I am honored to add my tribute to the person I have often described as “the Jedi Master of happiness research.” Many people, including many contributors to this volume, have made signal contributions to the emerging scientific understanding of positive well-being. But more than anyone else it was Ed Diener whose work in the mid to late 1980s first caught my eye and inspired my effort to give the field away, through *The Pursuit of Happiness* (Myers, 1992) and subsequent articles, including essays we coauthored for *Scientific American*, *Psychological Science*, and the *Harvard Mental Health Letter*. For me, Ed Diener exemplifies psychological science at its rigorous yet humanly significant best (not to mention his also being such an articulate, committed, and compassionate human being). How fitting that his grateful admirers should honor him with this volume.

Although I have been mostly a cub reporter and publicist for the field, not a pioneering contributor, I have paid especially close attention to explorations of wealth and well-being, and to what I report on here: explorations of religion and well-being.

Let us first acknowledge what is self-evident: Mirth and misery, mischief and morality, cruelty and compassion are exhibited by people of all faiths as well as no faith. Thus theologian Langdon Gilkey (1966) could see the human religious dimension as “not only the ground of its only hope but the source of life’s deepest perversion.” Religion has been associated with ecstatic joy and with
what Richard Dawkins (2001) called the "insane courage" that enabled the horror of 9/11. No wonder Stephen Jay Gould (1999) could observe that much of his "fascination" with religion "lies in the stunning historical paradox that organized religion has fostered, throughout western history, both the most unspeakable horrors and the most heartrending examples of human goodness."

Let us acknowledge, second, that explorations of religion's associations with happiness, coping, health, character, and compassion, and with intolerance and aggression, have no bearing on the truth claims made by the various religions. Are spiritual people pursuing an illusion, perhaps a mental opiate, or are they apprehending a deep truth? What follows in this chapter will not answer that question. And for seekers and doubters it is truth that matters: If religious claims were known to be true, but were discomfiting, what honest person would want to disbelieve? If known to be untrue, though comforting, what honest person would want to believe?

Science can, however, help us assess the contrasting hypotheses—that religion breeds joy ("Joy is the serious business of heaven," offered C. S. Lewis in The Four Loves), and that religion is an "obsessional neurosis" (Freud, 1928/1964, p. 71) that breeds sexually repressed, guilt-laden unhappiness.

**Religion and Individual Well-Being**

In North America and Western Europe, where most of the pertinent research has been done, what are the associations of religiousness with individual and communal well-being, and with health?

**Happiness**

In survey after survey, actively religious people have reported markedly greater happiness and somewhat greater life satisfaction than their irreligious counterparts (Ciarrochi & Deneke, 2005; Francis & Kaldor, 2002; Francis & Katz, 2002; Hadaway, 1978; Pollner, 1989; Poloma & Pendleton, 1990; Willits & Crider, 1988; Witter, Stock, Okun, & Haring, 1985).

Some examples:

- The Gallup Organization's (1984) "Religion in America" surveys revealed that those highest in "spiritual commitment" (i.e., those who consistently agreed with statements such as "God loves me even though I may not always please him" and "My religious faith is the most important influence in my life") were twice as likely as those least spiritually committed to report being "very happy."
- National Opinion Research Center (NORC) surveys (National Opinion Research Center, 2006) reveal higher self-reported happiness among Americans who feel "extremely close to God" (40% "very happy") rather than "not very close" (21%) or "not close at all" (24%). (There are no marked differences by religion; about one in three Protestants, Catholics, and Jews has reported being very happy.)

- The NORC surveys also reveal a marked correlation between frequency of religious attendance and self-reported happiness, as shown in Figure 16.1. A comparable result was obtained by a new Pew (2006) study of happiness in the United States, with 43% of weekly or more attenders and 26% of seldom or never attenders reporting themselves "very happy."

- The Gallup Organization (Winseman, 2002) extended this association to life satisfaction with their finding that 55% of "engaged" congregational members reported being "completely satisfied with the conditions of my life," as did 25% of those "actively disengaged."

- A slew of studies in the 1980s focused on the association between religiousness and well-being among older adults (Hunsberger, 1985; Koenig, Kvale, & Ferrel, 1988; Levin & Markides, 1988; Markides, Levin, & Ray, 1987; Poloma & Pendleton, 1990; Stock, Okun, Haring, & Witter, 1983). In their meta-analysis, Okun and Stock (1987) found that the two best predictors of well-being among older persons were health and religiousness. Elderly people tend to be happier and more satisfied with life if religiously committed and engaged.

![Figure 16.1](image_url)

Coping with Loss

Other studies have explored the connection between religious faith and coping with crises. Compared to religiously inactive new widows, recently widowed women who worship regularly have reported more joy in their lives (Harvey, Barnes, & Greenwood, 1987; McGlshen & O'Bryant, 1988; Siegel & Kuykendall, 1990). Among mothers of developmentally challenged children, those with a deep religious faith are less vulnerable to depression (Friedrich, Cohen, & Wilt Berner, 1988). People of faith also tend to retain or recover greater happiness after suffering divorce, unemployment, serious illness, or bereavement (Ellison, 1991; McIntosh, Silver, & Wortman, 1993). Not surprisingly, then, a meta-analysis of more than 200 studies revealed that high religiousness predicts a mildly lower risk of depression, especially for those undergoing stress (Smith, McCullough, & Poll, 2003). Actively religious North Americans have also been much less likely than those irreligious to become delinquent, abuse drugs and alcohol, and commit suicide (Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993; Colasanto & Shriver, 1989).

Explaining the Religion–Happiness Correlation

An active religious faith hardly precludes stress or suffering (as the biblical story of Job reminds people of the Abrahamic faiths). Yet religiousness does correlate with expressed happiness, and it may help buffer stress. Seeking to explain the correlation, researchers have entertained several possibilities.

Social Support: “Where Two or Three Are Gathered”

If Martin Seligman (1988) was right that “rampant individualism” has contributed to today’s elevated depression rates, and if humans indeed have a fundamental “need to belong” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), then one factor is surely the social support provided by North America’s estimated 350,000 faith communities (Ellison, Gay, & Glass, 1989). People usually practice their religion communally, through “the fellowship of kindred spirits,” “the bearing of one another’s burdens,” “the ties of love that bind.” As John Winthrop (1630/1965, p. 92) explained to one of the first groups of Puritans before disembarking to their new world, “We must delight in each other, make others’ conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our community as members of the same body.” Pennsylvania’s communal old-order Amish are known not only for their agrarian, pacifistic culture, but also their low rates of major depression (Egeland & Hostetter, 1983; Egeland, Hostetter, & Eshelman, 1983).
Meaning and Purpose: "Something Worth Living and Dying For"

After controlling for the greater social activity and support experienced by actively religious folk, some correlation between religiousness and well-being remains (Ellison et al., 1989). The 19th-century Polish poet Cyprian Norwid (1850) offered a clue to another possible factor: "To be what is called happy, one should have 1) something to live on, 2) something to live for, 3) something to die for. The lack of one of these results in drama. The lack of two results in tragedy."

Studies confirm that a sense of life's meaning and purpose enhances well-being, and that many people find both through their religious faith (Paloutzian, 1981; Zika & Chamberlain, 1987). Seligman (1988) has argued that a loss of meaning underlies today's high depression rate, and that finding meaning requires

an attachment to something larger than the lonely self. To the extent that young people now find it hard to take seriously their relationship with God, to care about their relationship with the country or to be part of a large and abiding family, they will find it very difficult to find meaning in life. To put it another way, the self is a very poor site for finding meaning.

For Rabbi Harold Kushner (1987), religion satisfies "the most fundamental human need of all. That is the need to know that somehow we matter, that our lives mean something, count as something more than just a momentary blip in the universe." In the Nazi death camps Viktor Frankl (1962) similarly observed a lowered apathy and death rate among fellow inmates who retained a sense of meaning—a purpose for which to live, or even be willing to die for. Many of these, he reported, were devout Jews, who found in their faith the strength to live and to resist their oppressors.

Durable Self-Esteem: "Accepting One's Acceptance"

Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, and Vohs (2005) have persuasively argued that self-esteem is not an all-purpose armor that protects and sustains us. Moreover, when inflated self-images are punctured, people may respond with aggression. But self-esteem does predict happiness. Paul Tillich (1988) and other theologians have argued that the religious message that God loves you—just as you are—can form a psychological basis for a durable and nondefensive self-worth. No longer is there any need to define one's self-worth by achievements, material well-being, or social approval. To find self-acceptance, said Tillich, "Do not seek for anything; do not perform anything; do not intend anything. Simply accept the fact that you are accepted! . . . If that happens to us, we experience grace. After such an
experience we may not be better than before, and we may not believe more than before. But everything is transformed.”

People who have this idea of God’s “grace”—who see God as redemptively loving, accepting, and caring—not only enjoy greater self-esteem but also warmer marriages (Greeley, 1991). There is a seeming interplay between our God-concept and our self-concept.

Terror Management: An “Eternal Perspective”

Writing from a college whose symbol is the “Anchor of Hope,” I cannot resist noting what our late colleague C. R. Snyder so often reminded us: of the psychological significance of hope. “Hope is itself a species of happiness, and, perhaps, the chief happiness which this world affords,” wrote Samuel Johnson. Many religious worldviews not only propose answers to some of life’s deepest questions, they also encourage an ultimate hope, especially when confronting what Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski (1991) call “the terror resulting from our awareness of vulnerability and death.” Different faiths offer different paths, but most offer its adherents a sense that they, or something meaningful they are part of, will survive their death. Aware of the great enemies, suffering, and death, they offer a hope that in the end, the very end, “all shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well” (Julian of Norwich). And that hope may help people cope with whatever punctuates life between now and death.

In the best of circumstances it also may provide vision and courage for the present. If human life and identity are believed to have value that make them worth preserving, and if one foresees a utopian afterlife marked by peace, justice, and love, then one has a back-to-the-present vision for life on earth. Thus Martin Luther King, Jr. could declare “I have a dream” of a future reality without oppression and suffering. With a dream worth dying for and a hope that even death could not kill it, he declared that “If physical death is the price I must pay to free my white brothers and sisters from a permanent death of the spirit, then nothing can be more redemptive” (1964, p. 10). As Alves (1972, p. 195), put it, “Hope is hearing the melody of the future. Faith is to dance to it.”

Promoting Positive Virtues: Humility, Forgiveness, Gratitude, and Compassionate “Losing One’s Life” for Others

Fundamentalist views often feed ingroup bias and hostility toward infidels; the circle that defines “us” also defines “them.” Yet most religions also advocate many of the human virtues identified in Peterson and Seligman’s (2004) Character Strengths and Virtues and in Snyder and Lopez’s (2007) Handbook of Positive Psychology. And, note Peterson and Seligman, “religiousness, broadly speaking, also
has been empirically linked to a range of human virtues, including forgiveness, kindness, and compassion.”

_Humility_ is intrinsic to theism, which assumes that (1) there is a God, and (2) it’s not you or me. Humans, the theist assumes, are finite, fallible creatures—with dignity but not deity. Therein lies the religious foundation for open-minded skepticism of all human ideas, including one’s own untested assumptions, and for free-spirited scientific inquiry. “It’s all God’s truth,” so let’s have at it. “To be humble,” notes Emmons (1999), “is not to have a low opinion of oneself, it is to have an accurate opinion of oneself. It is the ability to keep one’s talents and accomplishments in perspective” and to understand one’s imperfections, free of both arrogance and self-deprecation. From such humility, adds Tangney (2002), comes an “openness to new ideas, contradictory information, and advice.” By contrast, adds Tangney, “researchers have shown that narcissistic individuals are sensitive to interpersonal slights, quick to anger, and less inclined to forgive.”

_Forgiveness_, or a concept close to it, is a shared feature of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, note Peterson and Seligman (2004). Psychological researchers engaged in the recent wave of forgiveness studies agree that forgiveness is not denying, minimizing, excusing, condoning, or forgetting. Rather, forgiveness cultivates positive, prosocial responses such as compassion, which supplant hurtful and bitter thoughts, motivations, emotions, and behaviors (McCullough & Witvliet, 2002). Although not always possible or wise—as in cases of abuse or neglect—forgiveness can lead to reconciliation—the restoration of a fractured relationship. In both laboratory and clinical intervention studies, forgiveness also is associated with improved emotional and physical well-being (McCullough & Witvliet, 2002).

_Gratitude_ “is a felt sense of wonder, thankfulness, and appreciation for life,” say Emmons and Shelton (2002). And it is, they add, another “highly prized human disposition in Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu thought,” and is found in their texts, prayers, and teachings. Indeed, an attitude of gratitude is linked with religiousness. “Those who regularly attend religious services and engage in religious activities such as prayer or reading religious material are more likely to be grateful,” note Peterson and Seligman (2004).

Much as ruminating prolongs and intensifies depression, so counting one’s blessings enhances well-being. Students asked to keep a weekly log of things for which they are grateful come to “feel better about their lives as a whole,” report Emmons and Shelton (2002). Ditto for those who, in their follow-up study, kept daily gratitude logs.

_Compassion_ and its associated “kindness, generosity, nurturance, care . . . and altruistic love” are positive character traits that orient “the self toward the other” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Schwartz and Huismans (1995) explored such norms among Jews in Israel, Catholics in Spain, Calvinists in The Netherlands,
the Orthodox in Greece, and Lutherans and Catholics in West Germany, and consistently observed that highly religious people tended to be less hedonistic and self-oriented: “Religions encourage people to seek meaning beyond everyday existence . . . [and] exhort people to pursue causes greater than their personal desires. The opposed orientation, self-indulgent materialism, seeks happiness in the pursuit and consumption of material goods.”

In the U.S. General Social Survey data confirm that “volunteering some time to community service” is felt to be an “important obligation” by 19% of those attending religious services less than once a year and by 40% of those attending every week or more (National Opinion Research Center, 2006). And those who feel this “important obligation” are also more likely to report themselves “very happy” (39%) than are those who don’t (27%).

Mother Teresa observed that “Nothing makes you happier than when you really reach out in mercy to someone who is badly hurt” (Teresa, 1968). Putting this idea to the test, Rimland (1982) asked 216 students to list the initials of the 10 people they knew best, yielding a grand list of some 2,000 names. Then he asked them to indicate whether each person seemed happy or not, and, finally, whether each seemed more selfish (devoted mostly to his or her own welfare) or unselfish (willing to be inconvenienced for others). The striking result: 70% of those judged unselfish seemed happy, and 95% of those judged selfish seemed unhappy. Paradoxically, those who sought first their own happiness found less of it.

So, if compassionate values are espoused by religions and by religious people, and if compassionate people are happier, can we close the circle by linking religiousness with altruistic behavior?

**Religion, Altruism, and Communal Well-Being**

Religion has been associated with both love and hate. History offers us Bible-thumping slave owners, Ku Klux Klanners, apartheid defenders, and gay bashers. It also offers us the clergy who helped lead the abolitionist, civil rights, and anti-apartheid movements, and the founding of hospitals, orphanages, and universities worldwide. The horrors and heroes aside, what does the evidence show?

**Religion and Prejudice**

A mid 20th-century cluster of religion–prejudice studies painted a mixed picture (Myers, 2005): On the one hand, U.S. church members expressed more racial prejudice than nonmembers, and those with conservative Christian beliefs expressed more racial prejudice than those less conservative. For many people,
religion seems a cultural habit—something not so much practiced as professed by those who adhere to their community's attitudes and traditions. On the other hand, faithful church attenders expressed less prejudice than nominal members. Moreover, clergy were more supportive of civil rights efforts than laypeople. And those for whom religion was an intrinsic end ("My religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life") were less prejudiced than those who used religion as an extrinsic means ("A primary reason for my interest in religion is that my church is a congenial social activity"). Ergo, among the churched, the devout were consistently less prejudiced than were those who gave religion lip service. As Jonathan Swift (1727) observed, "We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another." "The role of religion is paradoxical," said Gordon Allport (1958, p. 413). "It makes prejudice and it unmakes prejudice."

Religion and Altruism

Some have enough religion to motivate self-sacrificial love, as memorably illustrated by the World War II Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish "Four Chaplains." As their SS Dorchester was sinking into icy waters after being torpedoed, they each gave away their life jackets and were last seen on the deck, with arms linked, saying their final prayers (fourchaplains.org). But does religion actually promote selflessness?

Volunteerism

In studies of college students and the general public, religiously committed individuals have (compared to those religiously uncommitted) reported volunteering more hours, for example, as relief workers, tutors, and campaigners for social justice (Benson et al., 1980; Hansen, Vandenberg, & Patterson, 1995; Penner, 2002). Among the 12% of Americans whom Gallup (1984) labeled "highly spiritually committed," 46% reported presently working among the infirm, the poor, or the elderly—double the 22% among those "highly uncommitted." In a follow-up Gallup survey, charitable and social service volunteering was reported by 28% of those who rated religion "not very important" in their lives and by 50% of those who rated it "very important" (Colasanto, 1989). And 37% of those attending religious services yearly or less, and 76% of those attending weekly, reported thinking at least a "fair amount" about "responsibility to the poor" (Wuthnow, 1994).

Do the religious links with volunteerism extend to other communal organizations? Putnam (2000) analyzed national survey data from 22 types of organizations, including hobby clubs, professional associations, self-help groups, and service clubs, concluding: "It was membership in religious groups that was most
closely associated with other forms of civic involvement, like voting, jury service, community projects, talking with neighbors, and giving to charity” (p. 67).

Charitable Giving

The anonymous jest—“When it comes to giving, some people stop at nothing”—is seldom true of church and synagogue members. In a Gallup survey, Americans who said they never attended church or synagogue reported giving away 1.1% of their incomes (Hodgkinson, Weitzman, & Kirsch, 1990). Weekly attenders were two and a half times as generous. This 24% of the population gave 48% of all charitable contributions. The other three-quarters of Americans gave the remaining half. Follow-up 1990 and 1992 Gallup surveys and a 2001 Independent Sector survey confirmed the faith and philanthropy correlation (Hodgkinson & Weitzman, 1992; Hodgkinson et al., 1990).

An analysis by Fortune (Bollinger, 1997) magazine of America’s top philanthropists found that most are “religious: Jewish, Mormon, Protestant, and Catholic. And most attribute their philanthropic urges at least in part to their religious backgrounds” (p. 96). According to the Nonprofit Times (2002), the seven financially largest, publicly supported U.S. philanthropies (YMCA, Red Cross, Catholic Charities, Salvation Army, Goodwill, United Jewish Communities, Boys and Girls Clubs) share one thing in common: They all have religiously motivated foundings. “Religion is the mother of philanthropy,” observed Andrews (1953, p. 85).

Moral Behaviors

Other moral behaviors also correlate with religiousness. In a U.S. Values Survey, frequent worship attendance predicted lower scores on a dishonesty scale that assessed, for example, self-serving lies, tax cheating, and failing to report damaging a parked car (Marini, 1990). Moreover, cities with high church-going rates tend to be cities with low crime rates (Myers, 2000). After examining 40 religion–delinquency studies, Johnson and his colleagues (Johnson, Li, Larsen, & McCullough, 2000) concluded that “most delinquent acts were committed by juveniles who had low levels of religious commitment.” To be sure, many are good without God, and many believers go to sleep behind bars each night. Yet even when controlling for other factors, such as socioeconomic level, neighborhood, and peer influences, kids who went to church rarely were delinquent.

Caveats

So, religion has been implicated in ingroup bias and intolerance, yet religiousness also correlates with happiness and altruistic ideals and behaviors. None of this research indicates the truth or falsity of religious claims. Even skeptics such as
Shermer (2000, 2004) acknowledge (in fact, contend) that religion exists because it contributes to evolutionary fitness, such as by encouraging within-group solidarity and by inhibiting antisocial behaviors. Although similarly skeptical of religion, biologist E. O. Wilson (1998, p. 244) likewise acknowledges that “religious conviction is largely beneficent. Religion ... nourishes love, devotion, and above all, hope.” Ditto the 18th-century skeptic Voltaire, who regarded religion as “infamy,” but nevertheless regarded it as useful among the masses. “I want my attorney, my tailor, my servants, even my wife to believe in God. ... Then I shall be robbed and cuckolded less often” (quoted by Wilson, 1993, p. 219). He once silenced a discussion about atheism until he had dismissed the servants, lest in losing their faith they lose their morality.

A second caveat: Like so many predictor variables in the subjective well-being literature, religion is confounded with other predictors. Religion is like political party affiliation—which a recent Pew (2006) survey shows is also predictive of happiness. Republicans (45%) more often than Democrats (30%) say they are “very happy.” Republicans are also more likely to be married, to have high income, and to be religious, each of which, to varying extents, predicts happiness. So is it the essential “Republicanness” or these other associated variables that are decisive?

Religion encompasses social support, a purpose for living, devotion to a reality beyond self, an ultimate source of self-acceptance, hope for the timeless future, and the promotion of positive virtues. If we were to control for such facts, would there be anything left of “the religion factor”? Might this be rather like a hurricane analyst asking whether, after controlling for the effects of the wind, tidal surge, and rain, there is any effect of a hurricane? The hurricane factor, and the religion factor, are package variables. Religion, for example, entails social support—because religion, unlike New Age spirituality, is intrinsically communal. The word root religion means “to bind together.” It is something you believe and practice in community.

Still, we may wonder about the extent to which a social support variable, such as marriage, helps explain the religion-happiness correlation. Consider:

- Married people (more than never-married people) report being “very happy” (40% versus 23% among those surveyed by the National Opinion Research Center between 1972 and 2004; National Opinion Research Center, 1996).
- Religiously active people (more than religiously inactive people) also report being “very happy” (see Figure 16.1).
- Religiously active people (more than religiously inactive people) report being married. (Sixty-three percent of adults who attend religious services weekly or more report being married, as do 46% of those never attending.)

We might wonder whether, after controlling for religious activity, marriage still correlates with happiness. (Is marriage just a proxy for religion?) Or we might wonder whether, after controlling for marital status, religious activity still correlates with happiness. (Is religion just a proxy for marriage?) Given that most religions encourage marriage, either question is reasonable. Thus Figure 16.2 recasts Figure 16.1, but with the religion–happiness association depicted separately for those married and never married. Although controlling for marital status leaves the religion–happiness correlation largely intact, we could surely, by extracting additional subcomponents of the religion factor, reduce its apparent impact (much as we could eliminate the residual effects of a hurricane after extracting the influence of its associations). Doing so would neither debunk nor validate the religious factor; it would simply illuminate its makeup.

Religion and Physical Well-Being

As humans suffered ills and sought healing throughout history, two healing traditions—religion and medicine—have joined hands in caring for them. Often those hands belonged to the same person—the spiritual leader was also the healer. Maimonides was a 12th-century rabbi and a renowned physician. Hospi-

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1 This section is adapted, with permission, from Myers (2007). Copyright 2007 by Worth Publishers. Adapted by permission.
tals, which were first established in monasteries and then spread by missionaries, often carry the names of saints or faith communities.

As medical science matured, healing and religion diverged. Rather than asking God to spare their children from smallpox, people were able to vaccinate them. Rather than seeking a spiritual healer when burning with bacterial fever, they were able to use antibiotics. Recently, however, religion and healing are converging once again:

- Duke University has established a Center for Spirituality, Theology, and Health.
- A Yankelovich survey (1997) found 94% of U.S. health maintenance organization (HMO) professionals and 99% of family physicians agreeing that “personal prayer, meditation, or other spiritual and religious practices” can enhance medical treatment.
- Booksellers are featuring such titles as The Healing Power of Faith (Koenig, 1999), Handbook of Religion and Health (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2000), and Faith, Medicine, and Science (Levin & Koenig, 2005).

Is there fire underneath all this smoke? More than a thousand studies have sought to correlate “the faith factor” with health and healing. For example, Kark and his colleagues (1996) compared the death rates for 3,900 Israelis either in one of 11 religiously orthodox or in one of 11 matched, nonreligious collective settlements (kibbutz communities). The researchers reported that over a 16-year period, “belonging to a religious collective was associated with a strong protective effect” not explained by age or economic differences. In every age group, religious community members were about half as likely to have died as were their nonreligious counterparts. This finding is roughly comparable to the gender difference in mortality.

In response to such findings, Sloan and his skeptical colleagues remind us that mere correlations can leave many factors uncontrolled. Consider one obvious possibility: Women are more religiously active than men, and women outlive men. So perhaps religious involvement is merely an expression of the gender effect on longevity (Sloan, 2005; Sloan & Bagiella, 2002; Sloan, Bagiella, & Powell, 1999; Sloan, Bagiella, VandeCreek, & Poulos, 2000).

However, several new studies find the religiosity-longevity correlation among men alone, and even more strongly among women (McCullough, Hoyt, Larson, Koenig, & Thoresen 2000; McCullough & Laurenceau, 2005). One study that followed 5,286 Californians over 28 years found that, after controlling
for age, gender, ethnicity, and education, frequent religious attendees were 36% less likely to have died in any year (Figure 16.3).

A U.S. National Health Interview Survey (Hummer, Rogers, Nam, & Ellison, 1999) followed 21,204 people over 8 years. After controlling for age, sex, race, and region, researchers found that nonattenders were 1.87 times more likely to have died than were those attending church services more than weekly. This translated into a life expectancy at age 20 of 83 years for frequent attenders and 75 years for infrequent attenders (Figure 16.4).

These correlational findings do not indicate that nonattenders who start attending services and change nothing else will live 8 years longer. But they do indicate that as a predictor of health and longevity, religious involvement rivals nonsmoking and exercise effects. Such findings demand explanation. What intervening variables might account for the correlation?

First, religiously active people have healthier lifestyles; for example, they smoke and drink less (Lyons, 2002; Strawbridge, Shema, Cohen, & Kaplan, 2001). Health-oriented, vegetarian Seventh Day Adventists have a longer-than-usual life expectancy (Berkel & de Waard, 1983). Religiously orthodox Israelis eat less fat than do their nonreligious compatriots. But such differences are not great enough to explain the dramatically reduced mortality in the religious kib-

![Graph](image)

**FIGURE 16.3.** Predictors of mortality: not smoking, frequent exercise, and regular religious attendance. Epidemiologist William Strawbridge and his coworkers (Strawbridge, 1999; Strawbridge, Cohen, & Shema, 1997; Oman, Kurata, Strawbridge, & Cohen, 2002) followed 5,286 Alameda, California, adults over 28 years. After adjusting for age and education, the researchers found that not smoking, regular exercise, and religious attendance all predicted a lowered risk of death in any given year. Women attending weekly religious services, for example, were only 54% as likely to die in a typical study year as were nonattenders.
FIGURE 16.4. Religious attendance and life expectancy. In a national health survey financed by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, religiously active people had longer life expectancies. Data from Hummer and others (1999).

butzim (Kark, Shemi, Friedlander, Martin, Manor, & Blondheim, 1996). In the recent U.S. studies, too, about 75% of the longevity difference remains after controlling for unhealthy behaviors such as inactivity and smoking (Musick, Herzog, & House, 1999).

For health, as for happiness, social support is another variable that helps explain the "faith factor" (George, Ellison, & Larson, 2002). Moreover, as noted earlier, religion encourages another predictor of health and longevity—marriage. In the religious kibbutzim, for example, divorce has been almost nonexistent.

But even after controlling for gender, unhealthy behaviors, social ties, and preexisting health problems, the studies report that much of the mortality reduction remains (George, Larson, Koenig, & McCullough, 2000; Powell, Schahabi, & Thoresen, 2003). Researchers therefore speculate that a third set of intervening variables is the stress protection and enhanced well-being associated with a coherent worldview, a sense of hope for the long-term future, feelings of ultimate acceptance, and the relaxed meditation of prayer or Sabbath observance (Figure 16.5). These variables might also help to explain other recent findings among the religiously active, such as healthier immune functioning and fewer hospital admissions, and, for AIDS patients, fewer stress hormones and longer survival (Ironson et al., 2002; Koenig & Larson, 1998; Lutgendorf, Russell, Ullrich, Harris, & Wallace, 2004).

Although the religion–health correlation is yet to be fully explained, Harold Pincus (1997), deputy medical director of the American Psychiatric Association, believes that these findings "have made clear that anyone involved in providing health care services ... cannot ignore ... the important connections between spirituality, religion, and health."
Conclusions

Religious affiliation has sometimes fostered the opposite of the love, peace, and justice that the major religions so often profess. Extrinsically motivated religion has fostered ingroup bias, antipathy to ethnic and sexual minorities, and self-justification for oppression. Expressed religiosity in the Western world does, nevertheless, exhibit positive correlations with happiness, coping with loss, character virtues, volunteerism, charitable giving, and health. Religion is a package variable that, psychologically speaking, encompasses social support, meaning, existential terror management, and health-promoting behaviors.

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