve the practice of certain techniques and that this practical component cannot easily be learned without guidance from some person or persons with experience—just as it is much easier to learn to drive a car if one has an experienced driver to teach you! Hinduism places considerable emphasis on this, holding that knowledge and practice can only be learned from an experienced teacher or **guru** who has achieved high levels of proficiency and spiritual growth. The guru becomes the focus of obedience and devotion for the postulant (see Section 14.1.2). Gurus who found religious movements are especially revered and might be thought of as avatars of a particular god or goddess. This kind of devotional orientation can be seen as a natural human characteristic or as something leading to psychopathology (Kalam, 1990).

3.2 Buddhism

Buddhism was founded in the mid 1st millennium BCE by Shakyamuni Gautama, the son of royalty in the North Indian kingdom of Maghda (Figure 3.2). Through a series of events, Gautama became acquainted with the suffering and transience of the world and became dissatisfied with his protected life. Leaving home he studied with some religious teachers and practiced extreme asceticism, none of which solved his problem. Finally, he relaxed some of his more extreme practices and focused more on meditation, seeking a middle path to freedom between an undisciplined life of pleasure and severe ascetic practice. While sitting under a bodhi true he had an experience of seeing the nature of reality and became an "enlightened one" or **Buddha**. He soon began teaching groups of disciples, and by the time of

Fig. 3.2 *Burning incense, Buddhist temple, China.* Psychological studies of Buddhism have focused on its intellectual views and individual meditation practices, but the practice of Buddhism in many parts of the world involve devotional and communal activities as well. Photo by the author

his death a large community had sprung up around him. This continuing community or **sangha** forms one of the three bases or "jewels" of Buddhism, along with the Buddha himself and the teachings of Buddhism or **dharma** (Harvey, 1990).

3.2.1 Early Buddhism and Basic Teachings

Early in Buddhist history there were many stories, writings and oral traditions about the Buddha and his teachings. Eventually several councils met and defined what is known as the **Pali Canon** of writings attributed to the Buddha and his immediate circle. These texts fall in three main groups of *Pitakas* ("baskets") and are thus known as the *Tripitaka*. They were written in the Pali language, a variant of Sanskrit that uses words like "sutta" instead of "sutra," "jhana" instead of "dhyana," and "dhamma" instead of "dharma." Writings in the original two baskets are somewhat unsystematic in their presentation of material, but later followers developed a more systematic philosophy that forms the third basket, the **Abidhamma**. Buddhism based strictly on the Pali canon and practices associated with it is known as **Theravada Buddhism**, which today is found in Sri Lanka and much of Southeast Asia. Theravada teachings and practice are the basis for much of the contemporary dialogue between psychology and Buddhism.

At the center of all schools of Buddhist philosophy are the **Four Noble Truths**, which by tradition are thought to have been given by the Buddha in his first sermon after enlightenment. These are given in the *Mahasatipatthana Sutta* from the *Digha Nikaya* (Walshe, 1995, pp. 344–350) as follows:

1. Suffering pervades life and is related to five "graspings" or kinds of mental activity: form, feeling, perception, mental formation, and consciousness. Buddhists generally hold that because these aspects of experience vary according to our psychological state, they are constructions that are "empty" and have no real ontological reality.

2. The origin of suffering is attachments or "cravings" which are based on mental activity and keep the person in the cycle of samsara. These attachments include problematic ways of thinking such as the graspings. An especially harmful habit is the making of illusory discriminations and creating dualities that can lead to the idea that we exist as a permanent, independent self. Buddhism thus rejects the concept of an immortal soul and finds even the idea of it problematic.
3. Enlightenment and the cessation of suffering can be found through detachment from the world, including our discriminatory or dualistic thinking and our belief in an independent, existing self. This leads to **nirvana**, a state in which suffering is left behind.
4. The practices necessary for the cessation of suffering are contained in the **Eightfold Path**, which includes knowledge to be learned (right view), a series of ethical prescriptions (right thought, right speech, right action and right livelihood), and practices for meditation and mental control (right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration). At the end of this process, one could become an **arhat**, or holy and enlightened being and eventually achieve final nirvana.

It is important to note several things here. First, a basic assumption of the Four Noble Truths is that enlightenment is in a sense the natural state of humanity and that all that needs to be done is the clear away the impediments of ignorance (Nanamoli & Bodhi, 2001, pp. 353, 358). Sometimes writers use the metaphor of a mirror with dust upon it—all that needs to be done is to clear away the dust for the mirror to reach its perfect condition. Second, as in Hinduism, the Buddhist path involves an entire makeover of the individual, including lifestyle, ethical practices, beliefs, and meditation. Early Buddhist scriptures like the *Dhammapada* (Kaviratna, 1980) strongly emphasize the ethical nature of spiritual seeking. In some branches of Buddhism, these activities are carried out in religious communities or temple settings, while in other places they are done mostly in the home (Musick, Traphagan, Koenig, & Larson, 2000). Third, the process of the Eightfold Path happens without reference to a god—Buddhism is in principle nontheistic, although many schools of Buddhism retain a strong element of devotion to spiritual beings. Fourth, Buddhism focuses on the empirical experience of reality and tries to avoid metaphysical speculation about its actual nature. For instance, Buddhist rejection of dualism simply says that ultimately reality seems nondualistic, and it produces less suffering to think of it that way, not that everything actually is one.

3.2.2 Early Meditative Practices

While there is a common core of Buddhist belief, there are different schools of thought and types of practice within Buddhism, each of which offers a somewhat unique perspective (Kawamura, 1995; Harvey, 1990). Early Buddhism had two types of meditative practices: **calm meditation** (*samathayana*) and opening or **pure insight meditation** (*suddhavipassanaayana*). These are outlined in *Tripitaka* texts and in the *Visuddhamagga*, the classic Theravada meditation manual, and are

often confused in psychological treatments of meditation. Calm meditation practices begin with focusing on one's breath, regulating or "counting" it and becoming aware of its movement. As the individual becomes more proficient, **mindfulness** (*sati*) emerges, a state of nonjudgmental awareness of reality involving changes in both attention and comprehension (Wiseman, 2007). At this point one encounters the five hindrances: sensual desire, ill-will (aversion to the task), sloth and torpor, worry or doubt, and fear of commitment. As these are overcome one enters **jhanas**, states of consciousness where one experiences peace and "one-pointed" concentration. Eventually one enters a realm of pure form and then formlessness where the distinction between subject and object disappear. This distinction between concentrative and opening forms of meditation can also be found in Islam (e.g., al-'Arabi, 1980, pp. 156–158). Some authors argue that the emphasis on mindfulness in Buddhist meditation makes it different from yoga and other types of meditation that emphasize concentration. However, concentration is a necessary prerequisite to the practice of mindfulness meditation, so it is unwise to draw too strict a division between the practices.

Mindfulness practices must, in later stages, be combined with insight or **vipassana** to achieve progress toward nirvana. Insight involves gaining knowledge about certain psychological and metaphysical truths that will lead us away from suffering and toward enlightenment. Traditionally this type of meditation begins with the four foundations of mindfulness as found in the *Mahasatipatthana Sutta*: "contemplating body as body … feelings as feelings … mind as mind … and mind-objects as mind-objects" (Walshe, 1995, p. 335), becoming aware of their impermanence and emptiness. The experience of emptiness shows that certain things such as our mental life are ultimately not where enlightenment is to be found (Gunn, 2000, p. 128). This allows us to become detached from them. Eventually one moves into a condition of detached abiding and achieves arhatship (see Section 13.5.1).

3.2.3 Mahayana Traditions and the Spread of Buddhism

The Buddhist tradition as developed in Theravada Buddhism implies a personal motivation for pursuing the Buddhist path—escape from suffering, becoming an arhat and achieving final nirvana. Later schools of thought that were part of the **Mahayana** or "Great Vehicle" Buddhist movement challenged the supremacy of this motive. In the Mahayana tradition, one pursues the spiritual path in order to help others achieve Buddhahood. While the Mahayana tradition has many points of agreement with Theravada (Wiseman, 2007), a key difference lies in their vision of ideal spiritual development. While in Theravada the goal is to become an enlightened arhat, in Mahayana the ideal is to become an enlightened being called a **Bodhisattva**, who turns aside from the quest for final nirvana and works to help others along the path. Mahayana Buddhism began in India as early as 200 CE, developing a "perfect wisdom" literature and culminating in the work of Nagarjuna (2nd–3rd century CE), whose philosophy of **Madhyamika** tried to provide a synthesis of Buddhist thought that avoided the extremes of

nihilism and asceticism which were opposed by the Buddha. Nagarjuna's philosophy and Mahayana ideas are formative for a number of schools of Buddhism including Vajrayana or Tibetan Buddhism and Chan or Zen Buddhism (see Table 3.2).

Mahayana Buddhist metaphysics is based on the **doctrine of dependent origin**, which in brief states that all things are the product of causes and are in turn causes for other things. In the Buddhist context, this implies that nothing has any substantial or continuing existence, it is simply part of a chain of causes that reaches back into the past and forward into the future. Mahayana Buddhists thus believe that apparently stable things like the self are **empty**, that is, their apparent continuity is an illusion because they are constantly in flux. The distinctions that we make between things are also illusory, as everything is part of the great chain of interlocking causal processes. These ideas align Mahayana Buddhism firmly with the doctrine of nondualism, a position that is also sometimes taken by thinkers in other religious traditions

Table 3.2 Spirituality in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition

Period	Beg. Date	Schools	Founders	Key texts (Translation)
Indian	200	Early Wisdom thought		*Prajna-Paramita-Sutras, Heart* and *Diamond Sutras* (Conze, 1975, 2001)
		Madhyamika "Middle Way"	Nagarjuna	*Mulamadhyamak-Karika* (Nagarjuna, 1995)
	400	Yogacara "Mind-only"	Asanga	*Lankavatara Sutra* (Suzuki, 1999)
Chinese	6th cent.	T'ien-t'ai	Chih-i	*Lotus Sutra* (Watson, 1993)
		Hwa-yen	Tu-shun	*Avatamsaka Sutra* (Cleary, 1993)
		Pure Land	Various	Pure Land Sutras (Inagaki, 1995)
		Early Chan	Bodhidharma	*Zen Teachings, Platform Sutra of Hui-neng* (Bodhidharma, 1987, Price & Wong, 1990)
	12th–13th cent.	Classical Chan	Various	*Wumenguan* ("Gateless Gate") (Cleary, 1996)
Japanese	12th cent.	Jodo, Shin (Pure Land)	Honen, Shinran	*Senchakushu* (Honen, 1998)
		Zen: Soto	Dogen	*Shobogenzo* (e.g., Tanahashi, 1985)
		Zen: Rinzai	Eisai	*Blue Cliff Record, Transmission of the Lamp* (Cleary, 2005; Keizan, 2002)
Tibetan	8th cent.	Vajrayana (Tantric)	Various	Various

(e.g., Rumi, 2004, p. 190). However, some of these other nondualists such as the Hindu philosopher Sankara would reject the traditional Buddhist idea that things do not have a continuing existence (Leggett, 1981, pp. 389–392).

Much of the development of Mahayana Buddhism took place in China and Japan, where it become the dominant form of Buddhism. Buddhism entered China about 50 CE and was well established there by the 3rd century CE. It was often seen as a "foreign" religion and was forced to come to terms with indigenous Chinese religious beliefs. Particularly important was the influence of Taoism, which had developed a sophisticated cosmology and anthropology in the *I Ching*, and the later philosophical work of Laozi (e.g., the *Tao Te Ching*) and Zhuangzi. A basic belief in Taoism is the cyclic nature of the world, which is governed by the opposing forces of yin (earth) and yang (heaven). The sage is the person who is one with this essential principle of the Tao and allows all of their actions to be spontaneously guided by it (see Box 3.1).

Box 3.1 The Story of Wen Hui's Butcher

The *Book of Chuang Tzu* is one of the most famous works in Chinese philosophy and a primary text for philosophical Taoism. The text is traditionally thought to be written in the 4th century BCE by Zhuangzi and is a compilation of teaching stories and commentary. Perhaps the most famous story in the book is that of Wen Hui's butcher:

Cook Ting was butchering an ox for Lord Wen Hui. Every movement of his hand, every shrug of his shoulder, every step of his feet, every thrust of his knee, every sound of the sundering flesh and the swoosh of the descending knife, were all in perfect accord, like the Mulberry Grove Dance or the rhythm of the Ching-shou.

"Ah, how excellent!" said Lord Wen Hui. "How has your skill become so superb?"

Cook Ting put down his knife and said, "What your servant loves best is the Tao, which is better than any art. When I started to cut up oxen, what I saw was just a complete ox. After three years, I had learnt not to see the ox as a whole. Now I practice with my mind, not with my eyes. I ignore my sense and follow my spirit. I see the natural lines and my knife slides through the great hollows, follows the great cavities, using that which is already there to my advantage. Thus, I miss the great sinews and even more so, the great bones. A good cook changes his knife annually, because he slices. Now this knife of mine I have been using for nineteen years, and it has cut thousands of oxen. However, its blade is as sharp as if it had just been sharpened …."

"Splendid!" said Lord Wen Hui. "I have heard what cook Ting has to say and from his words I have learned how to live life fully" (Zhuangzi, 1996, pp. 22–23).

As in Hinduism, devotion plays a major part in the lives of many Buddhists. Despite the Buddhist views of emptiness and nonduality, various Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have become a focus for meditation and devotion, including *Avalokitesvara*, the Bodhisattva of compassion and *Amitabha Buddha*, who rules over the Pure Land. Buddhist practice built around devotion to the Amitabha Buddha is known as **Pure Land Buddhism**. It remains the most popular form of Buddhism in modern China and Japan, forming a kind of popular or **folk religion** when combined with different indigenous cultural traditions and beliefs (Vergote, 1998, p. 207). Devotees of Pure Land Buddhism will read and recite sections of the three Pure Land sutras (Inagaki, 1995), and stress is often put on reciting the name of the Amitabha Buddha, with the belief that this will gain the postulant merit and allow them to be reborn into the Pure Land (Unno, 2002). Western views and interpretations of Buddhism influenced by modernist thought have often tried to "purify" Buddhism of these devotional qualities, but they are an essential part of most traditional and contemporary Buddhist paths (Eckel, 2000).

Buddhism has been a significant force in Tibet since the 7th century. The Vajrayana version of Buddhism that dominates there is highly visible in the West due to Tenzin Gyatso, the Dalai Lama, who has spoken widely and written a number of popular books on Buddhism. Tibetan branches of Buddhism are heavily influenced by tantric practice, but retain a basic Mahayana orientation; well known in the West is the Tibetan belief in reincarnation and the *bardo* state, an interim period between death and rebirth. *The Tibetan Book of the Living and the Dead* describes the bardo and was one of the first Tibetan Buddhist works to be translated into English. It caught the attention of Carl Jung, who wrote a preface for the book.

3.2.4 Chan/Zen Buddhism

One of the most important schools of Buddhism within the Mahayana family is Chan or Zen Buddhism (Dumoulin, 1990, 2005). Tradition has it that Chan was founded by the Indian monk Bodhidharma, who went to China from India in late 5th century CE, staying briefly in the southern part of the country before moving to North China where he taught for over thirty years (Suzuki, 1970). A number of works are attributed to him, although authorship is controversial (McRae, 1986; Pine, 1987). However, Chan actually traces its origins back to an encounter between the Buddha and Kashyapa, one of his followers:

> In ancient times, at the assembly on Spiritual Mountain, Buddha picked up a flower and showed it to the crowd. Everyone was silent, except for the saint Kashyapa, who broke out in a smile. Buddha said, "I have the treasury of the eye of truth, the ineffable mind of nirvana, the most subtle of teachings on the formlessness of the form of reality. It is not defined in words, but is specially transmitted outside of doctrine. I entrust it to Kashyapa the Elder" (Cleary, 1996, p. 33).

This story illustrates several key features of Chan thought. First, teaching and learning happen on an individual basis, with wisdom passed down directly

from master to student. Second, learning is experiential—it cannot be gained simply by study of texts and memorization of information. There must be an inner experience of enlightenment. Third, the truth to be gained through Chan is **ineffable**, not something that can be expressed in words. All of these ideas are certainly present in other forms of Buddhism, but they are especially emphasized in Chan.

A key issue that caused discussion and sometimes division in Chan Buddhism was over the nature of enlightenment. Was enlightenment a **sudden** experience that might come unexpectedly and perhaps involve a dramatic change, or was it a **gradual** process involving a slowly developing sense of awareness of one's true nature? Some writers tended toward one view or the other, while other thinkers like Nagarjuna of the Madhyamika school and Chih-i (539–597), founder of Tientai Buddhism, tried to strike a middle ground between the two approaches. This conflict was especially pronounced in Chinese Buddhism because it recapitulated the long-standing tension between Taoism, which emphasized more sudden religious experience, and Confucianism that emphasized more gradual training in morality (Gomez, 1987; Donner, 1987). This sudden vs. gradual issue is a fundamental one in philosophical/theological and psychological understandings of spiritual development (see e.g., Sections 4.5, 7.1).

Chan developed for many centuries in China, where it became the dominant form of Buddhism for a time and produced much of the classical literature still used today. It has continued to flourish in Japan, where it is known as **Zen Buddhism**, and it has also exercised considerable influence on Buddhism in Korea and Vietnam. The Buddhist monk Eisai brought Chan to Japan in the 12th century CE and founded the Rinzai school of Zen. This is perhaps the best-known form of Zen in the West due to the work of D. T. Suzuki (1870–1966), a member of the school who wrote extensively in English and corresponded with a number of famous psychologists and Christian religious figures like Carl Jung and Thomas Merton. The other main school of Zen in Japan is the Soto school, founded by Dogen (1200–1253). Deeply influenced by early experiences of emptiness such as the death of his mother (Gunn, 2000, p. 36), he taught extensively and produced the *Shobogenzo*, which is thought to be one of the greatest works of Japanese philosophy. The two schools of Japanese Buddhism tend to be divided on the sudden vs. gradual issue, with the Rinzai school emphasizing sudden and the Soto school gradual achievement of enlightenment (see Section 4.6.1).

Since Zen is experiential, an understanding of its practices is critical to an understanding of Zen. At the heart of Zen practice is the mindfulness practice of sitting meditation known as **zazen** or *shikantaza*. It involves "a sitting posture, control of breathing and a mental attitude of sitting in which extraneous thoughts are eliminated from the mind, allowing us to see our original nature" (Omori, 1996). Zazen stresses the need to eliminate effort to control mental processes and achieve a particular result, deepening the experience of emptiness (Gunn, 2000, pp. 63–64). This is typically combined with other meditative practices like *kinbin* (walking meditation), as well as the study of enigmatic teaching stories or sayings known as **koans**. Elimination of thought leads to a state of **samadhi** or deep meditation,

which may be helpful in opening the individual to an experience of **satori**, a glimpse at reality and our true self as part of a unified world. Satori is thus an experience in which one gains **prajna**, or transcendental wisdom. This experience of a unitive state can also be found in Christian thought, such as in the writings of Meister Eckhart (McGinn, 2001).

Various forms of Buddhism differ in the emphasis they place on doctrinal beliefs versus practice. Especially in Western countries, Buddhism is strongly associated with practice and many beliefs are free to vary so that it is common for individuals to retain original Christian identification or beliefs while practicing Buddhist meditation (Scotton, 1998; Marek, 1988).
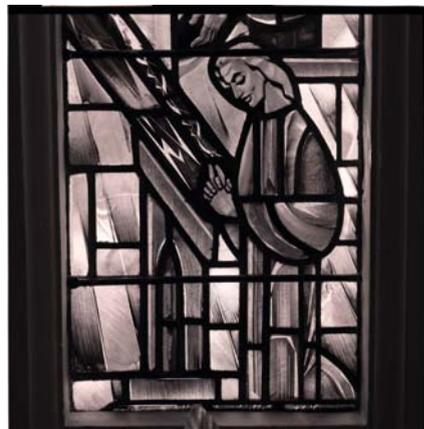
3.3 Christianity

Like Hinduism and Buddhism, Christianity is a richly diverse tradition that has a history of productive dialogue with psychology (for an overview of Christian history see Latourette, 1975a,b). A brief look at its history, beliefs, and practices will help us understand the dialogue (Figure 3.3).

3.3.1 History and Beliefs

Christianity arose as a movement within Judaism during the first century CE with the life and ministry of Jesus. After his death, the movement spread amongst both Jewish and Gentile (non-Jewish) groups. Towns and cities became headquarters for Christian communities presided over by a leader or *bishop* and a group of elders. Thus, from early times, Christianity has emphasized the importance of community in religious life.

Fig. 3.3 *Stained glass window of man praying, Los Angeles.* In Christianity, one goal of churches and religious communities is to provide support and inspiration for individual spiritual practices like prayer. Visual art like this can serve as a means of encouragement. Photo by the author

While Christianity is a richly diverse religious tradition like Hinduism and Buddhism, it tends to have stronger forms of internal organization and places more emphasis on agreements in belief as well as practice. As a result, Christianity has more of a central core of beliefs that are widely accepted in official Christian circles, although there are also many areas of disagreement. These common beliefs would include

- The existence of a transcendent, personal God who created the universe, loves, and cares for it
- Humanity was created in the image of God and thus has a special, unique status in the created order
- Although we are created in the image of God, we are sinful and stand in need of a redemption that we are unable to achieve on our own—a key difference between Christianity and Hinduism or Buddhism
- The presence of both God and man in Jesus, known as Christ, who sacrificed himself to redeem humanity and demonstrated this by rising from the dead. This presence of God in the flesh is referred to as the **incarnation** (Athanasius, 1994b). This gift or **grace** when accepted provides the core of a solution to the problems of sin, guilt, and separation from God (McMinn, Ruiz, Marx, Wright, & Gilbert, 2006)
- The continuing presence in the world of God in the person of the Holy Spirit, who works to further God's purpose for the redemption of all creation
- The possibility of eternal life so that our purpose is not limited to our immediate earthly existence
- The possession of sacred writings in the Bible, which are of special significance for the community.

Systematic works in Christian theology also agree on the types of subjects that are of interest, including the following:

- The nature of truth and revelation
- The nature of God and the Trinity
- The nature and purpose of creation
- *Christology*, the nature of the person and work of Christ
- *Pneumatology*, the person and work of the Holy Spirit
- *Ecclesiology*, the nature and work of the Church, including sacraments
- *Eschatology*, the final purpose of history and the end of a linear time process when God's kingdom will be established on the earth
- Practical applications of theology, such as in ethics

Some of these topics are of great importance to psychology. Writings about creation are of interest because they typically discuss basic human nature and the origins of suffering, while works on ecclesiology and ethics treat the fundamentals of communities and relationships. Theological writings produced in the last century are especially relevant for the psychology and religion dialogue, as theologians became increasingly sophisticated in their knowledge of psychology and made use of scientific theory and research in their work.

3.3.1.1 Trinitarian Thought and the Relational God

Modern Christian theology has tended to emphasize the relational character of God through a renewed emphasis on the ancient doctrine of the Trinity (Gunton, 1991, 1993; Grenz, 2001). Briefly, this doctrine is built on the idea that God contains both unity and diversity, relationality, and personhood. God is thought to consist of three Persons, the Father who creates, the Son who redeems and the Spirit who sustains. Each of these persons is unique, but they are also in some way One and their work is harmonious. The idea of God as distinct persons yet One is a strong statement that God has a relational character (Zizioulas, 1985, p. 84; Fiddes, 2002). Trinitarian language of Father and Son emphasizes this fact; a father cannot exist without a son (and son without father) because of the relationality inherent in the terms (Athanasius, 1994a; Gregory, 1994). Trinitarian theologies seek ways to express this combination of essential relationality or unity and unique personhood.

Different authors use different languages to describe the deep relationality present in the Trinity such as *constant presence* (Irenaeus, 2001), *mutual indwelling* (Gregory, 1994; Kelly, 1978, pp. 364–365; Torrance, 1994, pp. 10–14; Balswick, King, & Reimer, 2005), a constant *generativity* or mutual creativity (Origen, 1994; Pannenberg, 1988, p. 268), and an eternal *loving communion* (Augustine, 1956; Kelly, 1978, pp. 274–275) or characters in a narrative that has *dramatic coherence* (Jenson, 1997, pp. 64, 75). The relationship does not submerge the identities of the persons but acts to support and distinguish them, transforming each other without making them alike (Pannenberg, 1988, pp. 303–319; Jenson, 1997, pp. 149, 156).

Christian theology maintains a strong commitment to the idea that the Trinity is active in the world. While most theologians would say that we cannot ever directly know the essence of the persons and their relations, we can know them through their activity. This has led many writers to distinguish between the essence of God or **immanent Trinity** and God as acting in the world or **economic Trinity**. They point out that we can know the latter but not the former, although both are relational (Peters, 1996, p. 263). Some theologians deemphasize the difference between God's essence or immanent Trinity and work or economic Trinity (e.g., Rahner, 1974, pp. 22–23; Reid, 1997, pp. 55–66), while others tend to emphasize the differences (e.g., Irenaeus, 2001; Origen, 1994; Lossky, 1998, pp. 23–43, 67–90).

The active and relational nature of God has a couple of important implications for Christian theology. First, some theologians such as Robert Jensen (1997) have argued that since God is relational and active in the world through relating to other persons, both the essence and activity of God have an ethical character. Since the Divine reveals itself in action, we know something about this ethical nature, but because God is free and hidden, we will never know the entirety of God's moral intentions and purposes. We may understand them in retrospect but cannot fully predict them in advance. Second, since we learn about God through action and activity in the world, our knowledge of God is relational. The Trinity reveals itself freely through action, and through this gift of knowledge further establishes a relationship with us (Barth, 1932, pp. 362–381). So it is not just we who approach God, but God also approaches us. As action, this knowledge is not propositional but is *historical*,

occurring as unique events at particular places and times. It has a narrative character (cf. Section 6.3.3). We discover the immanent Trinity through the economic Trinity, and while this knowledge does not eliminate the essential mystery of the Trinity, we can learn about and respond to the Divine.

There are fascinating parallels between Trinitarian relationality and the ideas of many modern scholars and theologians about human relationships and personhood (Ware, 1986a). For instance, the theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg (1985, p. 850) defines the human person as an individual capable of self-transcendence through his or her presence with others. The Christian philosopher Charles Taylor (1989, pp. 159–162) argues that we must reject a view of the human person as isolated but that people have a kind of interpenetration or mutual indwelling with each other in which personhood and relationality depend upon each other. Our uniqueness is not simply a personal characteristic but is due to the fact that we are at the center of a unique set of relationships with other persons and communities (Grenz, 2001, p. 303). There are also a number of other interesting implications:

1. While we do not know others directly in their essence (in part due to their freedom) we can gain partial knowledge of them through action. This is knowledge that ultimately is revealed in our relationship with them. Even individuals with Alzheimer's disease act upon others and call forth action so that they remain persons despite the loss of cognitive and emotional abilities.
2. People can neither be reduced to isolated individuals (as in individualism) nor can they be understood solely on the basis of their membership in a collective group or their relations with others. A strictly individual perspective is isolating, while viewing people only from a collective perspective risks intolerance and a lack of appreciation for distinctive personhood (see Section 12.3.1).
3. Our connectedness to others enhances our uniqueness. Relationships occur in specific historical situations and are unique and non-repeatable. They are also not reversible: a son and father cannot trade places, nor can two friends exchange places, for they have different points of origin and a different nexus of relationships. This perspective is quite different from that of psychologists like Piaget and to some extent Kohlberg, who pictured ideal relationships abstractly as completely reversible (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958, p. 272; Kohlberg, 1984, p. 256; see Section 7.4).
4. Ideal relationships involve a kind of interdependency with freedom that supports the other in their personhood, uniqueness and work. Thus freedom also carries with it obligation to fidelity which is unique to each person.
5. Since persons are ultimately unknowable in some respects and are constituted by relations, they cannot be completely described by rationalistic and propositional statements. Contrary to the positivist position, important knowledge about persons is of a practical or relational nature and relates to a certain nexus of persons and relations in a particular time and place in a practical situation, moral demand, and response. It is not entirely describable through thin, universal, and absolute descriptions but is known through concrete practical activity (cf. Sections 2.3, 6.3.4).

3.3.1.2 Diversity of Belief and Organization

Historically, Christianity consists of three main organized movements: Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism. During the first four centuries of the Christian movement, no large-scale divisions took place. However, beginning at least by the 5th century CE, the Western part of Christianity, headquartered in Rome, began to drift away from the Eastern part of the Church that was based in Byzantium (Constantinople, modern Istanbul) and other cities in the Middle East. This division finally resulted in a formal rupture between the two groups in the 14th century over issues of Trinitarian theology and the authority of the Pope. Following the death of Mohammad in 632 CE many traditional Byzantine Christian areas were overrun by Moslem invaders, but Eastern Christianity continued to flourish in Greece, the Balkans and eventually Russia, forming the **Eastern Orthodox churches**. Western Christianity remained dominant throughout most of Western and Central Europe, where it divided into two groups—Catholic and Protestant. The **Catholic church** is headquartered in Rome and was the sole grouping of Western Christians until the European and English Reformations of the 16th century, when large groups of individuals broke away from the Catholic church over issues of church policy and doctrine, as well as papal leadership, marking the beginnings of various **Protestant churches**. The original Reformation churches (Lutheran, Calvinist/Reformed, and Anglican) became themselves the target of other dissenting and reform groups (Anabaptists, Methodists, Baptists, and Pietists), splintering the Protestant movement into a complicated diversity of groups.

Given the diversity of Christian groups, it is not surprising that there are differences and often conflicts over issues of belief (for an overview of issues in Western theology, see Bromiley, 1978; on Eastern theology see Lossky, 1998). Lindbeck (1984) divides these belief systems into three types. In traditional or **preliberal theology**, statements of belief are propositions that make truth claims, e.g., the existence of life after death. Beginning in the late 18th and early 19th century, an alternative **liberal theology** arose that saw most Christian beliefs as simply expressions of religious experience, feeling, and sentiment (e.g., Schleiermacher, 1999). More recently a third alternative known as **postliberal theology** has developed, which sees systems of doctrine as representing a kind of cultural and linguistic framework that undergirds the practices of a community, as well as how its members experience the world. Some Christian writers take these three approaches to theology as mutually exclusive and work within a single framework. Others work within two or more of the categories; for instance, when a writer argues that while religious beliefs reflect experience and cultural patterns, they also have truth value.

A number of specific issues are matters of debate within the spectrum of Christian belief. **Dualism** is an issue that has appeared in Christian thought, especially in two contexts. First is *good-evil dualism*. Since God is associated with the Good, is there an opposite but equal force for Evil that struggles with it? This type of dualism has largely been rejected in Christianity, which sees a good God as stronger than any evil. A typical view is that of Augustine, who saw evil as simply the absence of good. This position would later disturb the psychologist Carl Jung, who had a more dualistic view of good and evil. Second is *body-soul dualism*, which deals with the

issue of separation or unity between our physical and spiritual natures. Historically, dualistic views that separate body and soul have been popular in both Christian theology and Western philosophy, although more recent theology and religious practice has tended to reject this type of dualism.

A second key area of disagreement in Christian thought is that of **human freedom**. Many Christians believe in the absolute sovereignty and control of God, which if carried to an extreme conclusion means that the lives of individuals are completely governed or preplanned by God. This doctrine of determinism or **pre-destination** is opposed by the **Arminian** position, which holds that individuals have free will, a view that is assumed by both Buddhism and Hinduism despite the doctrine of karma. In the Christian tradition, freedom means that we have the ability to "commit ourselves to being the person we believe God intended us to be, and to commit ourselves to the path of life we believe God invites us" (Lonsdale, 2000, pp. 135–136). The issue of free will posed by naturalistic determinism and causal reductionism has also been a significant topic of discussion within psychology.

A third doctrinal problem in Christianity centers on the nature and authority of the Bible. Beginning in the 18th and 19th centuries, Christian scholars and other writers began to look more critically at the Biblical text from the basis of Enlightenment rationalism and scientific naturalism, questioning its accuracy and trying to "de-mythologize" the faith. Liberal theologians beginning with Schleiermacher began to build a new Christian theology oriented more toward personal experience and Enlightenment social concerns. This provoked a strong conservative intellectual and political response that resulted in two counter-movements within Protestantism—evangelicalism and fundamentalism. Both of these groups emphasized the accuracy, value, and centrality of the Biblical witness for issues of faith. However, there were also differences, as evangelicals were critical of fundamentalists for their perceived lack of attention to philosophical and social problems and their lack of emphasis on the unity of the Bible as a witness to God's action in the world (Miller, 2000). Dialogue between Christianity and psychology tends to look quite different depending on whether one approaches it from a liberal or conservative standpoint.

A final area of disagreement is over the role of tradition. Some groups find the maintenance of traditional beliefs and practices very important, while others stress innovation. However, even groups that are closely tied to tradition recognize that the Christian witness must adapt to changing times (von Balthasar, 1995, p. 12), and communities that are anti-traditional maintain the importance of many basic rituals and beliefs.

3.3.2 Christian Spirituality

In the Christian tradition, spirituality has a much more specific meaning than the general usage discussed in Chapter 1 (see Section 1.2). Christian spirituality is the experience and development of one's relationship with God. The goal of this development is thought of in various ways by different authors. In medieval Catholicism, it was thought to be a state of final beatitude, when the individual has been perfected

and has direct knowledge and experience of God (Thomas, 1998, I, q. 26, a. 1), "the intimate and joyful union of the souls of the blessed with God in glory" (Aumann, 1980, p. 42). In the Eastern Church, spirituality involves becoming "divinized" and experiencing participation in the inner life of the Trinity. For others, Christian spirituality is becoming like Christ, identifying with him in some way or conforming one's behavior to a Christian ideal with the help of a spiritually advanced elder. Since God is found both outside and inside us, this development was both an ascent to the God outside and a retreat to seek God within (von Balthasar, 1995, p. 167).

Histories of organized Christian spirituality in the post-Biblical period (e.g., McGinn, 1991, 1996, 1998, 2005; Mursell, 2001a,b) often trace its beginnings to St. Anthony and the Desert Fathers and Mothers, groups of individuals who went into the deserts of Egypt, Palestine, and Syria seeking solitude and God. Generally these seekers formed communities around a leader or teacher, which became the first Christian monastic communities of men and women. Along with traditional Christian worship, they participated in a set of intense spiritual practices revolving around prayer and ascetical techniques like fasting. These communities and their practices spread throughout the Eastern Church, where further development took place. John Cassian (c. 360–435) brought information on desert spirituality to Western Christianity, establishing monasteries in the south of France that would form the basis of spirituality in the medieval Catholic Church (see Table 3.3, Sections 12.2.3, 13.2).

There are two primary traditions or approaches in Christian mystical writings. In the **kataphatic** or positive theology approach, one tries to make positive statements about God, perhaps seeing the Divine as love or a sense of presence. This positive speech about God can take many forms (von Balthasar, 1995, pp. 22, 94; Turner, 2002). In the **apophatic** or **negative theology** school that first appeared in the 4th century work of Gregory of Nyssa, writers argue that because God is transcendent, we are ignorant about the Divine in fundamental ways, so the reality of God exceeds any positive statement we might make (Merton, 2008, pp. 75–76; Turner, 1995, pp. 19–20; Louth, 1996, p. 15). This can be due to (1) failures in language, (2) limitations of human thought, or (3) that unknowability is a basic ontological characteristic of God (Meredith, 1999, pp. 91–94). Earlier Christian writers such as Origen tended to attribute failures in understanding to limitations in the human mind, while later writers like Gregory Palamas saw them as an essential property of God (Thunberg, 1995, p. 407; Meyendorff, 1998b, p. 203). In this latter view, just as an attempt to describe what is special about a friend goes beyond any objective description of traits, any single definition of human person, of God, or of Trinitarian relationality, fails to encompass everything so that mystery is an essential characteristic and part of its perfection (Lossky, 1998, p. 121; Rahner, 1965, pp. 100–101; Williams, 2002). This kind of thinking is reflected in many Judaeo-Christian writings such as the Wisdom tradition in the Bible, as well as in aspects of Luther's theology (Fiddes, 2002; McGinn, 2002). It is also present in Islamic thought (e.g., Chittick, 1983, pp. 49, 234, 307). Some Christian authors (e.g., Eckhart, John of the Cross) represent this ignorance by using negative descriptive language, saying that God is *not* this or that, that the Divine is a kind of *darkness* beyond descriptive language or normal categories of thought (Shah-Kazemi, 2006, p. 9),

Table 3.3 Spirituality in the Orthodox and Catholic Traditions

Period	Date	Description	Key Authors and Works
Eastern Orthodox Tradition			
Desert Fathers	Late 3rd cent.	Writings about early seekers	Anthony, Evagrius and others *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (Ward, 1975)
Early Byzantine Fathers	4th–7th cent.	Developed systems and monastic rules	Basil (c. 330–379) *Monastic Rules* (Basil, 1999). John Climacus (c. 525–606) *Ladder of Divine Ascent* (Luibheid, 1982)
Greek Monastic	7th cent. on	Mt. Athos monastery communities	Gregory Palamas (c. 1296–1359) *The Triads* (Palamas, 1983) Nicodemos (1748–1809), *Philokalia* (Nikodimos & Makarios, 1979–95)
Diaspora	8th cent. on	Russian	Various, including *A Pilgrim's Tale*
Western Catholic Tradition			
Formative	500–600	Desert Fathers	John Cassian (c. 360– c. 435), *Conferences*
		Confessional	Augustine (354–430), *Confessions*
		Monastic	Benedict (c. 480– c. 547), *Rule of St. Benedict*
		Apophatic	Pseudo-Dionysius (c. 500), *Mystical Theology*
Medieval	1000–1400	Monastic	Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), *Sermons*
		Beguine and women writers	Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), *Scivias* Julian of Norwich (1343– c. 1413), *Showings*
		Apophatic	Meister Eckhart (c. 1260–1328), *Sermons* Unknown (c. 1370), *The Cloud of Unknowing*
Post-Reformation	1500 on	Carmelite	Teresa of Avila (1515–1582), *Interior Castle* John of the Cross (1542–1591), *Dark Night of the Soul*
		Ignatian	Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), *Spiritual Exercises*
Modern	1900 on	Post Vatican II writers	Thomas Merton (1915–1968), *New Seeds of Contemplation* Anthony de Mello (1931–1987), *Wellsprings*

while others go further and say that God in essence is utterly unknowable (e.g., Maximus Confessor) so that no language or categories are sufficient to describe the Divine (Turner, 1995, pp. 34–35, 195–204; Thunberg, 1995, p. 413). In either event, apophatic knowledge of God is something that cannot be gained through reason, only through experience (Louth, 1996, p. 147). Some writers (e.g., Carmelites like John of the Cross) consider the kataphatic and apophatic as separate stages with the apophatic usually coming as a later stage of growth that is marked by a move from complexity to increasing simplicity in views and experiences of God (Turner, 1995, p. 44). Other authors such as many medieval Catholic writers see individuals as inclined toward one or the other of these paths, so they are different styles within a tradition (Turner, 1995, p. 257). Other religious traditions like Buddhism also argue that crucial aspects of experience like emptiness are apophatic in nature (Gunn, 2000, p. 29).

Orthodox authors also describe a *mysticism of vision* that is spiritual and intuitive, without form or concept (Spidlik, 2005, pp. 242–244). Some writers describe this expansion of natural abilities as a vision of pure divine light, somewhat like a vision of the sun, where we see it but also see because of its light (Bartos, 1999, pp. 27–31). Palamas describes it as an intellectual and spiritual illumination that is visible only to those who have a purified heart, like the vision of light described in the transfiguration of Jesus. It enables a spiritual vision of the heart that can see divine things and know something of God (Palamas, 1983, pp. 33–34, 77–80; Louth, 1996, pp. 132–139). Two points are important here. First, such knowledge is limited. As Palamas points out, since God is transcendent and thus can never be fully experienced, it is not even possible to define "God." This takes us beyond the limits of Aristotelian logic (Meyendorff, 1998b, p. 131). Second, this knowledge comes through experience, which makes the distinction between theoretical and practical theology meaningless (Palamas, 1983, p. 79; Meyendorff, 1998b, pp. 200–228). Christian spirituality thus has both an intellectual and an affective character, with different writers sometimes emphasizing one or the other of these features of the mystical life, although ultimately agreeing that we need both (McGinn, 2001, pp. 37, 152).

The Protestant Reformation argued for a somewhat different view of Christian spirituality, rejecting the monastic ideal and its focus on human effort as a way to God. Groups of Protestants developed their own diverse but vibrant forms of spirituality (see Table 3.4). They retained the basic Christian spiritual practice of **prayer**, which is usually thought of as an active conversation between the believer and God, rather than simply an open or focused awareness of the Divine that is characteristic of **meditation**, although the division between these is sometimes hard to make in practice. Other practices and beliefs differ from group to group but often include ascetical techniques like fasting, periods of solitude, study of holy writings, and a simple lifestyle.

The difference between Protestant and non-Protestant understandings of spirituality can be thought of in terms of the sudden vs. gradual issue that we encountered in our examination of Zen Buddhism. Protestants see that the key event for the Christians comes in the acceptance of God's gift of love by faith, which results in **justification** and marks the sudden beginning of the individual's Christian life. When this event is

Table 3.4 **Key figures in spirituality from the Western Protestant tradition**

Period	Date	Description	Key authors and works
Reformers & Anabaptists	1500– 1600	Lutheran	M. Luther (1483–1546), *Freedom of a Christian*
		Calvinist	John Calvin (1509–1564), *On the Christian Life*
		Anabaptist	Menno Simons (1496–1561), *Writings*
Early English	1500– 1700	Literary	George Herbert (1593–1633), *The Temple*
		Theological	J. Taylor (1613–1667), *Holy Living and Dying*
English and Continental Dissenters	1600 on	Quakers	George Fox (1624–1691), *Journal*
		Puritans	John Owen (1616–1683), *The Mortification of Sin*
		Pietists	Philipp Spener (1635–1705), *Pia desideria*
		Baptists	John Bunyan (1628–1688), *Pilgrim's Progress*
Great Awakening	18th century	English and	John Wesley (1703–1791), *Journal*
		American revival	J. Edwards (1703–1758), *Religious Affections*
Later Anglicanç	20th century		C. S. Lewis (1898–1963), *Mere Christianity*
			Evelyn Underhill (1875–1941), *Mysticism*
Later American	20th century		ML King (1929–1968), *The Measure of a Man*
			Billy Graham (1918), *Just As I Am*
			Dallas Willard (1935), *The Divine Conspiracy*

accompanied by struggle and emotion, it is often referred to as a **conversion** event, a topic of vital interest to psychology of religion researchers (see Section 4.5). After conversion a person then begins to realize their new faith in everyday life through a process of **sanctification**. The emphasis here is on God's work rather than on human effort. Catholics and Orthodox Christians tend to think more in terms of gradual progression toward an ultimate goal. Either approach presupposes the desirability of religious or spiritual development (see e.g., Section 7.1, 7.2). Also in either approach, religious experience can be important. When this involves the direct experience of God, it is often referred to as **mysticism** (see Section 4.1.1).

Almost all religious practices in Christianity are either public rituals or things that can be done either in public or private. Worship services that combine discourse, music, and prayer are at the center of any Christian community. One especially important public ritual is performance of the **sacraments**. Various Christian groups define them differently, but all would agree that they are special acts related to the presence and work of God amongst the community and individual believers. In the Eastern and Western Christian traditions, sacramental acts play a central role in the worship experience, while in Protestantism they tend to have a more peripheral, symbolic role. The two primary Christian sacraments are the Eucharist, which is a reenactment of Jesus' final supper with his disciples, and Baptism, which is given when a person joins the Christian faith.

Public practices tend to take place in spaces designated as holy or sacred, so in artificially constructed spaces it has been important to use art, architecture, and music to create a suitable environment for ritual and prayer. The visual and spatial aspects of religious practice have been little studied in psychology but are important

for most religious traditions and have been generating much scholarly interest in other disciplines (e.g., Morgan, 1998).

3.4 Conclusion

Key issue: *Any detailed and accurate understanding of world religions will find similarities and differences between traditions and within them as well.*

Our brief review of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity demonstrates a number of important facts about religious traditions. First, there is considerable diversity within individual religions. Statements like "Buddhists believe X" or "Christians believe Y" are risky and may misrepresent significant subgroups and ways of thinking within a tradition. Second, religion does not stand completely independent of culture. Great world religions that have spread into different parts of the world adapt to the indigenous intellectual and cultural landscape, as Buddhism did in its long dialogue with Taoist and Confucian thought. Third, religions are a comprehensive way of life that integrate a worldview and beliefs with religious practices. It is potentially problematic to assume that individual religious practices can be removed from their context. Finally, while religious traditions often overlap each other in terms of common concerns or beliefs, there are also substantial differences and areas of uniqueness (e.g., Barth, 1932, p. 359).

A true rather than a superficial pluralism acknowledges both similarities and differences between traditions, as well as the benefit of dialogue. It respects the fact that any system of comparison or coordination of thought between different religious systems has its problems and limitations (Smith, 1982). It does not absorb traditions into each other but is not exclusivist, saying other traditions have nothing to offer (Senne, 2002). So, for instance, while Buddhism at least in its Theravada variety cannot really be reconciled with Christianity, there are a number of points of useful dialogue (Smart, 1993). However as Paul Tillich argued, we must be open to the possibility that not all beliefs are equally adequate so that dialogue must also involve critique as well as appreciation (Mead, 1962).

Now that we have a basic working knowledge of several religious traditions, in the next several chapters, we will turn to psychology and see in more detail how various thinkers have approached the task of dialogue.