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Religiosity, faith development and reaction to negative life events

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RELIGIOSITY, FAITH DEVELOPMENT AND

REACTION TO NEGATIVE LIFE EVENTS

by

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VITA

The author, Julie Oxenberg, was born May 3, 1963 in Manhasset, New York. Her undergraduate education was completed at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri where she majored in psychology and minored in history. She earned the Bachelor of Arts degree in May, 1985, graduating Magna Cum Laude. While attending Washington University Ms. Oxenberg co-authored two published research studies.

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INTRODUCTION

The current age is marked by a sense of confusion and ambiguity concerning issues of identity, values and meaning. More and more we see the signs of a society that is unclear about its personal and collective values and unable to convey a clear sense of direction and purpose to its young people. The news is filled with reports of increasingly more brutal and "meaningless" crimes being committed by youths who have often barely reached puberty. Gang activity seems to be a growing source of entertainment and socialization for many of today's youth. Drug dealing and smuggling has become a revered capitalist endeavor among youth from both underclass and more privileged backgrounds. Justifications made by youths for this type of activity reveal a mentality very similar to that of their white collar counterparts involved in insider trading on Wall Street or fraud and corruption on Capital Hill. Heros for today's youth are few.

Even the counterculture movement has changed in tone and message from previous times. Today's rock songs speak of violence, meaninglessness and satanism, while songs of a previous era that espoused ideals of justice, peace and love sound somehow simplistic and naive. Violence of today's gangs seems less related to protest or rights struggles than to sheer random terror. Particularly disturbing is the sense that the crimes of many of these groups appear to have no motive. The kids are not necessarily looking for money, not necessarily from broken homes, not necessarily underprivileged. The sense of meaninglessness expressed in these acts is quite chilling.

In this country major events of the 1960's and 70's brought with them a shakeup and loosening of "traditional" values. People began to question authority as well as "traditional" power relations between such groups as : men and women, black and white

young and old. Traditional religious values and teachings were among those values more seriously questioned. When the hope of establishing an idealistic society envisioned by many young people as embodying ideals of equality, liberation and free love began to wane, traditional values remained jarred but little was there to take their place. Today in the aftermath of changes in family structure, changes in sex roles and the breakdown of numerous marriages many people are left feeling somewhat uncertain about what it is they do believe and what they want to teach their children. Society's ethics and values are not well defined and the results are being felt on many levels.

The present study is an exploration of values. Its purpose is to examine the role an individual's world outlook and fundamental sense of values plays in how he or she interprets and copes with life experiences. Individuals who adhere to a traditional religious belief system will be studied as well as individuals who describe themselves as atheist or agnostic with respect to belief in a supreme being. Persons who report having a well defined, clear sense of meaning and purpose in their lives, whether in conjunction with religious belief or not, will be compared to those who report lacking such a sense of purpose. The way in which both these groups make sense of and cope with negative life events will be examined. It is hoped that through this investigation some light can be shed on the relationship between form and quality of meaning making and how individuals are able to cope with important events in their lives. More specifically, the study will address among other questions, whether it is necessary for an individual to have a clear sense of purpose in life and a clear sense of values in order to adapt positively to negative life events. Such an understanding may have implications for the priority given by educators and public officials to the clarification of society's ethics and values, and the need to communicate these to young people. This understanding may also have implications for therapeutic issues clinicians can address when working with

people struggling to make sense of and adapt to difficult events in their lives.

This study was designed to investigate the relationship between an individual's religious convictions, their sense of purpose in life, and the way this influences their satisfaction and ability to effectively cope with negative life events. For this investigation four groups of individuals were interviewed. These included a group of orthodox Jewish individuals, a group of religious Lutheran individuals, a group of atheist or agnostic Jews and a group of atheist or agnostic Lutherans. Views of each group member on issues related to: values and committments; spirituality and religion; and purpose and meaning in life were explored. The views of individuals in these four groups were compared with one another. Special attention was paid to the comparison of the views of religious versus non-religious individuals on these issues. The intent of this project was to assess how a religious orientation toward life impacts upon one's quality of life and one's way of conceptualizing and responding to difficult life events.

This review of literature will contain both a theoretical and an empirical component. The theoretical component will be comprised of a brief summary of the worldview expressed in Jewish and Lutheran theology as well as an overview of the philosophy expressed by several influential atheistic thinkers. In addition, a brief theoretical analysis of the psychology of religious faith and doubt and the psychology of meaning making will be presented. These sections, combined with an empirical review, are designed to add dimensionally and depth to the interpretation of the empirical findings of this research project.

Jewish Group

The first group interviewed for this project was a group of Jewish individuals who described their level of religious involvement to be "orthodox". Fifteen people

were interviewed, eight men and seven women, whose average age was 37.6 years. Many were from West Rogers Park, a close knit, middle class community in Chicago, Illinois. Each person was interviewed at their home or their place of employment.

The typical interviewee's home was replete with the adornments of orthodox Jewish life; shelves of Hebrew books graced the walls; paraphernalia of orthodox Jewish practice was readily apparent and rooms were often decorated exclusively with pictures of famous Jewish rabbis and scholars. The dress code for orthodox Jews emphasizes modesty of attire and this too was evident upon entering orthodox homes. The women interviewed typically wore long skirts, long shirts, tights and scarves to cover their head while the men dressed in black pants, long white shirts and black hats.

The practice of orthodox Judaism requires a very disciplined, structured approach to life. Specific rules of behavior are followed and rituals performed throughout the day, during each day in the life of an orthodox individual. Orthodox communities are often tight knit, sometimes even a bit insular, due to the community's need to be close to one another to perform group rituals. Specific environmental conditions must be met in order to uphold dietary and other proprietary rules. Rituals that must be performed with other community members include a man's requirement to pray three times a day in a "minion" or a group of ten men.

Orthodox men and women tend to remain largely separate during the day with men attending synagogue and studying with other men and women spending time with other women and children. Fidelity, clear role definition and concentration on one's responsibilities and relation with God are strong values. Most of the families of the men and women interviewed were quite large as is the norm for orthodox families. This is considered desirable and in line with God's will. The average number of children in the families interviewed was between six and ten. Children play a big role in the orthodox home and the importance of the family is a key orthodox value.

The section below provides an overview of central Jewish concepts and a summary of key components of a Jewish worldview. Not all subjects interviewed for this study interpreted their religious beliefs in this exact fashion. However, most people interviewed adhere to this general view of life and organize their lives from this orientation.

Overview of Jewish theological Concepts

Although there is no monolithic interpretation of "Jewish Theology" there are significant elements of a Jewish world view that are widely accepted. Jewish theology consists of a monotheistic belief in one and only one God who created the universe and whose presence remains immanent within this creation. God is viewed to have chosen Abraham and hence the Jewish nation as a people with whom to convene a covenant between himself and mankind. This covenant is seen as a vehicle to foster justice and righteousness and the Divine view of life first within the narrow sphere of the Jewish nation and then in ever widening circles of humanity (Kohler, 1918). The Jews were expected to be God's servants and to emulate God's way. The Jews received the Torah which contained the Law and a "blueprint for living" in accordance with God's plan. Religious Jews view their lifestyle which grows out of interpretation of Torah dictates and values to destine them to be a "light unto the nations" by providing a model of just and moral living to the rest of humanity in accordance with God's plan (Kohler, 1918). The Jews believe that at a time when the Jewish nation is in order a messiah will come and God's plan will be enacted on earth. The dead will rise and their spirits will rejoin their bodies. Jewish writing tends to be somewhat vague about the nature of an after life and focuses much more on life on this earth (Kohler, 1918). However, there is a notion that after death there will be some form of judgement, people will be held accountable for their actions, and only some people will gain admittance to the next world right away.

Some notion of punishment for wrong doing is advanced, however, no very clear focus on Heaven or Hell is articulated.

The law for orthodox Jews contains 613 "mitzvoth" which are commandments issued from God. Jews are expected to abide by all of these due to their special covenant with God, while non-Jews are called to abide by only seven general commandments reflecting major themes expressed in the ten commandments. The Jews "chosen" status is not looked at as occasion for superiority or arrogance but responsibility (Neusner, 1973). Judaism is not a universalistic religion and as such, religious Jews do not proselytize to gain converts. The heart of the Jewish lifestyle and value system lies in the meaning that is derived from interpreting and observing Jewish law outlined in the Torah and Talmud (Stitskin, 1969).

The fulfillment of the mitzvoth takes place continually throughout each day and represents the active renewal of the Jewish covenant and individual communion with God. Each commandment is considered to contain symbolic meaning and each action is said to renew the Jewish relationship with God and remind the observer of the divine element in all of creation (Stitskin, 1969). Orthodox Jews find moral and spiritual purpose in the laws of the Torah and believe that each law contains layers of insight into the meaning and value of life. Jews are encouraged to interpret the meaning of each phrase and commandment in the Torah to discover both the surface and multifaceted deeper meanings each reveal. Laws are viewed as often containing a hidden deep message whose meaning is purposely obscured and embedded within the revealed word (Stitskin, 1969). This purposeful interpretation of Torah never conflicts with the literal meaning but only deepens it according to Jewish thought. A teleological approach is encouraged to the interpretation of Halukah (Jewish law) such that the observant are urged to consider God's ends revealed through a given law's purpose. In addition to symbolic interpretation of the law, orthodox Jews also encourage the analysis of the

linguistic and semantic structure of biblical text for other dimensions of meaning.

The Torah as a whole is viewed as a guideline which when followed provides discipline to life and reveals insights about effective and successful ways to approach life on this earth. The laws express values of family, community, charity, discipline, self-cultivation, taming of passions, justice, fidelity, education and commitment among others and provide a vehicle for finding meaning in all aspects of life (Belkin, 1969). Restrictive laws such as those related to dietary and sexual conduct are seen in part as revealing the significance of transcending unbridled appetites and lusts. Undisciplined indulgence in food, drink and sexual activity are seen as causes of evil in the world. The discipline is viewed as encouraging the cultivation of man's higher potentialities. The Torah does not encourage asceticism nor renouncement of the material world but rather encourages Jews to enjoy life through balanced discipline of their passions and desires. The material and the spiritual are not divorced in Jewish theology (Kohler, 1918). Spirituality is thought to be expressed within and through the material world. The literal interpretation of laws reveals only a surface understanding while analysis of their purpose reveals insight into God's plan. For instance, on the Sabbath Jews are expected to cease all work activity and to uphold numerous restrictive prohibitions of action. The Sabbath requires a halt to the acquisition of material and the preoccupation with means that occurs throughout the week. This can require great self discipline since regardless of circumstance (other than one that threatens life) all commercial aspects of one's week are to be suspended for the higher purpose of observing a day of prayer, reunion with family and reflection on the purpose and meaning of life. From the standpoint of meaning, this is believed to help cultivate the highest aspects of human nature by emphasizing the integrity, nobility and uniqueness of man and his power and obligation to transcend the

exclusive preoccupation with material survival (Belkin, 1969).

With respect to prayer, orthodox Jews consider themselves to live in the perpetual attitude of prayer (Berkovits, 1969). Prayer is viewed as seeking intimacy and nearness with God. Since God is immanent in all aspects of nature, life is enacted in God's sight and in transaction with God. In Judaism one is not saved by faith in God alone, a Jew is expected to implement his or her beliefs and deeds in interaction with God and in observance of God's will throughout the entirety of his or her life (Berkovits,1969). Outward worship is viewed as merely an auxiliary tool to express the intention of the worshipers inward mind and heart. Jews believe that God is forever present in the world and that he renews his creation in conjunction with mankind's actions everyday (Stitskin, 1969).

Numerous views of the meaning of sin and evil are expressed in Jewish thought. The Jews do not believe in a cosmic principle of evil in the universe (Kohler, 1918). Evil is viewed as either man's alienation from God, a test or meaningful challenge emanating from God or as a result of man exercising his free will. The concept of Satan is rejected by Jewish doctrine (Kohler, 1918). Satan is viewed allegorically as representing both physical and moral evil in the world which emanates from God and is not something that has power over the soul's free will. However, life is regarded as a continuous conflict between good and evil influences within man. As man succeeds in overcoming evil and attaining good, he asserts his own moral personality (Kohler, 1918). Suffering evil is sometimes depicted as a means by which man can transcend his connection to his physical body and love God with "all the soul" (Lubin, 1969). Suffering evil is also viewed as a means to fortify man's moral strength and to humble haughtiness so as to pave the way for ultimate self-transcendence (Stitskin, 1969). Jewish thinkers believe there is latent good in every particle of existence. Each

challenge in life reveals an area for growth, creativity and choice regardless of how painful. In every moment of existence man is viewed as being confronted by God's love and judgement (Stitskin, 1969). For religious Jews all problems are seen as having a purpose and meaning. Problems help man to develop his potentialities if he looks inside to find understanding and strength rather than blaming external factors. Jews are expected to assess the meaning derived from a circumstance from the perspective of eternity rather than just immediacy although immediate experience is considered very important (Luban, 1969). God is viewed as sharing the pain of humanity. Evil can be displaced by God's presence and Torah can help reveal that presence (Lubin, 1969). From Torah man gains insight into the essential structure of existence. Evil is also viewed at times as deriving from man's free will and his choices which have gone against God. Some Jewish writers view God as a paternal figure who sometimes castigates his children for the purpose of educating them to goodness (Kohler, 1918).

There is no strong emphasis on a belief in original sin in Judaism. No one is seen as completely sinful by nature but since man is of flesh he is inclined to sin and no one is perfectly free from sin (Kohler, 1918). Sin is viewed as infidelity to God and one's own godlike nature (Kohler, 1918). Sin is expressed as "missing the mark", misunderstanding or wandering from God's path (Kohler, 1918). Sin is seen as a severance of the soul's inner relation to God and as a sense of estrangement. No individual is held guilty for the sins of another and there is no concept of universal or national guilt (Kohler, 1918). Man can find a way back to God through his own efforts and through atonement. Judaism does not stress a belief in eternal damnation or eternal alienation although man is viewed as being held accountable for his actions in life and there is a concept of judgement after death. What this means for a world to come has been interpreted in different fashions and is not explicitly made clear (Kohler, 1918).

The immanent relation between God and man, consecrated daily through man's actions conducted toward the end of uncovering the divine purpose of creation is a prominent aspect of life expressed in orthodox Judaism. The Jewish people believe they have a special covenant with God and that through their actions and interpretations of God's plan expressed in the Torah they are to be a "light unto the nations" by modeling God's way to the rest of humankind. What will happen when the messiah arrives is still considered largely a mystery. Every act of life is viewed as meaningful and purposeful to orthodox Jews including acts involving the challenge of pain and suffering evil. All of life is lived in dynamic interaction with God, the one and only divine being, who is both transcendent, reigning over all of creation, and immanent and who renews his creation in dynamic involvement with each individual in every act of life.

Lutheran Group

The Lutheran individuals interviewed for this study were 15 adults, eight men and seven women who attend a traditional Lutheran parish in Chicago, Illinois. Many of the individuals were from middle class backgrounds and reside in the Northside area of Chicago. The interviews were conducted primarily at people's homes and places of employment. The Lutheran religious lifestyle is less structured than the orthodox Jewish lifestyle in terms of the extent to which ritual and rules govern daily conduct. The people interviewed varied significantly in their ways of interpreting their religious beliefs and in the degree of their involvement with the Church. Most of the people reported attending church regularly (at least once per week) but some were more involved with religious thought and observance than were others. Below is a general overview of some basic Christian/Lutheran theological concepts. This is a fairly abstract conception of

Christian doctrine and clearly not all the individuals interviewed conceptualized their religion in these terms or on this level.

Christian/Lutheran Theological Concepts

The Lutherans ascribe to the general Christian belief that God formed a covenant with the nation of Israel and through this covenant handed down the Law to mankind. The values and lifestyle outlined by the Law allowed man to become spiritually and psychologically prepared to receive the higher level of revelation of truth in the form of the Gospel. Some Lutherans believe that the law revealed to man his sinfulness and helplessness and made him more fully aware of his need for salvation (Lobo, 1984). The Christians, similar to the Jews, believe that as a result of an act of freewill in which man, following a temptation, chose to turn away from God, humankind has fallen from grace. In this way man became aware of his separation from God, became "self-conscious" and came to know death (Lobo, 1984). Consequently, human life on earth became permeated by sin or a sense of alienation from God . Sin or brokenness is a condition of humanity and this state implies both a sense of estrangement from God and a fragmentation of one's true or whole self (Lobo, 1982). The Christians believe that God in his goodness, seeing this condition, made himself flesh in the form of Christ, suffered and was crucified as an atonement for the sins of mankind so that they might be saved. God's offer of the Cross represents God's offer of reconciliation or salvation to human beings and human beings accept that offer through faith (Lobo, 1982). Christ's death and resurrection suggest that the form of reconciliation offered man takes the form of death and rebirth. The lessons of Christ's life as depicted in the Gospels, show the ultimate attributes of God which man is to cultivate in himself. These include compassion, service and most of all, a belief in the consummate healing power of love. The form of

man's reconciliation with God and hence his love for God expresses itself through his love for his fellow human beings (Lobo, 1982). Christ represents the ideal human being, the human being completely without sin or any form of estrangement. Through the grace of God which comes to man by the workings of the Holy Spirit and opens man's heart to faith, mankind can achieve salvation and the promise of everlasting life (Braaten, 1983). In this way for those who have faith there is no ultimate death or alienation. However, Christ will return at the end of days for judgement and will raise the dead in order to give eternal life to the faithful and to condemn those who remain sinners to eternal punishment (Lull, 1973). Christians believe that the Gospel is the message of salvation for all human beings and that it should be made available to all peoples of the world. Christian theology consists of a belief in one God who manifests three distinguishable aspects of one divine essence (Braaten, 1983).

There are many different forms of interpretation of Christian doctrine. These range from literal beliefs in the events and words of the Bible to completely symbolical interpretation of the meaning of Scripture. Some Lutheran thinkers interpret the meaning of God, salvation, damnation, repentance and sin in largely metaphorical terms (e.g., Tillich) while others maintain a more conventional understanding of such concepts (e.g., Lull, Gritch, Jenson). Tillich (1963) expresses the notion of God as the "ground of being" and understands damnation and salvation as symbolic references to ontological/spiritual conditions of life. Damnation and salvation represent extremes of a continuum between total alienation from and total immersion and participation in one's "ground of being" (Tillich, 1963). Damnation is a symbolic representation of one's sense of total, irredeemable alienation from the ground of one's being, and hence true self. Mankind lives in a state of estrangement from the realization of his full participation with the ground of his being. Salvation is progressive, and occurs in stages according to Tillich. The first step, which Tillich calls "regeneration", involves

acknowledgement of one's state of alienation and brokenness in relation to one's awareness of the possibility of wholeness as manifest in Christ. The next step, termed "justification", is the acceptance of God's remediation of one's estrangement. Man accepts God's acceptance of man, and that is faith. This involves faith that one is ultimately acceptable in spite of one's alienation or brokenness. The last step is termed "sanctification", which is the transformation of one's personality and spiritual state through faith and this is a progressive process. It involves a movement toward full realization of one's essential relatedness to the ground of one's being; one's essential self. This is the progression of "salvation" and the character of salvation is manifest in love (Tillich, 1963). Many other Lutheran writers view these concepts in a less symbolical fashion.

Two important Christian concepts include those of the "kingdom of God" and the "Body of Christ". The kingdom of God is a teleological concept expressive of the ultimate fulfillment of God's purpose (Lobo, 1982). It is expected to be established upon the second coming of Christ which some regard as the end of history. The Kingdom symbolizes a society in which humans live in perfect community with each other and with God; a community in which the law will be written in the hearts of men who will no longer need external laws to maintain righteousness. The Kingdom of God is the salvation of society while the concept of salvation itself usually refers to salvation of the individual (Tillich, 1963). The "Body of Christ" is a community on earth called together by God in Christ to be a people in witness to God's love and grace (Lull, 1973). Human beings in their individuality are not complete. They are completed by their relation with one another and ultimately, their relation with God. Symbolically, the glue that holds this community together, which is also the foundation of its being once it is filled with the Holy Spirit, is love (Lobo, 1982). Jesus is considered to have been the first member

of the Body of Christ. The concept of the Church is the earthly representative of the Body of Christ and God's gift to the world.

A key Lutheran conception is the notion that justification can be achieved by the grace of God alone and can not be earned through good works or even through faith. Justification is an existential concept whose meaning is close to purpose of being (Gritsch & Jenson, 1976). Only the Holy Spirit can stir the heart of the individual believer and open it to faith, he can not do this alone (Lull, 1973). Grace is a gift. Man needs God to expel evil. Through the enterence of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God there is the possibility for Christ's indwelling in the soul of the believer (Lull, 1973). The believer is drawn to faith and good works come from this faith, but are not the cause of it. Therefore, man and God are in dynamic relation with one another. There is no true ontological category of man-in-himself with respect to man's relation with God. Humanity is seen to "happen" in the event of communication of the Word, communion with God (Gritsch & Jenson, 1976).

At the time of Jesus there was a sense among some that people were upholding the letter of the law and not its spirit (Lobo, 1982). According to Christianity the law is merely the behavioral manifestation of an inner state. God does not care so much what one does but who one is. To uphold the law without spiritually transforming one's inner self is missing God's message. The spiritual transformation of the believer is salvation while the expression of faith alone or the upholding of law alone is not. The Gospel was meant in part to reveal the spirit and lighten the burden of the law (Lobo, 1982). Another significant Christian value is one of non-materialism. The noted biblical quote "the meek shall inherit the earth" speaks to this value. One's ability to enter the Kingdom of Heaven is viewed as related to one's spiritual state and the qualities associated with a spiritual state of transformation tend to differ from those often displayed by people highly driven to amass earthly wealth or power (Lobo,1982).

Various sacraments symbolize the communion of man and God and serve the purpose of awakening and strengthening faith. The Holy Spirit is received by the believer in baptism and this is symbolic of the birth of God within the individual who otherwise was born in sin (Lobo, 1982). Christ's redeeming grace is available to man through sacraments. The Eucharist or communion sacrament symbolizes incorporation of Christ's spirit into the believer. Confirmation represents an official entrance into the church and the Body of Christ (Lobo, 1982). Luther believed in infant baptism and advocated for reforms in various areas of church policy to make the church less politically hierarchical (Lull, 1973).

Christian theology does incorporate a concept of Original Sin. As mentioned previously human nature alone is thought to be permeated by sin and this is the human condition to which we are all born and are all guilty (Lobo, 1982). Man without God is condemned to a state of alienation and brokenness on earth and after death. Only through the grace of God, repentance, and the enterence of the Holy Spirit, can man be saved from this fate of alienation. However, because humans are encumbered by their flesh they are never without sin while on earth and true salvation is attained only in the here after (Lull, 1973). Evil is depicted as an independent force in the universe at odds with God (Lull, 1973). This evil force, sometimes called Satan, did originally spring from God and therefore is not completely independent but is depicted in Christian mythology as having his own arena of power. Man is tempted by this evil force both in the world and within himself. Human life involves a struggle between good and evil (Lobo, 1982). God is seen as good and evil results from turning away from God and not resisting the strong temptation toward evil. There is a clearly articulated belief in an afterlife in Christian thought. Again, different theologians interpret this concept in differing ways. There is a notion that the faithful, who have been blessed with the grace of God, will be judged after death and will achieve eternal salvation with God.

The non-faithful will also be judged and are potentially subject to eternal damnation and estrangement from God. Focus on an afterlife has at certain times in Christian history been a predominant concern.

Lutheran theology consists of a belief in one God of three aspects who created the world, handed down the Law to humanity through the nation of Israel and later made himself flesh, suffered and died in order to save mankind from its sins. Through this event the world received a means of spiritual reconciliation with God. Humanity also received the Gospel which declares the Good News that man can be saved and reveals the spiritual nature of salvation through the lessons of Christ's life. Love is at the basis of man's foundation when his heart has been stirred by the Holy Spirit toward faith (Lull, 1973). Love towards fellow human beings is one means by which people express their love of God (Lobo, 1982). Love is also the medium that holds the Christian community together in the Body of Christ. The Christians would like all of humanity to join this community. The relation of man and God is dynamic and various sacraments help man to commune with God and to receive the blessing of his Holy Spirit. Man without God is born of sin and condemned to brokenness and alienation. Man is justified through God's grace in the form of the Holy Spirit which opens man's heart to faith. This faith in God and consequently in the acceptability of one's self, saves mankind from its condition of brokenness and from eternal estrangement. Christ will return to earth at the end of days and will raise the dead and judge all of humanity placing them eternally with God or away from God.

Atheist Group

In addition to a group of orthodox Jews and a group of religious Lutherans, a group of individuals were interviewed who described themselves as atheist or agnostic with respect to belief in a Supreme Being. These people denied adhering to any

traditional religious system or belief. Approximately one third of these individuals were recruited from the Chicago Atheist bookclub or through the Chicago Atheist Newsletter. These people tended to be somewhat more dogmatic about their atheism than were the other individuals interviewed for this category.   A few additional people were recruited from the congregation of a secular-humanist synagogue in Chicago, Illinois. The rabbi of this congregation, who considers himself an atheist, participated as a subject in this study as well. This congregation accepts some of the customs, rituals and values expressed in the Jewish religion but rejects the notion of a Supreme Being and the historical "truth" of the religious writings. The additional interviewees for this category were recruited largely by word of mouth through friends.   Below is a summary of the writings of a few key atheistic thinkers on issues of religion and meaning. Certainly not all the individuals interviewed in this group voiced these specific ideas about religion but many of the these notions have influenced atheistic and even secular views of reality.

Atheistic Concepts

This segment will contain a review of the theories of a few highly influential atheistic thinkers. These writer's ideas have had profound influence on economic, psychological and philosophical developments in the twentieth century. The theorists to whom I am referring include Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Frederick Nietszche and Jean-Paul Sartre.   Certainly not all atheists ascribe to the world views expressed by these theorists but the thoughts of many secular individuals and as well as numerous institutions have no doubt been indirectly influenced by these writer's conceptions.

Marcel Neusch (1982), an Assumptionist priest, has written a book on modern atheism in which he contends that God no longer is a central concern for human beings. Though people turn to God for the "big moments" of life according to Neusch, he

does not play a central role in many people's lives today. Neusch suggests that contemporary atheism has its socio-political roots in the 18th century. Before the 19th century it was very dangerous to admit to an atheistic position as atheists were viewed as criminal, insane or both and many were jailed or burned at the stake (Neusch, 1982). Atheists were viewed as morally corrupt and intellectually weak . However, a growing tolerance of atheistic thinking began to emerge as the 18th century progressed. The real founding of intellectual atheism came in the 19th century when religion began to lose ground among certain intellectuals and through them among the common people as well. Atheists began suggesting that rather than God creating man, man created God as a reflection of who he is or would like to be. Thinkers began pointing out the compensatory functions God serves and began to suggest that religion curbs the will of man. After the unprecedented destruction and horror wrought by World War I and World War II shook the world, many people were stirred to rethink traditionally held religious conceptions of life. New secular ideologies of meaning began to develop. Some of the main attacks against religion came in the form of these four critiques according to Neusch : 1) God is morally impossible given the evil in the world, 2) God is useless from the scientific viewpoint, 3) God is intolerable to human beings with respect to their freedom and 4) God is metaphysically superfluous. These critiques will be addressed in greater depth through the review of the thoughts of a few prominent atheistic theorists that will follow.

Perhaps the most influential atheistic thinker of the 19th century was Karl Marx. The heart of Marx's critique of religion lay in his belief that religion does not rouse people to transform the world, but instead, encourages passivity in this world, focus on a world to come and submission to an outside force to solve earthly problems (Marx, 1843). His famous quote "religion is the opiate of the masses" speaks to this by suggesting that people use religion to pacify themselves in the face of a horribly unjust

and cruel world. Marx felt that religion, especially Christianity which promises the hope of a better fate in a world to come for those who lack means in this world, does not promote struggle against injustice but rather escape (Marx,1964). Marx believed that the rich use religion to help blind the poor to the recognition of their exploitation (Marx,1964). Marx was obviously very concerned with changing socio-political conditions and he advocated for human emancipation from religion and from the state. He felt that the Christian ideal in particular promotes a slave mentality among the poor that serves the upper classes. However, Marx's critiques were all leveled against the economic and political implications of religion and he wrote little on existential matters such as love, life, suffering, meaning, failure and death. Some have suggested (Neusch, 1982) that by closing off the religious form of spiritual avenue to man, while replacing it with little, Marx may have created a new kind of alienation while trying to resolve an old one.

Another highly influential theorist who critiqued religion from a psychological perspective was Sigmund Freud. Freud felt that the development of religion in history was similar in cause, motivation and even practice to the development of an individual neurosis (Freud, 1938). Freud referred to religion as a universal obsessive compulsive neurosis of humanity (1927). In addition, Freud believed that religion fulfills many psychological functions for human beings but screens them from truth.

Freud suggested that a primordial oedipal conflict experienced by primitive man was the historic cause of the introduction of religion to the world (Freud, 1938). Freud stated that in primitive times people were organized in hordes led by one strong male leader who through his position had unlimited access to the women of the horde. His sons were prohibited from sharing these women and they eventually banded together to oust their father from power. The sons were said to have killed the father and devoured him in the raw as was the custom of the day (Freud, 1938). However, the father had

served as not only a prohibitor but also a protector for the horde. After the father's murder the sons experienced guilt and anxiety related to the loss of their protector. To compensate for this loss they chose a symbolic animal to worship whose spirit then became the substitute protector of the horde. This marked the beginning of Totemism in history according to Freud (1938). The sons were also able to mollify their guilt over the murder by submitting to this higher power and offering worship. Freud believed that this primitive murder of the father was the historical root of the Western religious concept of "Original Sin". He believed that a memory trace of this original event was passed down to future generations through the collective unconscious memory of humanity and that the emergence of various religions represent organized attempts to deal with this original inherited unconscious sense of guilt and anxiety (Freud, 1938).

Freud believed that the function of the numerous rituals in various religions, particularly th. abundance of rules and rituals in Judaism, represents an obsessive/compulsive defense strategy unconsciously designed to assuage a strongly felt inherited sense of guilt and anxiety. Freud felt that Christianity offered a particularly effective means to assuage this original sense of guilt (Freud, 1939). First of all, according to Freud, Christianity address this psychological concern head on through the concept of "Original Sin". Christian theology acknowledge the primary, originally felt sense of guilt mankind inherits. Then the theology offers the perfect expiation for the crime of murdering the father, by sacrificing the son, in the form of Jesus. The crucifixion of Jesus offered humanity exoneration for their Original Sin and is considered to serve the function of saving mankind in this fashion, according to Freud. Freud states that through communion all Christians can share in this atonement (Freud, 1939).

Religion fulfills numerous psychological needs according to Freud. Life is too harsh and fate too cruel, especially in death, for most people to face squarely. Religion promises compensation in a future life for privation on earth and thereby allows people

to maintain a belief in a just world (Freud, 1927). Man can try to "deal" with God through prayer and worship to attempt to gain some control over otherwise uncontrollable events. God also is viewed as a protector and in this way Freud suggests he is a projected father figure for mankind. In addition, virtually all religions offer some means of transcendence of death. Freud viewed religion as an illusion, and suggested that people's primary motivation for following it is the desire for wish fulfillment rather than genuine belief in its truth (Freud, 1927). Freud described religion as a collective mania but suggested that it may spare people the burden of an individual neurosis. He concluded that religion has helped tame man's instincts but it has not made him happy. He believes that religion belongs to mankind's infancy, it hinders growth and is motivated by defensive strivings rather strivings for truth. Mankind should grow up, according to Freud and face the true source of its guilt and anxiety. He wished that humanity could ultimately accept its adulthood and the responsibility for its own fate, as is his goal for a successful individual psychoanalysis.

Two other thinkers whose atheistic writings have been very influential to students of philosophy and beyond are Frederick Nietzsche and Jean-Paul Sartre. Nietzsche, who was the son of a pastor, believed like Freud that religion can lead to peace of mind but away from truth. Nietzsche railed against Christianity and tried to paint a picture of a new human being that would be the antithesis of the Christian (Nietzsche, 1966). Nietzsche saw in Christianity a rejection of life in this world and a focus on a world to come. He believed that Christianity cultivates passivity, guilt, self-abnegation, submission and lack of responsibility. The child of the Gospel, according to Nietzsche, is full of love but lacks the taste for risk and adventure needed to truly take life on (Nietzsche, 1967). His vision of the new man or "Overman" is one who springs toward his own future which he receives from no one but himself. Religions depict everything strong as stemming from outside man, according to Nietzsche, and this has offered

consolation amidst the harshness of life but debased man. Nietzsche declared that humans must face the responsibility for everything they experience. "God is dead" Nietzsche proclaimed (Nietzsche, 1966). People no longer truly believe in God and must take full responsibility for life themselves. This is the key to the existential atheistic position. Man needs great discipline and strength to face this responsibility squarely. Each individual must determine his own direction, take risks and invent his own goals. Nietzsche's conception of the "overman" is one who must "will" the whole of reality for himself (Nietzsche, 1967). Man has a will to power according to Nietzsche, not necessarily over others but to self mastery and the means to attain his own goals. Nietzsche suggested that there is a master and a slave mentality and that religion has its origin in slave natures. This did not necessarily mean that Nietzsche felt some people should be slaves, but that everyone should cultivate themselves as a master of their own lives. People must overcome the dualism of power between man and God expressed in religion, according to Nietzsche, and accept full responsibility for life in this world.

Jean-Paul Sartre outlined numerous central existential themes in his philosophical writings. Sartre declares that humans are "condemned to freedom" (Sartre, 1957). "Condemned" because they did not chose to be born and the effort needed to live a free life is great. Taken itself existence lacks justification - there is no inherent meaning to life. Humans must take complete responsibility to create their own meaning. When people refuse to see their life situation as completely their responsibility, they exercise "bad faith". Religion causes humans to betray their responsibility according to Sartre (Sartre, 1963). Sartre views this stance of responsibility as ultimately liberating and optimistic albeit challenging, but many writers have characterized him as a gloomy pessimist. Sartre views man's very being as a project which at every moment he has the power to make anew. Belief in God is incompatible with human freedom according to Sartre (Sartre, 1957). True freedom requires man to face his aloneness in the universe

and the anxiety that this engenders without trying to deny or escape from this reality. Every human is isolated and compelled to exist for himself. Choice is the crux of human freedom. One forms and renews one's self through one's critical decisions.

In sum, the atheistic thinkers reviewed in this section suggest that religion has been accepted in part because it assuages anxiety, offers a promise of justice, mitigates existential aloneness and helps humankind duck from full responsibility for its life. None of the thinkers surveyed believe the true atheistic position is an easy one but they view it as in line with truth and the responsible position to take to create a just and strong life here on earth. Given the anxiety and difficulty each thinker acknowledges comes with the responsible atheistic stance, one may hypothesize that even atheists believe that the religious find life somewhat easier and might derive greater satisfaction. This might be true for non-religious people who do not have a sense of purpose in their lives but less true for non-religious people who have taken the responsibility to create a vision and meaning for their lives. Atheists might also suggest that the non-religious, particularly those who have created a meaning for their lives, may cope with earthly problems in a more responsible and effective manner.

Psychological Analysis of Religious Faith and Doubt

The previous section of this review summarized the world outlook expressed by two major religious systems and by several atheist writers. This section will focus on the psychological dimension of faith, doubt and meaning. Specifically, this section will include an exploration of object relations theory applied to the phenomenon of religious faith and doubt. Since one focus of this research project is to assess the impact that a well developed sense of meaning in life has on one's ability to effectively cope with difficult life events, an analysis of the psychology of meaning will be presented.

Psychology of Meaning

While some psychologists have suggested that the primary motivating force in man is his will to power (e.g., Adler) and others have suggested it is his will to pleasure (e.g., Freud) Victor Frankl, an Austrian born psychiatrist, suggests that man is fundamentally motivated by a will to meaning (Frankl, 1959). Frankl views pleasure as a side effect or by product of the fulfillment of man's strivings but suggests that it is spoiled to the extent to which it is made a goal in itself. Similarly, Frankl views power as a prerequisite for meaning fulfillment but not a truly satisfying end in itself. Therefore, Frankl suggests that both the will to power and the will to pleasure are derivatives of a more fundamental human orientation, a will to meaning. Frankl disputes Maslow's notion that "self-actualization" is the ultimate goal of psychological health. Frankl suggests that man only returns to himself and to self-absorption when he makes self-actualization his goal while he finds identity and true actualization to the extent to which he becomes committed to something beyond himself. Existence, according to Frankl, falters unless it is lived in terms of transcendence toward something beyond the self (Frankl, 1971).

Frankl suggests that the present era is marked by a sense of existential frustration and existential vacuum (Frankl, 1971). He attributes this to two primary losses: man's initial loss of a sense of instinctual security as a result of his attainment of self-consciousness and his more recent loss of traditions which governed his life in former times. He believes that man's quest for meaning and his spiritual aspirations should be taken at face value by clinicians and not reduced or analyzed away. His primary objective as a clinician is to help his clients discover the meaning of their lives.

Frankl, like earlier theorists discussed, ascribes to an existential phenomenological view of reality. One only knows reality through one's interpretations, according to Frankl. Frankl believes that man has freedom of will such that while he is

not free from life conditions, he is free to take a stand toward those conditions (Frankl, 1971). Freedom entails responsibility. Frankl asks his patients to interpret their own being and to create their own vision and sense of meaning for their lives. Frankl suggests that man can find meaning in three ways: through what he gives to life, what he takes from life and primarily through the stand he adopts toward a fate he can no longer change.

Frankl developed a clinical technique called "logotherapy" to help people find meaning in their lives, even in their suffering (Frankl, 1957). Frankl himself was a concentration camp victim during World War II and he discovered that even under the most dire of circumstances he still had choices, if only to take a stand toward his situation and derive meaning from this stand. He noted that those prisoners who had something to live for beyond themselves, who held onto some belief in a meaning to their existence, were better able to survive despite their physical condition, than were those prisoners who felt little sense of meaning or purpose to their survival. Through his techniques of logotherapy Frankl tries to help people discover the meaning to their lives, the vision they are committed to beyond themselves, and to recognize their ability to take a stand toward their conditions in line with this vision and thereby create meaning at each juncture of their lives.

Meaning can be derived through religious and non-religious channels. Various theorists have differed in their view of the efficacy of the religious channel as a medium to meaning and truth. While some theorists have expressed a positive view of the psychological implication of religious faith and myth (e.g., Campbell, Jung) others have viewed religious myth as helping to screen man from truth (e.g., Freud, Nietszche). In a similar fashion, theorists have differed in their views of the psychological benefits or detriments of a religious orientation. Several perspectives on the intra-psychic

implications of religious faith and doubt by prominent object relations theorists will next be presented.

Object Relations Theory and Faith

Sigmund Freud believed that religious mythology had a different significance for society than did various other psychological theorists. While Freud viewed man's relation to God similar to a child's relation to his father, certain other object relations theorists (i.e.,Winnicott, McDargh) have described faith as related in nature, function and quality to a person's relation with their mother.

Object relations theorists tend to take a great interest in the mother-child dyad and the separation-individuation process. They see these as primary experiences that affect the nature and quality of one's relationships throughout life. These later relationships may also include one's sense of relationship to a higher power and one's internalized object representation of that power.

Roheim (in Segal, 1977) sees the function of myth as serving to forestall object-loss of the mother that corresponds with the trauma of birth. Similarly Joseph Campbell (1964), a renowned classicist and popularizer of the study of comparative mythology, has described myth as a second womb, helping humankind to face its initiation to life and death. He states that myth can symbolically help to wean one from the mother enabling one to feel connected to an external symbolic object throughout life and thereby be able to separate from the mother without feeling completely alone and alienated in the world.

Various object relations theorists describe one's ability to have faith and the form that faith takes as related to one's early relational experiences (McDargh, 1983; Sandler, 1960). The dynamics of faith has been related to the dynamics of trust by some theorists (Erikson, 1963; Meissner, 1970). Faith, according to McDargh (1983) seems to proceed from some prior foundational sense of the trustworthiness and goodness of the original

object of faith, (the mothering one). The infant is thought to form internal representations of the other, or part other (initially the gratifying, ambivalent or rejecting other) and himself in relation to this other. The formation of basic trust, according to Sandler (1960) is related to the elaboration of a libidinally cathected internal mother image. Erikson (1963) hypothesizes that the achievement of a basic sense of trust is the first psychological developmental challenge facing the young child. It is in this basic trust McDargh suggests, that Erikson locates the origins of the virtue of hope. Although one's ability to have a faith of any sort in a higher power may not be determined by the nature of one's early object relations, the type of faith one develops and one's internal representation of "God" is thought to be affected by these early relational experiences (McDargh, 1983).

Object relations theorists are also very interested in the dynamics of the separation-individuation process, which Mahler (1968) proposed lasts from about five months to around thirty to thirty-six months. However, she and others argue that the psychological process of individuation and development of the self is a life-long process. The separation-individuation process has also been identified with the life issue of becoming a self which has been defined as a central matter of human faith by certain theorists (Fowler, 1981; Neibuhr, 1961). Some theorists have suggested that one's ability to have faith and the form of that faith is related to one's ability to truly achieve a separate sense of self (Helfaer, 1972; McDargh, 1983).

Otto Rank (1914) suggested that the human condition of ultimate limitation and dependency necessitates a heroism in everyday life which requires the development of an explicit immortality ideology and myths of heroic transcendence of the earthly conditions of limitation. Ernst Becker (1973) postulated that all of human motivation is centered around two primary needs - a need for separation and a need for relatedness. In either direction lies the possibility of the terror of death and the threat of non-being. Ultimate

separation from being can be represented by death, while extreme relatedness can be expressed by feelings of engulfment and loss of the self. Man needs to achieve a balance between these two needs and has fears about falling too far in either direction. To avoid feelings of separation, human beings often give their loyalty to strong leaders or intense interpersonal relations and thereby attempt to dissolve the loneliness of the integrity of the responsible self (Becker, 1973). In the other direction people may retreat and deny their dependance and essential interconnectedness. Becker suggests that the taming of this two-fold terror requires transference - allaying oneself with powers beyond the self. Some have suggested that "faith" could be substituted for Becker's notion of transference (McDargh, 1983). Becker concluded that faith, that takes as its object transcendent reality, is the most humane, worthy and workable life way.

Helfaer (1972) suggests that religious doubt is related to the dread of fusion - the fear of loss of self or annihilation. Helfaer believes that the basic source of doubt is the wish for and yet dread of fusion with the primary object. The wish is for hope, wholeness, meaning but the dread is of self-engulfment and annihilation. Helfaer believes that religious faith is an outcome of ego-synthesis. He views religious belief to be a primary symbolic vehicle available to the individual which enables him to establish consistent relations with social reality. Helfaer suggests that any sort of religious doubt which is pervasive or deep represents a profound lack of closure, conflict or confusion in the coherence of the ego.

Pruyser, in his book Between Belief and Unbelief (1963) came to a very different understanding of religious doubt. He argues that lack of belief is just as natural as belief, or possibly more natural. He suggests that Kierkegaard's notion of the "leap of faith" implies that unbelief is a more natural state than belief. He also suggests that belief and unbelief are in a dynamic, interactional relationship and suggests that the vantage point is shifting from belief to unbelief as the natural or normative condition.

Whether or not belief or unbelief results from an arrestment in psychic development, some theorists (i.e., Winnecott) suggest that religious belief can serve to fulfill certain object relational needs. Helfaer and McDargh might argue that one's ability to achieve a healthy faith is related to his or her successful negotiation of the separation-individuation process. If one's ego-synthesis or sense of self has not been adequately established, a person may experience alienation, engulfment or annihilation in their sense of relationship to a higher power.

Since the separation-individuation process is never fully completed individuals need to be able to negotiate throughout the life span a view of themselves as separate and independent while maintaining the sense of inner sustenance and connectedness. D.W. Winnicott (1960) proposed that the passage to selfhood was a matter of the internalization of good parental objects. Winnicott proposed that in the process of achieving an adequately developed internal representation of the mother, children make use of "transitional objects" (i.e., baby blankets, teddy bears) which evoke for them the sense of security associated with the doings of the "good enough" parent. Transitional object phenomena represents the transiting from involvement with purely inner reality to engagement with strictly external or shared reality. Winnicott argued that one does not outgrow the need for the transitional phenomena but that the ability to use such phenomena enlarges into the ability to creatively use culture and religion. Winnicott suggested that the object representation of God can have significance as a transitional object. For some people God functions as the all accepting other, according to Winnicott, who like the original mother, is the preserver of the "background of safety" that makes play and creative life possible. God, according to Winnicott, may serve as that transitional object which allows the person to experience and express his true self. Winnicott suggests that to use an object representation of God in a positive way one must first develop a foundational sense of trust which can serve as a referent for the

representation of God. Also God must be discovered or created by a child and not forced upon him. The ability to use the representation of God as a transitional object supports faith, McDargh believes, which makes it possible for people to tolerate dependance, accept ambivalence, embrace aloneness and love unreservedly. However, if the image of God has been associated with earlier punitive, controlling or rejecting internalizations of the original other, God might be experienced as more frightening. When the original object representation of the parent is formed it is influenced by the defensive and adaptive distortions that accompany the original affective response to the parent. These defensive distortions can change, but they can also influence subsequent object representations such as the individual's initial representation of God.

If God and religion can serve as a transitional object for people, helping them to separate adequately and develop an individuated self without becoming alienated or disconnected from a general sense of being, then the representation of God can also help ease the universal fear of death. As mentioned earlier, virtually all major religions address this fear and propose some means of transcending death. Since death is separation from being taken to its extreme, it is universally feared. A belief in God or some transcendental life force can serve to help people feel more unified and connected to an ultimate principle both during life and in their thoughts of the possibility of a life to come.

It is not fair to suggest from this that religious people have a greater capacity for trust or faith based on early object relations than do non-religious people. This might be true in some cases, but many people in this era are brought up with no religion and have no reason to turn to religion on their own. Some atheistic thinkers might suggest that it takes a great sense of wholeness of self to endure the anxiety that is aroused by acknowledging one's aloneness in the universe and living life responsibly in the face of this. Although a religious faith might not stem from greater psychological well-being, it

may provide psychic resources to the faithful and help to create and sustain a sense of health and wholeness. Even the atheistic existentialists acknowledge that facing reality without the comfort of God engenders considerable anxiety. Since both Judaism and Christianity advance a belief in a personal God in dynamic relation with man throughout life, the relational dimension added to the life of the faithful in both these groups must be considered a significant psychological benefit of their religious involvement. The possibility that this does provide a life long transitional object relation which allows them to feel separate and yet not alone in the universe may be very real. The relational benefits associated with the practice of both Judaism and Lutheranism should be considered when speculating on the impact of faith on life concerns such as satisfaction with life, purpose and meaning in life and the ability to adapt to negative life events.

Summary of Theoretical Literature Review

The psychological components of a religious orientation to life are many faceted. Summarizing from this review the most significant psychological facets seem to be: 1) The offer of a ready made world view which includes a belief that there is a purpose to life, a meaning to life and an ultimate destination for the world and for one's self. This does not mean that people can not chose their own purpose within a religious belief system but simply that life itself is viewed to have a purpose and a destination. 2) The potentially meaning enhancing, spiritual/psychological impact of having a personal interaction with a higher being throughout life. This gives each human act significance since it is observed by and conducted in relation to another "being". This may also add dimensionality, as well as a sense of security, fullness and relatedness which can be life enhancing. However, the fear of a punitive God may cause great anxiety. 3) A possible means of salvation from a personal sense of guilt, incompletion or self-alienation. Belief in the goodness of God and his creation, in spite of its shortcomings, and a submission to

God, may transfer into a self-acceptance, forgiveness and lead to a sense of wholeness. Also, religion may help people get in touch with severed or unconscious aspects of themselves. 4) Other benefits might include a belief that there is ultimate justice in the world, a belief that one can transcend death, a possible sense of influence over certain life events through prayer, a feeling that there is ultimate protection in the universe and relief from loneliness through participation in a community of believers. Although these sound very positive generally, there are also some potentially significant negative consequences of a religious orientation if it is approached in a destructive fashion. For instance, belief in a punitive and vengeful God could be quite terrifying. The concept of eternal damnation opens the way to a potentially horrifying fear for those who interpret this concept literally. Also, religious faith may foster a passivity or submission in the face of certain life conditions, according to some thinkers. Some of these thinkers also suggest that religious belief can lead people to feel small and not to take adequate responsibility for their lives. However, even the atheistic writers tend to agree that for most believers the positive benefits of religion outweigh the negative with respect to their ability to experience a sense of satisfaction and purpose in life. They may disagree with the notion that a religious orientation would lead to a greater ability to cope with negative life events. It may lead to a greater ability to endure negative life events, but it might not foster the ability to cope more effectively and responsibly with such events.

A review of atheistic and existential writings suggests that life without God may be anxiety provoking and lonely. However, it is possible that those atheists who are able to face their situation squarely and to define a vision for their lives and create a sense of meaning and purpose may achieve satisfaction with life and may also display great ability to cope with difficult life events since they take a position of active responsibility for life on this earth. The individuals most vulnerable to a sense of nihilism, disillusion, despair and personal neurosis may be those individuals who neither have a religious

orientation nor a personal sense of purpose or vision for their lives. Those who view life as simply to be lived for pleasure alone without adequate acknowledgement of the need for discipline and commitment, may actually suffer since both religious and existential thinkers emphasize that life is challenging and demanding and that to live fully requires appropriate recognition of the nature of the challenge inherent in authentic living.

So far this review has included a segment on the world view and psychological dimensions of adherence to differing belief systems. The following segment is intended to add an empirical perspective on the issues of religiosity, satisfaction with life, sense of purpose in life and effective coping.

Empirical Literature Review

The relationship between religiosity and well-being has been studied extensively (Cox & Hammonds, 1988; Dufton & Perlman, 1986; Morse & Wisocki, 1987). Religiosity can be defined broadly as "the manifestation of faithful devotion to an acknowledged ultimate reality or deity" (Webster's 9th, p.198). Religiosity has been operationalized in a number of ways, the most common method being through response on a self-report questionnaire made up of items asking things like: frequency of prayer, frequency of church attendance, belief in God or deity, belief in an afterlife. In a study investigating the relationship between prayer and measures of well being Margaret Paloma (1986) found that among 560 Alton, Ohio residents studied there was a significant positive relationship between engagement in meditative prayer and subjective reports of general well being. The thought content of meditative prayer was studied by Benson (1984) who found that meditation with a religious content was more effective in helping to lower blood pressure among his sample than was meditation without a religious content.

Religiosity and life satisfaction has been studied by various researchers (Cox & Hammonds, 1989; Georgemiller & Getsinger, 1987; Roth, 1987). Harold Cox and Andre Hammonds (1988) studied this topic using older individuals (age 54+). They found that those who attended church expressed greater life satisfaction and attained higher personal adjustment scores on a self-report questionnaire than those who reported not attending religious services. Brian Dufton and Daniel Perlman (1986) administered a religiosity questionnaire to 232 college students. Using the response on this measure they classified students as either a conservative believer, nonconservative believer or non-believer. They next administered the Purpose in Life Test developed by Crumbaugh and Maholick (1964). The PIL test is based on the concepts of Victor Frankl and was designed to assess the degree to which an individual experiences a sense of meaning and purpose in life. Through the use of factor analysis on responses to the PIL inventory, Dufton and Perlman found that items clustered into two factors, one representing life satisfaction and the other life purpose. Conservative believers were found to score significantly higher on both factors of the PIL inventory than were the non-conservative believers or non-believers.

In an attempt to understand one of the components of "well-being" various researchers have studied the issue of "hardiness" and its relationship to health (Maddi, Kobasa &Hoover, 1978; Kobasa, 1979). In 1979 Suzanne C. Kobasa studied a group of middle and upper level executives in order to investigate some of the personality factors that may relate to an individual's ability to stay healthy under stress. Kobasa found that executives who demonstrated a stronger commitment to themselves and expressed a greater sense of meaning in their lives as measured by the "Alienation Test" (Maddi, Kobasa & Hoover, 1978) tended to report experiencing high levels of stress without falling ill. Executives who expressed a less strong sense of meaning in their lives and a less vigorous attitude toward the environment more often reported becoming sick after

their encounter with stressful life events. Maddi, Hoover & Kobasa (1982) report that persons who demonstrate a stronger "commitment disposition" toward life seem to resist illness better than others less "committed". They define a commitment disposition as a tendency to involve oneself in, rather than experience alienation from, whatever one is doing or encounters. They further suggest that committed persons have a generalized sense of purpose that allows them to identify with and find meaningful the events, things and persons of their environment. An additional personality attribute found by these authors to be related to successful coping is what they term a "control disposition". These authors suggest that a sense of control leads individuals to actions aimed at transforming life events into something consistent with an ongoing life plan. The authors conclude that a strong sense of meaning and purpose in life seems to mitigate the effects of stress and even possibly help to forestall the development of stress related illness.

Taylor, a researcher at the University of California, Los Angeles, has proposed a theory of cognitive adaptation to threatening events. She argues that when an individual has experienced a personally threatening event the readjustment process focuses around three themes, one of the primary being a search for meaning in the experience. The search for meaning attempts to answer such questions as: what is the significance of the event? What caused the event to happen? What does my life mean now? Taylor posits that an individual's efforts to successfully adjust to negative events rests upon his or her ability to form and maintain a set of illusions. By illusions she means a set of beliefs whose maintenance requires looking at known facts in a particular light because a different slant would yield a less positive picture. Although Taylor does not discuss the role of religion in the maintenance of illusion Sigmund Freud (1927) has written extensively on this matter. Freud suggested that all religious belief is an illusion in that the primary motivation behind the development of belief according to Freud, is a desire for wish fulfillment. Although Freud did not categorize religious beliefs as delusions, he

personally felt that there was no factual reason to adhere to them. However, whether these religious "illusions" are true or not Taylor (1983) suggests that the development of and adherence to illusions, far from impeding adjustment, may be critical to mental health especially in the area of adjustment to negative or threatening life events.

One psychological factor often considered to be crucial to an individual's ability to adjust to negative life events is hope. Meissner, a priest and renowned psychoanalyst (1987), views hope as the motive force of change in human development as it "promotes future goals in return for surrendering attachment to present conditions" (1987, p. 186). Meissner discusses the role of hope in adjustment to loss in his book Life and Faith (1987). Most negative human life events involve some form of loss either actual or symbolic. According to Freud (1907) the loss of anything valued sets off the operation of psychological mechanisms that mitigate the sense of loss by the appropriation of substitutes. The underlying force behind the relationship between loss and restitution is primarily libidinal. Libido restores its loss by seeking new objects for its cathexis, a process that may be adaptive or not. According to Meissner (1987) it is hope that determines the success of this restorative effort. The adaptive effort to deal with loss that injures the self, Meissner explains, requires an ego response that directs libidinal energy to real restitutive objects. Left to itself the libido will respond to loss by following the principal of pleasure and immediacy of gratification leading in the direction of cathecting inner (hallucinatory) objects. A return to the outer (real) world requires a modification of this process by the reality principal. It is hope, Meissner argues, that makes this return possible by redirecting psychic energies toward real possibilities in the outer (real) order.

Carson, Soeken and Grimm (1987) designed a psychological study to investigate the relationship between hope and religious and existential well-being. These researchers administered the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (Ellison, 1983) and the State Trait Hope Scale (Grimm, 1984) to 197 nursing students. The Spiritual Well-Being Scale consists of

a 10 item measure of well-being in relation to God (religious well- being). Both state and trait hope were found to correlate positively with spiritual well being (encompassing both religious and existential well-being). Subjects were also questioned regarding religiosity. Both the perception of being religious and the influence of religious beliefs were positively related to hope, spiritual and existential well-being.

One conclusion that can be drawn from the above stated literature review is that religiosity, to the extent that it helps an individual to find a sense of meaning and purpose in life and to maintain a hopeful attitude toward existence, might be hypothesized to relate positively to an individual's ability to cope with and adjust to negative life events. However, the literature suggests that the ability to find meaning in life events and to establish a hopeful and purposeful attitude toward life is what seems to be related to psychological well-being and adjustment to stress. The findings on the effect of religiosity itself (without considering its relation to meaning making and other existential concerns) on mental health are somewhat more mixed (Bergin, 1983). In 1983 Bergin conducted a meta-analytic review of 30 studies dealing with the relationship between religiosity and mental health (assessed by measures such as the MMPI and Taylor Manifest Anxiety Scale). He found that 14 of the studies reported a positive relation between religiosity and mental health, while the rest reported either a negative relation or no relation whatsoever. Not all aspects of religiosity (such as frequency of church attendance or frequency of prayer) necessarily relate to an individual's ability to find meaning in his or her life. Therefore, in studying adjustment to stress and negative life events, it might be helpful to include a measure that assesses something more than an individual's self report of "religiosity" but instead taps into the manner in which an individual finds meaning in his or her life and the quality and type of meaning he or she is able to find.

Faith Development

Faith, according to Fowler of Emory University's Candler School of Theology is defined as "that knowing or construing by which persons or communities recognize themselves as related to the ultimate conditions of their existence" (Meissner, 1987, p. 114). Fowler views the development of faith as a progression through a sequence of stages by which persons shape their relatedness to a transcendent center or centers of value (Moseley, Jarvis & Fowler, 1986). Fowler has produced a theory of faith development which envisions the types of human faith experience as divided into six categories or stages. Each stage in Fowler's scheme represents an increasingly more complex perspective on central aspects of meaning and purpose. Fowler's scheme of faith development incorporate elements of Kolberg's theory of moral development, Piaget's theory of cognitive development, Erikson's scheme of psycho-social development and Kegan's notion of self-development. From Piaget, Fowler has adopted a largely structuralist approach to faith development theory. Fowler states that the structuralist belief that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, that parts are structurally integrated and that structures are dynamic are preserved in his theory. Fowler sees faith as a transcendent function composed of more than merely what can be derived through interviews or analysis. The aspects of faith constitute an organized pattern of meaning making in Fowler's scheme. Faith development is viewed as a dynamic process which has a developmental sequence. Fowler's faith development theory recognizes the interdependence of structural, functional and genetic aspects of development. Fowler's recognition that functions are the transformational activities (i.e., assimilation and accommodation) through which structures emerge is preserved in his view of the psychological process behind an individual's transition from one stage of faith to another. Transition (especially at the higher stages) usually is precipitated by a major life change or crisis which necessitates a new level of equilibration.

Fowler has borrowed ideas about social perspective taking, bounds of social awareness and types of moral thinking from both Piaget and Kolberg. He has incorporated ideas on ego-development and on self-development from both Loevinger and Kegan's work. Fowler's scheme integrates these different conceptions of human development and applies them toward a broad and comprehensive understanding of faith.

Fowler has devised a personal interview, similar to a life review interview, as the instrument from which he gleans the information necessary to categorize an individual into an appropriate stage of faith development. This interview is conducted individually and consists of questions addressing significant life concerns such as: relationships, present values and commitments, religion, and crisis and peak experiences. Each response is categorized at a given stage of development based on the type of thought it demonstrates in the following areas: Form of logic, social perspective taking, form of moral judgement, bounds of social awareness, locus of authority, form of world coherence and symbolic function. Subjects at each stage display an increasing level of complexity and depth in the above mentioned categories. Individuals are not expected to pass through each stage. Many people reach a given level of faith development and remain at that level indefinitely. As mentioned previously, often a very significant, usually difficult life event may precipitate one's transition into a higher stage of faith development. Individuals at higher stages display more advanced and complex moral and cognitive development and tend to display greater individuation than those at lower stages.

Fowler's measure, overall, taps into the complexity and comprehensiveness of one's world view. It addresses the extent and form of meaning making subjects display in their lives. A subject at a high level of faith development does not necessarily have to be religious in a traditional sense. Rather, such a subject would be able to express a

complex, dimensional and coherent world view, whether organized around a religious theme or not.

The Stages

Fowler's stages of faith development are characterized by the themes below:

Stage One : Intuitive - Projective Faith - This stage is associated with Piaget's "pre-operational" stage. It is marked by ego-centric thought. Fantasy and reality are not well distinguished at this stage. One's ability to take the perspective of the other is extremely limited and one's sense of self is not clearly differentiated from the object world at this stage. Thought is fluid, episodic and seemingly unconnected. Cognitive processes are one dimensional.

Stage Two : Mythic - Literal Faith - Concrete operational thought emerges. The subject is able to connect events into meaningful patterns. The sense of time and physical causality emerges. Fantasy is distinguished from reality but a fascination with narrative and story (usually of literal and concrete type) develops. One is able to be aware of friends and other members of the wider community at this stage. Perspective taking and awareness of another's interiority are still quite limited.

Stage Three : Synthetic - Conventional Faith - Perspective taking skills advance and early formal operational thought emerges. The subject demonstrates an intense concern for the building and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. Conventional authority is accepted. At stage three subjects are oriented toward mutuality but they are not yet able to place the other, or the sense of relationship within the context of a larger system

or whole. A reflective sense of self that can stand apart from social relations is not yet
evident.

Stage Four : Individuative - Reflective Faith - Individuation becomes very prominent
at this stage. A break with reliance on external authority is seen. The locus of meaning-
making shifts and both values and conflicts move inside. Formal operational thought is
attained. A change at this stage is often precipitated by an encounter with new persons or
groups. "Finding one's own identity" becomes very important. This is a time of
autonomy. The self as a distinct entity emerges for the first time. Thinking at this stage
is critical and rational. Stage four subjects seek to construct and maintain fairly rigid
distinctions between subject and object. Concerns are with self-definition and boundary
maintenance.

Stage Five : Conjunctive Faith - Modes of meaning making are "dialogical" at this
stage. Subjects display a greater flexibility and fluidity of boundaries than in the
previous stage. Subjects display awareness that one lives within a plurality of meaning
systems. There is an active embracing of multi-layered meanings for richness and depth.
Most prominently, there is an attempt to hold these perspectives in critical tension
without reductionism. The ability to shift from one perspective to another to illuminate
different aspects is prominent. Subjects resist the temptation to deal with conflict by
collapsing polarities. An increased capacity for self criticism is seen.

Stage Six : Universalizing Faith - The more narrowly egoic concerns of previous
stages are transcended because they are ordered by an all-encompassing ideal or vision of
the good that is indicative of a sense of relationship to and participation in the whole or
totality of being. Individuals at this stage engage in a giving over of oneself to a

relatedness, a participation in a wider community that becomes extended to include all of humankind.

Hypotheses

Summarizing from this theoretical and empirical review of literature several hypotheses regarding the main focus of this study are implicated:

1) Religious people may be expected to display a greater sense of satisfaction in life than non-religious people due to the life enhancing quality of the relational component of religious faith and the fact that life in religion is viewed to have an overall direction and purpose and one's individual actions matter in the overall scheme of God's plan.

2) Religious people would be expected to display a greater sense of purpose in life than non-religious people on average, because religion does spell out a worldview and an overall direction and meaning to life and because one's individual actions have meaning in relation to God.

3) Individuals who have been able to define a meaning and vision for their lives, expressed by a high sense of purpose in life, with or without a religious orientation, would be expected to experience a greater sense of satisfaction with life than those with little sense of purpose in life.

4) People with a greater sense of purpose in life, with or without a religious orientation, would be expected to cope more effectively with negative life events than those with a less developed sense of purpose in their lives. This is thought to be related

to an attitude of responsibility generally attributed to those with a well developed sense of purpose in life and an ability to find meaning even in adversity, which has been found to relate positively to measures of coping.

5) Religious people would be expected to cope more effectively with negative life events than non-religious people. Since coping has been hypothesized to relate to one's ability to find meaning in an event, and religiosity has been found to relate to one's ability to find meaning, it is expected that religious individuals will display more effective coping skills then will non-religious individuals.

6) People at high stages of faith development would be expected to cope more effectively with negative life events than would people at lower stages of faith development. Since individuals at higher stages of faith display thought characterized by cognitive complexity, multiple perspective taking, flexibility and dimensionality, it is predicted that these individuals would utilize these attributes in the service of making sense of and adjusting positively to life experiences.

7)Non-religious people with a low or undeveloped sense of purpose in life would be expected to display relatively low levels of satisfaction with life and relatively limited ability to cope effectively with negative life events.

METHOD

<u>Subjects</u> -

Subjects were 50 adults of at least 26 years of age. Fifteen were Jewish individuals who describe their level of religious involvement to be "orthodox". Fifteen were Lutheran individuals who are members of a traditional Lutheran parish in Chicago, Illinois. Twenty subjects comprised a group consisting of a mixture of Jewish and Lutheran individuals who describe themselves as "atheist" or "agnostic" with respect to belief in a supreme being. Of these 20, 8 individuals were originally from a Lutheran background and 12 were originally from a Jewish background. The mean age for subjects across all the groups was 42.3 years with a range from 26 to 82 years of age. Subjects in the religious Lutheran group had an average age of 47.7 years, orthodox Jewish subjects had an average age of 37.7 years, atheist Lutheran subjects had an average age of 32.6 years and atheist Jewish subjects averaged 48.1 years of age. Subjects ranged in education level from high school graduates to those with advanced post-graduate degrees. The average level of education for all subjects was 16.2 years of study which corresponds to completion of a four year Bachelor's degree. There were 26 males and 24 females who participated in this research project. Among the orthodox Jewish group there were eight male subjects and seven female subjects. Among religious Lutherans there were eight male subjects and seven female subjects. Among the atheist Jewish group there were six male and six female subjects and among the atheist Lutheran group there were four male and four female subjects. All subjects completed the Satisfaction with Life measure, the Purpose in Life measure, the Religiosity measure and participated in an individual Faith Development interview. In addition two measures - the Ego Development measure and the Amended Guided Autobiography Measure (used to assess adaptation to negative life events) were left with subjects who were asked to

complete these at a later time and return them by mail to the experimenter. Only 36 subjects returned these last two measures. Of these subjects who completed the full battery of measures, 12 were orthodox Jewish individuals, 10 were religious Lutheran individuals, six were atheist Lutherans and eight were atheist Jews. All subjects were volunteers recruited either through a church or synagogue or by word of mouth through friends. In addition, some atheists were recruited through a notice placed in the Chicago Atheist Newsletter or through an announcement made at the Chicago Atheist Book Club. Subjects were not paid for their participation.

Measures -

Satisfaction With Life Scale: The Satisfaction With Life Scale, developed by Diener, Emmons, Larson & Griffen (1983) is a five item measure assessing person's global satisfaction with their lives. Examples of questions include : "In most ways my life is close to my ideal" and "I am satisfied with my life". Subjects rate these statements on a 7 pt. likert type scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree. All items show high factor loadings on a single common factor. The scale has a very high alpha and test-retest reliability. The scale is balanced in terms of response direction so acquiescence is not a problem.

Purpose in Life Test: The Purpose in Life Test developed by Crumbaugh and Maholick (1964) is a 20 item attitude scale designed to assess the extent to which individuals have a sense of purpose and meaning in life. The scale was constructed from the orientation of "logotherapy" - a system of existential psychotherapy developed by Frankl which aims to treat people suffering from psychological difficulties by helping them find meaning in life. Subjects rate each test item on a seven point Likert type scale. Examples of test items include : "In life I have:" with the answer choices ranging from 1= no goals or aims

at all to 7= very clear goals and aims. "My personal existence is": 1= utterly meaningless without purpose to 7= very purposeful and meaningful. "I regard my ability to find a meaning, purpose or mission in life as : " 1= practically none to 7= very great. Raw scores from responses to the 20 items are tabulated. Scores are interpreted in ranges. A raw score from 92-112 is in the indecisive range. Scores above 112 indicate the presence of definite purpose and meaning in life; Scores below 92 indicate the lack of clear meaning and purpose. Norms are provided for normal and patient groups. Construct validity has been assessed through correlation of PIL scores with therapist's ratings of patient's sense of meaning and purpose in life as well as minister's ratings of parishioner's sense of purpose in life. Correlation between the PIL and therapist's ratings = .38. Correlation between the PIL and minister's ratings =.47.

Religiosity Questionnaire: The religiosity questionnaire is a seven item self-report measure designed by this experimenter to assess the extent to which person's consider themselves to be "religious" applying a conventional understanding of that term. Subjects respond to the seven items on a five point Likert scale. Items include: "Do you believe in a supreme being?" with responses ranging from 1= absolutely not, without doubt to 5= absolutely without doubt. "Do you adhere to the beliefs of any organized religion?" 1= no, not at all to 5= yes, completely. "How often do you pray?" and "How would you rate the quality of your sense of relationship to a supreme being?" The scale is balanced in terms of response direction so that acquiescence is not a problem.

Faith Development Interview: The faith development interview designed by Fowler (1963) is a personal interview intended to assess an individual's level of development in the area of faith. Faith, according to Fowler, has a number of dimensions. The questions incorporated in this interview fall in the following categories: significant relationships,

present values and commitments, religion, and crisis and peak experiences. Responses to each question are assessed on seven dimensions, which correspond to Fowler's view of the salient dimensions that determine an individual's quality and level of faith. These dimensions of thought include: form of logic, social perspective taking, form of moral judgement, bounds of social awareness, locus of authority, form of world coherence and symbolic function.

Fowler's model of faith development, similar to Loevinger's conceptions of ego stages is a structural developmental model in which qualitatively distinct stages are arranged on a hierarchical continuum. The earlier stages (Stage 1- "Intuitive - Projective", Stage 2- "Mythic-Literal", stage 3- "Synthetic-Conventional") involve simplistic, conventional modes of meaning making in which religious and moral values are not questioned and thinking is primarily ego-centric. In the later stages (Stage 4- "individuative-reflective", Stage 5- "conjunctive" and Stage 6- "Universalizing faith") meaning is derived through greater reflection and questioning, thinking is more complex and dynamic and multiple perspectives are apprehended and valued. More indepth characterization of meaning making at each stage has been presented earlier in the review of literature.

Each response is evaluated in terms of the dimensions of thought it incorporates (e.g., form of logic, form of moral judgement) and the stage of faith development evident for each relevant dimension. A total stage of faith for a subject is determined by computing an average of that subject's individual response scores. The numerical average of all the individual response codes is used as a final criterion for stage assessment and placement. Inter-rater reliability for new raters is reported by Fowler to be .88 and for experienced raters as .93. Inter-rater reliability was tabulated for this study by comparing the scores of two independent coders on 10 full taped interviews. Inter-rater reliability was determined to be .80.

Washington University Sentence Completion Test: The sentence completion form 81-A is an 18 item measure extracted from the original 36 item sentence completion test designed by Loevinger and Wessler (1966). This test is designed to assess an individual's level of ego development. Loevinger's model of ego development is a structural developmental model in which qualitatively distinct ego stages are arranged on a theoretical continuum. The early, more immature stages in her hierarchical model of development (Stages 1-1 or "Symbiotic", 1-2 or "Impulsive", Delta or "Self-Protective", or 1-3 "Conformist") involve simplistic and global frames of meaning. Issues are apprehended in superficial, rigid, black and white terms and one's orientation is toward self-protection and conformity. At higher stages (1-4 "Conscientious", 1-5 "Autonomous" and 1-6 "Integrated") one displays greater cognitive complexity, respect for individuality, more questioning toward conformist standards and an ability to apprehend and cope with conflicting information and values. The 18 items are sentence stems including: "Raising a family...", "A man's job...", "My mother and I...". Subject's completed sentences are each evaluated for ego-stage and an overall ego-stage level is determined for responses to the full test. Norms are reported for different subject samples. Inter-rater reliability among trained raters has been found to be high (generally ranging between .78-.93).

Amended Guided Autobiography: This measure is an abridged and amended version of McAdams' Guided Autobiography measure (1988). The measure consists of three questions addressing negative life events (one interpersonal, one achievement focused, and one question addressing a negative event in human history). Subjects are asked to explain each life event in terms of what happened, when it happened, what the subject was thinking and feeling and what the event says about who they are, were or might be. In addition subjects are asked to respond to questions such as: "Did you feel there was a

meaning in the event? If so, what was this meaning?" "Did you draw any implications from the event about your life or life in general?" "Was there any underlying belief about life that enabled you to cope with this event?" In addition, subjects are asked to describe what behavioral and psychological things they did to cope with the event and to rate how well they believe they coped on a 1-5, Likert-type scale.

Responses were scored in three main areas. The primary score computed from this measure was a score representing "efficacy of coping". In addition, a score was computed for quality of affective response and for the extent to which subjects were able to find meaning in the event and/or to articulate a worldview. The efficacy of coping score was comprised of three dimensions. The first dimension assessed the appropriateness of the coping response. This was based upon the conclusions of Lazarus and Folkman (1982) who found that certain types of problems are coped with more effectively through the use of certain types of coping strategies. More specifically, Lazarus and Folkman report that problems of a changeable nature tend to be most effectively approached using a problem focused strategy of coping while problems that are unchangeable often warrant a more emotionally based coping strategy. Subject's reported negative life events were first assessed to determine whether they were of a changeable or unchangeable nature. Next subjects were given 3, 6, or 9 points depending upon the appropriateness of their strategy of coping as determined by the findings of Lazarus and Folkman. Three points represented an inappropriate, ineffective approach style, 6 points were given to subjects who used a mixed style of coping and nine points were given to subjects whose strategy of coping was deemed most appropriate to the problem they faced based upon the findings of Lazarus and Folkman. The second dimension comprising the efficacy of coping score was the subject's self assessment ratings of how well they felt they coped with the event that they described. Subjects were asked to describe how well they felt they coped with the event immediately after it

occurred and ultimately, after a significant period of time had passed, each on a 1-5, Likert-type scale. The second rating (how well individuals felt they "ultimately" coped with this event) was doubled and added to the first rating. Subjects scores for this dimension ranged from 3 to 15 points. The last dimension of the efficacy of coping score was comprised of four assessments each worth one, two or three points. The first assessment was based on whether the subject stated that they coped adequately or poorly in their written description of their response to the negative life event described. Evidence of poor coping was given one point, evidence of quality coping was assigned three points while responses that did not indicate subject's thoughts about their quality of coping where assigned two points. The second assessment was based upon whether subjects stated that they learned something from the event and/or were able to give the event meaning. If they stated they learned something positive or found a meaning in the event, they were assigned three points, if they did not comment on meaning one way or the other they were assigned two points and if they stated that they learned nothing from the experience and could find no meaning or value in it they were assigned one point. The third assessment was based upon whether the subjects stated that they became more cynical as a result of this experience or whether they were able to get something positive or optimistic from this event despite its difficulty. If they became more cynical they were assigned one point, if they did not comment they were assigned two points and if they were able to create something positive from this experience they were assigned three points. The last assessment was based on the rater's judgement of the overall efficacy of the subject's reported coping process based on their written material. This ranged from one point for low efficacy of coping to three points for high coping efficacy. All these scores were tabulated and a single efficacy of coping score was determined per story. Scores for all three stories for each subject were added together and a final efficacy of coping score was determined. These scores ranged from 56 to 95 points.

A separate affective response score and worldview/meaning score was also independently tabulated. The affective response score consisted of two ratings. One was based on whether the subject stated that they learned something or got something from the event. Again, if they did learn something they were assigned three points, if they did not comment on learning they were assigned two points and if they stated that they did not learn anything or derive anything from this experience they were assigned one point. The second rating was based on whether the subject stated that they left the event in a more pessimistic or optimistic fashion. Again this was assessed on a 3 point scale. These two scores were tabulated and one "affective response" score was computed for each story and then across all three stories. Scores for this category ranged from 8 to 18 points. The last category that was scored was the worldview/meaning dimension. This was also scored on two aspects. The first was whether the subject was able to find a meaning in the event and the second was scored for the extent to which the subject articulated a worldview in expressing their answer. Again each dimension was scored on a 1-3 scale with higher scores indicating increased meaning and an ability to articulate a worldview. Scores were tabulated across stories and ranged from 7 to 18 points.

Procedure -

Subjects met individually with the experimenter for a session of approximately 1 1/4 hours in length. Most of the sessions were held at the subject's place of residence. A few sessions were held at the subject's place of employment, at a church or at Loyola University. Subjects initially signed an informed consent sheet and were told that this study was designed to investigate the relationship between spiritual beliefs, values and how people conceptualize life events. Subjects next entered their age, gender, education level and profession on a demographic sheet. Subjects were then asked to complete the Religiosity Questionnaire, Satisfaction with Life Scale and the Purpose in Life Test.

These measures generally took about 15 minutes to complete together. Next subjects were interviewed individually using Fowler's Faith Development Interview. This interview was taped by cassette recorder. Last, subjects were given the Amended Guided Autobiography and the Washington University Sentence Completion Test and were asked to complete these at a personally convenient time and return them in the stamped, self-addressed envelope that was provided to them for this purpose. When all materials were collected subjects were debriefed and fully informed of the purpose and focus of this study.

RESULTS

Means and standard deviations for all measures for the full sample and for males and females in the sample are reported in Table 1. The mean age across the group was 42.3 years. The mean Satisfaction With Life score was 23.37. The mean Purpose In Life score was 109.16. The mean Religiosity score was 23.53. The mean Faith Development score was 3.75. The mean Ego Development score was 4.00 and the mean Guided Autobiography Efficacy of Coping score was 80.91.

Tables 2 and 3 report the result of t-tests conducted to determine significant gender effects and religiosity effects for each of the variables in this study. The mean scores for males and females on the Satisfaction with Life measure were found to be significantly different. For females the mean score was 20.67 while for males the mean score was 25.96, $t (47) = -2.47$, $p < .05$. Males therefore, reported significantly higher degrees of satisfaction with their lives. The mean scores for males and females on the Faith Development measure were also significantly different. For males the mean score was 4.00, while for females the mean score was 3.50, $t (48) = - 2.98$, $p < .01$, with males displaying higher levels of Faith Development. Males and females also significantly differed on the Efficacy of Coping subscale of the Amended Guided Autobiography measure. The mean score for males was 85.44, and the mean score for females was 76.18, $t (33) = -3.49$, $p < .01$. Males once again displayed greater coping scores. There were no significant differences between the genders on scores for the Purpose in Life Test, Religioisity measure or the Ego Development measure.

Several t-tests were conducted to determine significant religiosity effects for each of the variables in this study. All subjects were divided into a religious or non-religious group using an 18.0 cutoff score on the religiosity measure. Those above this score were considered religious while those at or below this score were placed in the non-religious group. The means on all the study measures for these two groups were

compared against each other. The mean scores for religious and non-religious subjects on the Satisfaction With Life measure were significantly different, with religious individuals reporting greater satisfaction with their lives. The religious group mean was 25.00 while the non-religious group mean was 20.79, t (47) = 1.87, p <.05. The mean scores for these two groups on the Purpose in Life measure were also significantly different, once again with religious individuals expressing a significantly greater sense of purpose in their lives. The religious mean was 113.40, and the non-religious mean was 102.47, t (47) = 2.47, p <.01. Mean scores for religious and non-religious individuals on the Ego Development measure were significantly different, this time with religious individuals displaying significantly lower levels of ego development. Religious subjects' mean Ego Development scores was 3.87, while the mean score for non-religious subjects was 4.20, t (34) = -1.99, p < .05. A score of 3.87 indicates a transitional score between an I-3 rating on the Ego Development Scale and an I-4 rating. An I-3 rating represents a conventional ego-style oriented towards mutuality and the maintenance of interpersonal harmony and an I-4 rating which indicates a more individuated stage of development. More indepth description of the meaning of these scores can be found in the Method section. Mean scores on the Worldview/Meaning subscale of the Amended Guided Autobiography measure also differed significantly for these two groups. Religious individuals had a mean score of 13.81, while non-religious individuals had a mean score of 11.08, t (33) = 2.56, p < .01. Religious and non-religious individuals did not differ significantly on mean scores for either the Faith Development measure or the Efficacy of Coping measure from the Amended Guided Autobiography.

TABLE ONE

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF STUDY VARIABLES

VARIABLES	TOTAL SAMPLE		FEMALES		MALES	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Education	3.24	.89	2.83	.96	3.62	.64
Age	42.30	14.49	43.50	16.20	41.19	12.93
SWL	23.37	7.89	20.67	9.04	25.96	5.65
PIL	109.16	15.88	105.50	16.89	112.68	14.30
Religiosity	23.53	9.59	23.13	10.00	23.92	9.38
FD	3.75	1.33	3.50	1.33	4.00	1.13
ED	4.00	.89	4.00	1.06	4.00	.75
GABEC	80.91	9.12	76.11	9.06	85.44	6.65
GABSUM	12.80	3.30	11.59	3.66	13.94	2.50

Note: SWL = Satisfaction With Life Scale, PIL = Purpose in Life Test, FD = Faith Development Scale, ED = Ego Development Scale, GABEC = Guided Autobiography Efficacy of Coping Subscale, GABSUM = Guided Autobiography Worldview/Meaning subscale.

TABLE TWO

The t-TEST TABLE FOR STUDY MEASURES BY GENDER

Variable	Gender	Mean	S.D.	t-Value	df	Probability
SWL	female	020.67	09.04	-2.47	47	0.017 *
	male	025.96	05.65			
PIL	female	105.50	16.89	-1.61	47	ns
	male	112.68	14.30			
REL	female	023.13	02.04	-0.29	47	ns
	male	023.92	01.88			
FD	females	003.50	01.33	-2.98	48	0.004 *
	males	004.00	01.13			
ED	females	004.00	01.06	0.00	34	ns
	males	004.00	00.75			
GABEC	females	076.12	09.06	-3.49	33	0.001*
	males	085.44	06.65			

Note: SWL = Satisfaction With Life Scale, PIL = Purpose in Life Test, REL = Religiosity measure, FD = Faith Development Scale, ED = Ego Development Scale, GABEC = Guided Autobiography Efficacy of Coping Subscale.

* - denotes significance at the .05 level.

TABLE THREE

The t-TEST TABLE FOR STUDY MEASURES BY RELIGIOSITY

Variable	Religiosity	Mean	S.D.	t Value	df	Probability
SWL	Relig.	025.00	06.65	1.87	47	0.034 *
	Nrelig.	020.79	09.12			
PIL	Relig.	113.40	12.05	2.49	47	0.009 *
	Nrelig.	102.47	19.00			
RELIG	Relig.	030.73	02.56	21.65	47	0.000 *
	Nrelig.	012.16	03.44			
FD	Relig.	003.83	01.43	0.87	48	ns
	Nrelig.	003.60	01.17			
ED	Relig.	003.87	00.81	-1.99	34	0.028 *
	Nrelig.	004.20	00.93			
GABEC	Relig.	080.41	07.76	-0.42	33	ns
	Nrelig.	081.77	11.34			
GABSUM	Relig.	013.82	02.77	2.56	33	0.008 *
	Nrelig.	011.08	03.50			

Note : SWL = Satisfaction With Life Scale, PIL = Purpose in Life Test, REL = Religiosity measure, FD = Faith Development Scale , ED = Ego Development Scale, GABEC = Guided Autobiography Efficacy of Coping measure, GABSUM = Guided Autobiography Summation of Worldview and Meaning Subscales.

* denotes significance at the .05 level.

An analysis of variance was conducted for each of the three groups studied for this project (Religious Jews, Religious Lutherans and Atheists) on each of the study measures. Results of these ANOVAS are presented in Table 4. Means for the three groups differed significantly on the Purpose in Life measure, F (2, 48) = 3.48, p < .05. The mean score for Orthodox Jews was 116.00, for Religious Lutherans it was 110.80, and for Atheists it was 102.47. The Atheist group differed significantly from the Orthodox Jewish group at the .05 level. Not surprisingly, the three groups also differed significantly on mean scores for the Religiosity measure. The mean Religiosity score for Orthodox Jews was 31.67, for Religious Lutherans it was 29.80, and for Atheists it was 12.16, F (2, 48) = 246.95, p < .001. Atheists differed significantly from both Religious Jews and Religious Lutherans on this measure. Comparisons of these three groups on the other variables in this study revealed no other significant differences through these analyses of variance.

The main hypotheses of this study were assessed primarily through comparisons of the correlation coefficients between scores on the relevant measures included in this project. A correlation matrix for all the variables in this study is reported in Table 5. Only the significant results predicted by the hypotheses of this study were taken from this overall correlation matrix. To avoid accumulation of alpha error the full sample was split in half by gender and the same correlations were run on each half of the data. Only the correlations that were significant for both groups were considered additional significant results of this study.

In order to assess the relationship between scores on the Religiosity measure and scores on the Satisfaction with Life measure a correlation coefficient was computed. This correlation, performed on the full sample, was found to be statistically significant, r=.336, p < .01 with high levels of religiosity corresponding positively with high levels of reported satisfaction with life. This supported a main hypothesis of this study.

A correlation coefficient was also computed to determine the relationship between scores on the Religiosity measure and scores on the Purpose in Life measure. Statistical significance was also reached in this analysis, r= .418, p < .01, thus supporting the hypothesis that religiosity would correspond with high levels of purpose in life. To determine the relationship between scores on the Purpose in Life measure and scores on the Satisfaction with Life measure a correlation coefficient was computed and significance was reached, r= .814, p < .001 which also supported a main hypothesis of this study, that a high degree of purpose in life would correspond with satisfaction with life. Scores on the Purpose in Life measure were found to be significantly correlated in a positive direction with scores on the Efficacy of Coping subscale of the Amended Guided Autobiography measure r= .306, p < .05. This supported the hypothesis that a sense of purpose in life would be related to efficacy of coping with negative life events. To determine the relationship between scores on the Religiosity measure and scores on the Efficacy of Coping subscale of the Amended Guided Autobiography measure, a correlation was computed and this was not found to reach significance. This finding failed to support a major hypothesis of this study which predicted that religiosity would be associated with effective coping. One of the final main hypotheses of this study was tested by computing a correlation coefficient for the relationship between scores on the Faith Development measure and scores on the efficacy of coping subscale of the Amended Guided Autobiography measure. Statistical significance was reached in this analysis, r = .354, p <.05, supporting the prediction that high levels of faith development would be associated with effective coping .

TABLE FOUR

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE FOR STUDY MEASURES BY GROUPS

	JEWISH		LUTHERAN		ATHEIST			
Variable	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	F Score	Probability
AGE	37.60	7.64	47.47	17.49	41.95	15.30	1.81	ns
EDUC.	3.53	.64	3.47	.92	2.85	.93	3.53	ns
SWL	25.80	5.36	24.20	7.85	20.79	9.12	1.88	ns
PIL	116.00	7.88	110.80	14.97	102.47	19.00	3.48	.04 *
RELIG.	31.67	1.72	29.80	2.96	12.16	3.43	246.95	.00 *
FD	3.60	1.21	4.07	1.53	3.65	1.17	2.06	ns
ED	3.76	.79	4.00	.82	4.20	.93	2.65	ns
GABEC	78.83	7.61	82.30	7.90	81.77	11.34	.47	ns
GABSUM	13.75	3.31	13.90	2.13	11.08	3.50	3.20	ns

Note : Educ. = Education, SWL = Satisfaction With Life Scale, PIL = Purpose in Life Test, Relig. = Religiosity measure, FD = Faith Development Scale, ED = Ego Development Scale, GABEC = Guided Autobiography Efficacy of Coping Scale, GABSUM = Guided Autobiography Summation of Worldview and Meaning Subscales.
* denotes significance at the .05 level.

TABLE FIVE

CORRELATION MATRIX FULL SAMPLE

	Gender	Educ.	Age	SWL	Relig.	PIL	FD	ED	Gabec
Gender		.44	-.08	.34	.04	.23	.40	.00	.52
		p=.001	ns	p=.009	ns	ns	p=.002	ns	p=.001
Educ.			-.26	.01	.25	.14	.53	-.04	.06
			p=.034	ns	p=.040	ns	p=.000	ns	ns
Age				.38	.01	.39	-.09	.31	.06
				p=.004	ns	p=.003	ns	p=.035	ns
SWL					.34	.81	-.02	-.06	.39
					p=.009	p=.000	ns	ns	p=.010
Relig.						.42	.05	-.36	-.09
						p=.001	ns	p=.017	ns
PIL							.03	.02	.31
							ns	ns	p=.037
FD								.17	.35
								ns	p=.019
ED									.35
									p=.021

Several other relevant correlations between scores on study measures were found to be significant. Correlations between scores that were not predicted as part of the original hypotheses were tested by dividing the subjects in half according to gender and computing the same correlations on the same score measures for both groups. Correlations between measures that were found to be significant in <u>both</u> samples were considered significant additional findings of this study. These findings included the following relationships: Education was found to be significantly correlated with level of Faith Development, with higher levels of Education correlating positively with higher stages of Faith. For males $r = .333$, $p < .05$, and for females $r = .502$, $p < .01$. A negative trend was found between the correlation of Religiosity scores and Ego Development scores. For males $r = - .404$, $p < .05$ and for females $r = - .33$, $p = .10$. Religiosity was not significantly correlated with Faith Development in either sample. A significant relationship was found between high levels of Religiosity and high scores on the Worldview subscale of the Amended Guided Autobiography measure. For males the correlation coefficient for this relationship $= .424$, $p < .05$ and for females $r = .683$, $p < .01$. A significant trend was found for both males and females in the relationship between level of Ego Development and Efficacy of Coping. For males $r = .415$, $p < .05$, and for females $r = .397$, $p < .10$. The relationship between scores on the Faith Development measure and scores on the Ego Development measure was significant and complex. For females the positive correlation between these measures was significant, $r = .616$, $p < .01$. The male sample however, displayed a significant <u>negative</u> trend between the scores for these two measures, $r = - .34$, $p < .10$. Another interesting finding revealed by breaking the full sample in half by gender was that the relationship between Religiosity and Satisfaction with Life was only significant for females, $r = .46$, $p < .05$, but not for males in this study.

In addition to the one-way analysis of variance already reported for the three different groups in this study on all study measures, one-way and two-way ANOVAS were computed on the full sample for several other combinations of measures in order to test for the presence of curvilinear relationships or interactions between any of the relevant measures in this study. One-way ANOVAS allow for the detection of a curvilinear relationship between two variables since one measure is divided into three groups, typically a high, medium and low group. Whether or not scores on the second measure significantly differ across these three groups is then analyzed. If the middle group (or any group) is significantly higher than the other two groups for a given measure this will be detected through this analysis where it might not be detected through a regular correlation analysis. If the middle group were significantly higher than both the low and high group in a correlation analysis, these scores might cancel each other out and this finding would thus not be dectected. Two-way ANOVAS were computed for the following relationships between measures: The effect of the relationship between scores on Faith Development and Religiosity on the Efficacy of Coping measure, the effect of Faith Development and Purpose in Life on the Efficacy of Coping measure, the effect of Faith Development and Purpose in Life on the Satisfaction With Life measure, the effect of Faith Development and Religiosity on the Satisfaction With Life measure and the effect of Religiosity and Purpose in Life on the Satisfaction with Life measure. None of the interactions for these two-way ANOVAS were found to be significant. One-way ANOVAS were computed to determine if there were curvilinear relationships to be found between the following measures: The effect of Faith Development on Efficacy of Coping, Religiosity on Efficacy of Coping, Purpose in Life on Efficacy of Coping, Ego Development on Efficacy of coping, Ego Development on Satisfaction With Life, Faith Development on Satisfaction with Life, Ego Development on Faith Development, Purpose in Life on Satisfaction With Life, and the effect of Religiosity on Satisfaction

with Life. None of these one-way anovas revealed significant information that was not already captured by the information revealed by the correlation coefficients calculated between these measures. In other words, no curvilinear relationships were found to be significantly affecting the relationships between these measures. Similarly, the results of several multiple regression analyses failed to reveal further significant information than that revealed by the results of individual correlations computed between measures. The only relationships that were found to be significant in the multiple regression tests were relationships that were already found to be significant in individual correlation computations and the multiple regression findings added nothing significant to this information.

DISCUSSION

Many of the main hypotheses of this study were supported by the results of the empirical analysis. Most notably, a religious orientation was found to correspond with both a high degree of satisfaction with life and a well developed sense of purpose in life. It was predicted that religiosity among Jewish and Lutheran individuals would correspond with a relatively well developed sense of purpose in life since the Judeo-Christian religious orientation provides a meaningful worldview in which history is seen as significant and leading in a particular direction and to a particular destination. Individual human life is viewed as meaningful when lived in interrelationship with God and each human life has a purpose within the broader scheme of God's plan. Individuals are also able to define their own personal sense of meaning within these religious systems. In addition, some approaches to religious practice emphasize a purposeful interpretation of religious doctrine and encourage the derivation of meaning from interpretation of life experiences at large.

A religious orientation was predicted to correspond with a sense of satisfaction with life for numerous reasons. These reasons include: Relational benefits predicted to derive from a sense of personal interaction with a higher being throughout life which may lead to feelings of security, engagement, and personal meaning; a sense of self-acceptance and wholeness thought to derive from faith in God and the goodness of his creation; relational benefits thought to derive from participation with a community of believers; and thoughts about the nature of the world that can be potentially life enhancing such as - a belief that there is ultimate justice in the universe, a belief that humans can exert some control over nature through prayer, a belief that there is an omnipotent protector in the universe, and a belief that ultimately death can be

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transcended. In order to probe into what <u>specific</u> aspects of a religious orientation were found to relate to satisfaction and purpose in life, relevant responses to questions on the Faith Development interview were reviewed. A brief sample of a few religious individual's responses to questions related to satisfaction, meaning and purpose in life will be presented. Future research that is designed to focus specifically on the dimensions of a religious orientation that relate to satisfaction and purpose would be beneficial.

A few segments from the Faith Development interview that address religious conceptions of meaning, satisfaction and purpose will be presented below. Several religious individuals expressed a view of life's meaning and purpose that displayed significant richness and depth of perspective. A few of these expressions will be contrasted with the views on meaning, purpose and death discussed by a few atheistic individuals. These latter views will be presented after the next section which looks at the relation between purpose in life, satisfaction with life and coping.

In response to the question "Do you feel that your life has meaning at present? What makes life meaningful to you?" one religious subject responded :

Life is meaningful when it is shared. Relationships give life meaning. Goals and values provide a sense of satisfaction and a feeling that life makes sense; that life has a purpose but is also a mystery and because of that mystery there's a certain tension and unfolding. This is exciting. The purpose of life is to love and be loved. To live life to the fullest in all its dimensions. A few key phrases express significant aspects of meaning in life. One is that we only grow through hard times, through facing the painful and broken part of ourselves and that's how I think wholeness happens. So that rather than fleeing from brokenness I believe that in embracing that, confronting that, we become more whole. I believe that life is tension and release in the sense that we can't always expect it to be good. As soon as we accept that, it helps us to accept life better. Life is up and down, pain and joy, laughter and tears. It is a paradox and that's what makes us who we are and makes life meaningful and exciting.

Two other expressions that demonstrate the spiritual richness and empowerment that can come with a religious orientation are presented below. In response to the question "What does being religious mean to you?" one subject responded:

> It means that I've been struck by grace. That I sense an individual as well as a global or universal relationship with God which encompasses all of life. From that I draw strength and energy. That relationship which is encompassing, is a way of life and it empowers my whole approach to life, the entire substance of the way I live my life. Faith is not something one confesses, faith is a way of life. Prayer is not something one does, prayer is a way of life. Thanksgiving is a stance about all things. I think that in large part because I feel the recipient of love and of relationship with a gracious God, that that empowers me a great deal, and helps provide me the great energies that are required to move ahead on things in the world.

In response to a question about a significant life experience, one subject described a spiritual moment which illustrates the relational depth a religious orientation can provide:

> I recently had an experience that was very important. The school that I attend had a weekend retreat. I didn't want to go on this retreat at first because it took place on Saturday which is Shabbus, a day I spend with my family. However, after thinking about it for a while I decided to go. It meant being away from family on Shabbus, bringing my own food, not going to synagogue and it meant spending a Shabbus in a totally secular environment, something I've done before but only when I've been with someone else. This time it was just me. This was the first experience of my life where I was alone, the only Shabbus observer in an environment where no one else was celebrating. The retreat was to Lake Geneva. On Friday night I sat down by the side of the lake, lit two Shabbus candles (my wife usually lights the candles) and prayed by myself at the bank of the water. It was probably one of the most powerful experiences that I've ever had. It was almost like I felt that my Shabbus guest was God. It was just me and God sitting around the lake. It was a very powerful spiritual experience for me and I usually don't have dramatic spiritual experiences. The only experience I've had like that is when I've been to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem and felt that I was standing in the presence of God at the base of my history. This was really strange. I thought I'd be embarrassed to pray in front of other people, but it was such a powerful experience - people came over to ask about what I was doing, to talk to me because they saw me praying in my prayer shawl. It was such a positive rejuvenating experience, I shared it with my students. It was weird, there was no synagogue and no Shabbus songs but it was almost like just renewing a relationship, it was really very special.

Another very significant hypothesis supported by the results of this study was that individuals with a more highly developed sense of purpose in life, with or without a religious orientation, were found to cope more effectively with negative life events than were those with a less developed sense of purpose or meaning in their lives. This has been predicted by both religious and atheistic theorists and supports past empirical findings that suggest that individuals who are able to find meaning in life events, particularly negative events, are better able to cope with such events (Kobasa, 1979). Some existentialist thinkers suggest that life has no inherent meaning and that individuals must take full responsibility to create a meaning and vision for their lives (Nietszche, 1966; Sartre, 1957). Individuals who have taken the responsibility to do this, whether they are religious or not, may tend to be responsible in their general approach to life. It is also possible that having an overall sense of purpose in life can relate to an ability to find purpose and meaning in specific life events and/or an orientation toward analyzing the significance of life events toward this end. Effective coping has been found to relate to an individual's ability to find meaning in different life events (Kobasa,1979; Taylor,1983). Another significant benefit of having a well developed sense of purpose or meaning in life is that when a specific crisis arises it may be understood within the perspective of an overall life plan or life meaning. This can enable individuals with a sense of purpose in their lives to avoid getting too distracted by specific negative life events since they have a larger life plan to focus on or aim towards. If an individual has a larger worldview he or she may be able to interpret the significance of specific life events in terms of how they fit into the context of their overall view of the world. This may lead to an ability to find non-obvious dimensions of meaning in events so that something positive may be gleaned from these experiences despite the surface pain they engender.

Since one's ability to develop a sense of purpose and meaning in life is something that can be fostered and changed by intervention, the finding relating purpose with coping has significant clinical implications. Purpose in life was also found to be significantly related to satisfaction with life in this study. If a more well developed sense of meaning and purpose in life corresponds to both greater satisfaction with life and increased ability to cope with challenging life events, then it might be important for clinicians to help their clients develop a sense of meaning and purpose in life and define a vision for their lives that they are committed to achieving. Encouraging clients to find meaning and purpose even in their suffering may help individuals cope more effectively with difficult life situations. This intervention can also be implemented within religious and educational institutions. The discussion of the difficulties and challenges inherent in leading a full life and the value of defining a purpose and meaning to one's life could be quite important to individuals within both these settings. Encouraging young people to find a meaning to their life may enable them to feel more important, connected to things beyond themselves, and better able to interpret negative events within a larger context. A few specific examples of the benefits of a purposeful interpretation of life taken from the Faith Development interview follow.

In response to the question "Do you think that human life has a purpose?" one religious man had this to say :

Absolutely. The purpose of man is to enjoy God and that means not only to be filled with the joy of God but to fill God with joy. So there's a purpose in all of our lives and I think at many levels too. My stance comes from a biblical point of view. There are places in the Bible where the expectation of mankind is that it be the husband of the world - not the exploiter, but the careful nurturer. That's the required stance. The relationship of men and women to the environment is that they are kings and queens and this is to be understood in the archaic sense, that the king and queen is entrusted with the well being of the world, of creation. I find purpose at many levels of my life and I'm always astounded at people who are bored. So that's s a part of grace in and of itself.

A few views from individuals who experience less of a sense of purpose in their

lives follow. One woman had this to say in response to the questions "Do you think

human life has a purpose?", and "Does your life have meaning at present?":

Purpose to me is related to agency - you can say a toothbrush has a purpose
because someone uses it. To say that life has a purpose implies some larger thing or
being out there whose purposes are served by human life and I don't live that way.
We all die eventually. In death consciousness ceases along with physiological
functions, we rot. it's over. There is no afterlife, no rebirth, no heaven or hell - just
that's it. With respect to meaning, I don't have a strong sense of meaning or
purpose in my life. I mean all those questions "If you had it to do over would you
do it the same?" I had to say a resounding "Hell no". Religion has always
fascinated me and I must say I feel like I would be happier if I did believe but I
can't, it's not something that I can do. It might be easier for me to become a
ballerina or fluent in Hungarian than to become a believing anything.

Another woman had this to say in response to the question "Do you feel that your

life has meaning at present?" :

Not that much. Life has become more meaningful recently but I have a tendency
to live in the future and to think that the present doesn't count. There's a word for
it - I think it's called "existential neurosis". People are afraid of dying so they don't
want to live because this keeps them kind of suspended and they don't have to feel
that a life that they are engaged in is passing them by. You're kind of suspended
this way, kind of paralyzed. It's a syndrome.

Another individual in response to the question "Do you think that human life has

a purpose?" and "Is there a plan for our lives?" responded :

Not really. Sometimes when things are going bad I try to think that things
happen for a reason but I think that people just say that so that they don't kill
themselves when something bad happens. I like to believe that but I'm not sure
I really believe it.

It is interesting that religiosity itself was not found to significantly correlate with

effective adaptation to negative life events. Although some studies have found a positive

relationship between religiosity and coping (Koenig, 1988; Morse & Wisocki, 1988)

other studies have failed to confirm such a positive relationship (Baider & Sarell,

1984; Blotcky, Cohen, Conatser & Klopovich, 1985). Certain atheistic writers would predict a negative relationship between religiosity and coping since they feel that a religious orientation can lead to passivity or escapism in the face of difficult life events. The results of this study did not reveal a significant negative relationship between religiosity and coping but did fail to confirm a positive relationship. It may be that different approaches to religious practice influence different styles of coping. Future research that looks at type of religious orientation and efficacy of coping might be very illustrative. There are many different approaches to religious belief and practice ranging from religious mysticism to religious fundamentalism. A study that investigated the different psychological implications of these differing approaches to faith would be very illuminating.

One measure utilized in this study that does assess the type and quality of one's spiritual orientation is the Faith Development measure. Scores at higher levels indicate increasingly more dimensional, complex and symbolical interpretations of faith and meaning while scores at lower levels indicate a more concrete, conventional or even literal religious and/or meaning orientation. Subjects at higher levels of faith development in this study were found to cope more effectively with negative life events than were subjects displaying lower levels of development of faith. It is interesting that while a high level of faith development was found to correspond with effective coping, religiosity in and of itself was not found to be related to efficacy of coping. This supports the hypothesis that type of faith orientation effects quality of coping, not simply presence of faith alone. There are several aspects of a highly developed faith orientation, according to Fowler's theory, which might be predicted to relate to effective coping with negative events. Individuals with higher levels of Ego Development were found to cope more effectively with negative life events. Significant skills and attributes displayed by individuals at higher stages of faith development include: Cognitive complexity,

dimensionality of thought, ability to analyze situations from varying perspectives and an ability to outline and articulate an integrated worldview. One might hypothesize that individuals at higher stages of faith development may be capable of utilizing these developmental skills toward planing and implementing effective strategies to cope with challenging life experiences. Individuals at higher stages of faith also display greater levels of individuation and development of self. It is possible that this type of self development has a positive impact on an individual's ability to cope independently with negative events and to recover adequately and rapidly from such experience. In addition, individuals at higher stages of faith tend to display a more comprehensive worldview. Such individuals may interpret the significance of specific life events in terms of how these events fit into a larger view of reality. This may help these individuals find meaning in such events, put them into perspective and thereby avoid becoming excessively absorbed or sidetracked by any one isolated incident. Further, if interpretation of religion and meaning at higher stages of faith tends to be more symbolic rather than literal, and this orientation has been found to correlate with effective coping, this may indicate that the significant truth revealed through religion lies in its symbolic expression about life's meaning and not merely the literal content of its mythology. Religion represents a vehicle through which humans attempt to access truth about the nature of the universe and the human psyche. One might predict that apprehending and experiencing greater dimensions of truth would help individuals better adapt to the conditions of their lives.

The ability to develop a multi-dimensional and complex understanding of challenging events may foster successful and enduring adaptation to such experience. Higher level of faith development was not found to be significantly related to religiosity. Therefore, both religious and non-religious individuals can display a dimensional,

complex, spiritually rich and multi-faceted apprehension of life's meaning. It is the development of these traits and utilization of this approach to life that seems to relate to effective coping and not merely the presence of a religious orientation itself.

The following two perspectives on the meaning of death illustrate the type of thinking displayed by individuals at both a relatively low stage of faith development and a relatively advanced stage of development of faith. These two views illustrate both more and less literal interpretations of faith and differing levels of complexity of thought and understanding.

In response to the question "What does death mean to you?" one individual stated:

You go to Hell - which I guess, you just burn up, which is what they tell you. Or you go to Heaven.
"Do you believe this is a literal place ?"
Yes I do believe there's a Hell and a Heaven. In one place you burn in the other you're in comfort.
"Why would someone be placed in Hell or Heaven?"
It depends upon what they did all their life. If you were some jerk that did this or that or if you were a goody two shoes. It could go either way. That's Hell or Heaven.

An individual who expressed a more advanced stage of development of his Faith responded in the following way to the question "Do you believe there's an afterlife?" and "What does religiosity mean to you?"

I would have to say mostly no because I think the image of Hell is something that people experience on earth. In terms of religion, even if I decided that there wasn't a God or that all the dogma or doctrine in the myth of my faith was not historically true, I would probably still be a Christian because the deeper meaning behind the myth I believe is the meaning of life. It enables me to do what I said before was the meaning of life: to live life to the fullest, to love and be loved, to embrace mystery, to realize brokenness and wholeness and how they all work together. That degree of spiritual truth that undergirds me and sustains me is so important. That the skeleton of religion, the framework, the thing that holds it together is important but that's penultimate to meaning and what that does to give me meaning I guess would make me a very religious person. I was hesitant to say that. The myth gets at truth. I might interpret God very differently than someone else or what is implied by a traditional understanding of that term.

Purpose in Life and Satisfaction with Life were found to relate very significantly in this study. One study referred to in the review of literature suggested that the Purpose in Life test measures two dimensions: one being life purpose and the other being life satisfaction (Dufton & Pearlman, 1986). A study that utilizes a measure that teases out the life purpose dimension exclusively and correlates this with an independent measure of life satisfaction would be worth conducting in order to assess the distinctiveness of each of these constructs. Most religious and atheistic thinkers, particularly existentialists, would predict a positive relationship between purpose and life satisfaction. Existentialists suggest that the fact that man is free to create his own identity and sense of meaning in life and is fully responsible for this creation, is quite liberating, albeit challenging. Some thinkers view this stance as representing the height of optimism toward human potentiality (Frankl, 1959; Sartre, 1957) despite the fact that many people characterize existentialists as a gloomy lot. Development of a sense of meaning, purpose and a vision that one is committed to in life, seems to correspond with a positive outlook for both religious and non-religious individuals.

It was somewhat interesting that level of Ego Development was found to relate to level of Faith Development for females and not for males in this study. Research that probes into the possible implications of this gender difference is warranted. This overall finding may have been influenced by a few considerations. One consideration is that the faith development scoring scheme encourages scorers to consider a person's background in making a scoring determination. One is only to score an individual at a higher than conventional level of faith development if they display an ability to independently assess the meaning system to which they are ascribing or from which they have broken. Merely stating theological concepts, without demonstrating an ability to apply critical reasoning to these concepts, does not necessarily warrant higher than conventional placement level, regardless of how sophisticated the concepts themselves may be. In the Ego

Development scoring scheme however, it is not really feasible to consider a person's background in making scoring determinations because the scorer does not have access to such background information on the subject. He or she merely has the completed sentence stems to work with. Therefore, sentences that display sophisticated thought are scored at a relatively high ego-stage, even if this thought simply represents rote repetition of already developed theological concepts. This may have caused certain religious individuals to be scored at a higher level of ego development than faith development.

Research that further probes the relation between Ego and Faith Development is warranted. If in fact level of ego development does not necessarily correspond with the level of one's development of faith for males though it does for females, it would be interesting to look at what other non-cognitive or non ego-oriented dimensions of faith seem to influence this relationship in males and in what fashion.

The trend found in the data suggesting that Religiosity is negatively related to Ego Development was an unexpected, interesting finding. Atheistic existentialists might predict this relationship since they suggest that a religious orientation represents a less fully mature and developed approach to living life than an approach that faces the "truths" of life squarely. Some atheist writers suggest that religion allows people to remain child like and to avoid facing truth and the full responsibility for their lives (e.g., Freud, Nietzsche). They argue that religion gets in the way of one's ability to develop a fully independent sense of self, since one has to forever remain deferential to an external power, while others argue the opposite, that in fact by "... providing a backdrop of security and safety" religion fosters individuation and cohesiveness of the self (Winnicott, 1960). Further investigation of the relationship between religiosity and self-development would be worth pursuing. Studies that investigated the differences between religious individuals at high levels of ego and/or faith development versus those at lower levels of development and compared these two groups on factors such as type

and quality of coping, sense of responsibility, purpose in life and meaning in life would be quite illuminating.

A few limitations of the present study should be noted. One aspect of this project that should be considered was that only 36 individuals completed all the measures including the Ego Development and the Amended Guided Autobiography measure despite the fact that 50 individuals were initially interviewed. Results involving scores on the Satisfaction with Life measure, Purpose in Life measure, Religiosity measure and Faith Development measure alone were based on the full 50 person sample while those that included the Ego Development measure and the Amended Guided Autobiography measure were based on a 36 person sample. Another limitation of this study was that the coping measure utilized, the Amended Guided Autobiography, was developed for this study hence no pre-established norms or reliability figures exist for this instrument. Research that compares results of this measure to those obtained from a more well established coping measure would be quite valuable for validity purposes. Last, the coping measure utilized in this study asks people to describe their mode of coping with an incident that took place in the past. If there were some way to study actual coping rather than reported coping among these groups of individuals, or if people could be studied as they were going through an actual difficult life experience, this would add potency and increased validity to this research concept.

In sum, the results of this study seem to indicate that religiosity affects qualitative aspects of life such as an overall sense of satisfaction, communion, meaning and purpose. Many religious individuals in this study expressed a sense of awe and wonder toward the world and displayed a spiritually rich interpretation of the meaning of significant life events and passages. Active and meaningful participation with a personal God or central life power was prominently expressed and seemed to have a potent effect on the quality of the lives of the faithful. However, religiosity in and of

itself did not seem to improve the efficacy of one's coping with specific life problems in the here and now. Type of religious involvement may mediate the relation between religiosity and coping. A less literal, more dimensional, and more responsible approach to faith may influence coping in a positive direction while other approaches to faith may have different impact. Secular as well as religious individuals were able to display high levels of coping and meaning. Faith development, ego development and the development of a sense of purpose and meaning in life seem more related to positive coping than does religiosity in itself. The development of a sense of meaning and purpose in one's life, regardless of whether or not one is religious, seems to significantly impact both life satisfaction and life efficacy. Intervention designed to assist people to recognize the challenge inherent in living a full, successful life, and to help them discover meaning in their lives, could have far reaching impact not only on the quality of life for these individuals, but on the moral and spiritual quality of society at large.

Since religion does seem to add a significant spiritual dimension to many people's lives which appears to impact positively upon feelings of satisfaction and meaning, it might be worthwhile for individuals who are not traditionally religious to investigate other spiritual avenues available in society. Research that investigates differing forms of spirituality and compares these with both traditional religious orientations and atheistic orientations on dimensions related to meaning, satisfaction, purpose and coping would be very interesting. Research into the psychological implications of differing approaches to faith, including study of non-traditional spiritual systems, might reveal important information on the common human quest for truth and similarities and differences in the form this quest takes. Research focusing on differing spiritual systems may reveal which approaches to spirituality are more and less conducive to effective coping, responsibility, satisfaction and meaning. Future research

that compares similar psychological dimensions behind differing approaches to faith and meaning would also be quite interesting and illuminating.

Finally, those individuals who do not have a religious orientation and who do not have a well developed sense of meaning and purpose in life were found to display relatively low levels of satisfaction with life and relatively ineffective coping abilities. As suggested earlier, encouraging people to develop and define a purpose and vision for their lives, in a therapeutic setting or other contexts, could help individuals gain a greater sense of self, a greater sense of significance, and an increased feeling of connection to things outside themselves. This could in turn positively impact upon their ability to cope with difficult life events. Such an intervention might significantly influence the hopes and aspirations of young people who currently feel unimportant, alienated and pessimistic about their ability to achieve anything significant in their lives.

Future research should be conducted to investigate the significant topics and relationships noted throughout the discussion of the results of this project. In addition, research that addresses the effect of intervention designed to help people develop a sense of purpose in life, similar to logotherapy but implemented outside of a clinical context, should be encouraged. Such an intervention could be performed with kids from disadvantaged backgrounds, kids who must adjust to difficult physical handicaps, or even with people facing immanent death. Finally, research that investigates the different impact of religion for males and females seems warranted. A study that researches negative responses to religion and negative images of God and analyzes these from an object relations perspective would also be quite interesting and informative. In general, the whole area of meaning, purpose, values and spirituality is as significant and relevant today as it has ever been. Despite significant changes in societal value structures, structures of the family, and tremendously rapid changes in technology, human beings

today yearn for truth and meaning just as passionately and with just as much need and fervor as they ever have displayed throughout history.

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The thesis is, therefore, accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

_5/12/91_____   _Dan P. McAda_____
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