

## Religion and Forgiveness

MICHAEL E. MCCULLOUGH  
GIACOMO BONO  
LINDSEY M. ROOT

The concept of forgiveness has gone from complete scientific obscurity as recently as 1980 to remarkable visibility in the first few years of the 21st century. The boom in forgiveness research can be appreciated by examining Figure 22.1, in which we have displayed the annual number of items catalogued in PsycINFO that include the word stem “forgiv\*” in their abstracts (1980–2004). This figure clearly shows that whereas forgiveness was a psychological concept that received negligible empirical attention in the 1980s, social scientists have been producing scores of publications on the topic annually for the last several years.

Psychologists have given sustained attention to several aspects of forgiveness, including (1) the development of reasoning about forgiveness (e.g., Enright, Gassin, & Wu, 1992) (2) applications of forgiveness to counseling and psychotherapy (e.g., Enright, 2001; Worthington, 2001; Worthington & Wade, 1999); (3) social-psychological factors that facilitate or deter forgiveness (e.g., Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002; McCullough et al., 1998); (4) personality correlates of forgiveness (e.g., McCullough, 2001; McCullough & Hoyt, 2002); (5) the associations of forgiveness with measures of mental health, physiological functioning, and physical health (e.g., Karremans, Van Lange, & Ouwerkerk, 2003; Lawler et al., 2003; Witvliet, Ludwig, & Vander Laan, 2001); and (6) the religious contours of forgiveness (e.g., McCullough & Worthington, 1999; Tsang, McCullough, & Hoyt, 2005).

In this chapter, we focus specifically on the links between forgiveness and religious experience, belief, and behavior. We describe the relevance of forgiveness to the religious lives of individuals and communities, as well as the importance of religion in shaping how people understand and experience forgiveness. We also speculate about the relevance of forgiveness for understanding the relationships of religion to aging and health. We close by introducing some ideas drawn from evolutionary psychology that might provide direction for future interdisciplinary work in this area.

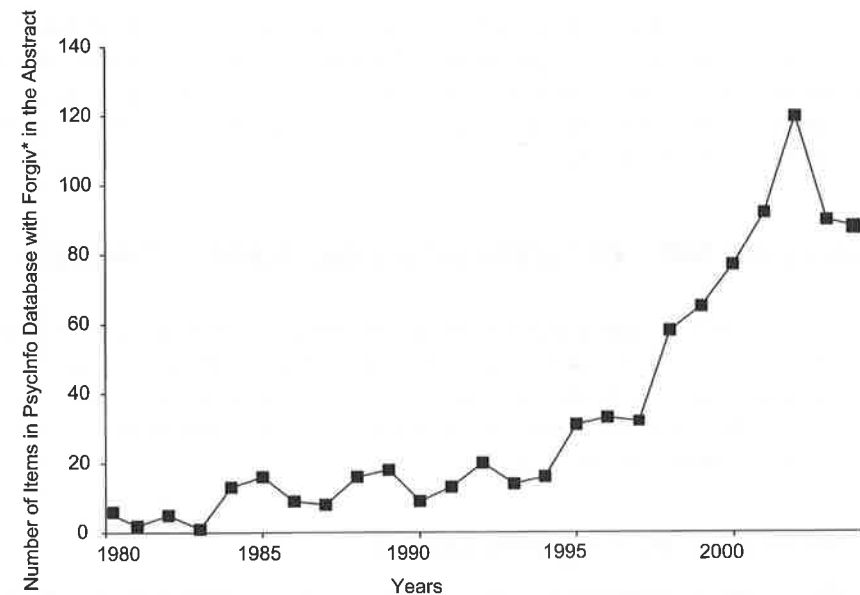


FIGURE 22.1. Number of items in PsycINFO database with “forgiv\*” in the abstract, 1980–2004.

### WHAT IS FORGIVENESS?

Psychologists seem to agree on several points about forgiveness. First, most concur with Enright and Coyle (1998) who argue that forgiveness should be distinguished from pardoning, condoning, excusing, forgetting, and denying. Most also concur that forgiveness should be distinguished from related concepts such as reconciliation. This is because reconciliation, which involves “the restoration of trust in an interpersonal relationship through mutually trustworthy behaviors” (Worthington & Drinkard, 2000), is not a prerequisite for forgiveness. For instance, people can forgive people with whom they cannot resume a relationship (e.g., someone who is in jail or is deceased) or with whom they do not wish to resume a relationship (e.g., an abusive partner).

But scholars continue to disagree somewhat about how forgiveness should be defined (Scobie & Scobie, 1998). Enright and colleagues (Enright & Coyle, 1998; Enright, Gassin, & Wu, 1992) defined “genuine forgiveness” according to philosopher J. North’s (1987) proposal that forgiveness occurs when the target of an interpersonal transgression is able to “view the wrongdoer with compassion, benevolence, and love while recognizing that he has willfully abandoned his right to them” (p. 502). Worthington and colleagues (Berry & Worthington, 2001; Worthington & Wade, 1999) proposed that when one forgives, positive, love-based emotions (e.g., empathy, compassion, sympathy, and affection) replace the negative emotions he or she previously experienced regarding the transgressor (Worthington & Wade, 1999). McCullough and colleagues proposed that people forgive when they undergo a suite of motivational changes. Specifically, people come to experience forgiveness as they become less motivated to avoid and to seek revenge against a transgressor and simultaneously become more benevolent toward the transgressor (e.g., McCullough et al., 1998; McCullough & Hoyt, 2002). It is presumed that these motivational changes will increase the likelihood that a transgression recipient will, in turn, be-

have more positively and less negatively toward his or her transgressor. McCullough, Pargament, and Thoresen (2000) proposed a definition of forgiveness that emphasized the commonalities in the above conceptualizations. They suggested that forgiveness is an "intraindividual, prosocial change toward a perceived transgressor that is set within a specific interpersonal context" (p. 9).

### IS THERE ANYTHING PARTICULARLY RELIGIOUS ABOUT FORGIVENESS?

Forgiveness is a deeply religious concept for people from many faiths and cultures, and therefore, we believe, an important topic of study for the psychology of religion. Issues of guilt, reconciliation, salvation, and redemption are common to many religions and many cultures, as are at least indirectly, questions about forgiveness and its place in the life of individuals and communities.

#### Forgiveness as a Universal Religious Concern

Anyone who peruses ethnographic studies of the world's cultures cannot help but note that forgiveness is a major religious concern. Consider this observation about the importance of forgiveness in the lives of people from the animistic Igbo culture of Nigeria:

The offering of sacrifice is deemed to be essential only to those spirits which reside or operate outside the pale of human ken and control. The animist's life is permeated with the thought of their sinister power. All he can comprehend is that there are devastating forces at work in the world about him. He believes that, in some mysterious manner, these spirits can, and do, execute vengeance upon unprotected men. He may be unable to trace any definite reason for their antagonism, nevertheless, he is forced to conclude that punishment is meted out for some sin committed. Whether of omission or commission he may be unable to state: all he can do is to accept the verdict and meekly submit to whatever falls to his lot. In his distress, he appeals to the "dibia" and, either by his own endeavours, or by the services of the "dibia", he seeks a way of forgiveness by offering appropriate sacrifices in order to "drive away evil" ("ichu aja"), or to "drive out the devil" ("ichu Ogbonuke"). For this latter, a dog or a fowl is killed and left lying in the street, or outside the village, as an offering to the evil one." (Basden, 1966, p. 57)

Or consider De Laguna's (1972) description of how the Tlingit of southeastern Alaska would treat the remains of bears they killed on hunting expeditions:

After the bear was killed, the hunter would pray to it for forgiveness, explaining why he needed to kill it. The head would be cut off and buried, facing the mountains. Sometimes it was covered with boughs, or it might be put in a mountain stream, or buried under a waterfall, so no birds could get at it. . . . "If they don't do that, the other bears would notice and get angry and get after the hunter." (De Laguna, 1972, pp. 365-366)

Even cultures that are better known for their vengefulness also have well-established rituals for effecting forgiveness among belligerents, and many of these rituals are made sensible by shared religious values among the belligerent parties. Consider Rovinskii's (1901) description of a ritual for reconciliation following a feud between two clans that

have been locked in a cycle of blood revenge, which we have taken from Boehm's (1984) study of tribal Montenegrins:

At the ceremony, the two clans stayed away from each other "like two hostile regiments." Rovinskii describes the ceremony in detail: A short moment of silence falls, and then a group of people steps out from the other side. The son of the murderer, in a single undergarment, barefoot and without a cap, creeps on all fours. And on his neck hangs a long gun on a strap (it is always a long gun, for a greater effect, even if the murder was just by pistol). . . . Seeing this, Zec hastily runs ahead in order to shorten this severe, humiliating scene. He runs to Bojković in order to raise him up more quickly, but at that very moment Bojković kisses him on the feet, the chest and the shoulder. Taking the gun off Bojković's neck, Zec addresses him with the following words: "First a brother, then a blood enemy, then a brother forever. Is this the rifle which took the life of my father?" And not waiting for a reply, he hands the gun back to Bojković, expressing by this the full forgiveness of the past, and they both kiss each other, embracing each other like brothers. (Rovinskii, 1901, p. 386, as cited in Boehm, 1984, p. 136)

This Montenegrin ritual of forgiveness and reconciliation was consummated by establishing 12 godfather relationships between members of the two clans, as well as 24 different blood-brother relationships (Boehm, 1984). It was their shared Orthodox Christian faith that made these kinship relationships possible in a culture in which vengeance was the normative response to homicide.

The roles of forgiveness in each of the above cultures reflect what may be a universal function of forgiveness for societies: its value for preserving stability in humans' relationships in the social world, the natural world, and the world of spirits.

#### Forgiveness as a Religious Concern in the United States

Closer to home and the present day, forgiveness is an acute religious concern in the Christian and Jewish traditions that form the mainstream of religious expression in the United States. According to data from a 1998 General Social Survey, over 80% of U. S. adults feel that their religious beliefs "often," "almost always," or "always" help them to forgive others, to forgive themselves, and to feel forgiven by God, respectively (Davis & Smith, 1999). Wuthnow (2000) studied a representative sample of U.S. adults involved in religiously oriented small groups (e.g., prayer groups, Bible study groups). Sixty-one percent of the sample reported that their group had helped them forgive someone and 71% of the sample reported that they had experienced healing in a relationship because of their group participation.

#### How Religion Promotes Forgiveness

Religious scholars have noted that all of the major world religions have structures that promote forgiveness (McCullough & Worthington, 1999; Rye et al., 2000). Tsang et al. (2005) noted that religions can promote forgiveness in several ways. Religious meaning systems can prescribe forgiveness as a value, encourage emotions such as compassion and empathy, and model forgiving actions through Scriptures and/or rituals. Religion can also sanctify forgiveness behavior by providing role models of forgiving behavior and presenting a worldview that allows individuals to interpret events and relationships in ways that

facilitate forgiveness. Thus, religion is a concern that people bring to their thoughts, feelings, and behavior regarding forgiveness.

But perhaps the opposite is also true: Perhaps people also reformulate their religious convictions as a result of choices that they make about forgiveness. People may question or even redefine their religious convictions when confronted with difficult dilemmas of forgiving. Indeed, philosophers and psychologists have noted the potential of forgiveness to transform an individual's entire outlook on life (Enright & Coyle, 1998; North, 1987).

### RELIGION AND THE PROPENSITY TO FORGIVE OTHERS

Because the teachings of many of the major religions promote forgiveness (McCullough & Worthington, 1999; Rye et al., 2000), it is worth considering how religion might influence whether and how individuals forgive.

#### Religion and "Forgivingness"

For three decades, psychological research has consistently demonstrated that religious involvement is positively related to the disposition to forgive others—a trait that researchers are now referring to as forgivingness (Roberts, 1995). In some of the earliest work on the topic, Rokeach (1973) found that people who reported greater church attendance, religiousness, and intrinsic as well as extrinsic motivation for religious involvement placed "forgiveness" as a higher priority in their personal value systems than did people who scored lower on these religious indicators. Poloma and Gallup (1991) also found a positive relationship between religious involvement and self-reports of people's tendency to forgive those who have harmed them. In a reanalysis of Poloma and Gallup's nationally representative data, Gorsuch and Hao (1993) found that, compared to nonreligious people, highly religious people reported having greater motivation to forgive, working harder to forgive, and harboring fewer reasons for getting even and staying resentful toward their transgressors. Others have reported similar findings (e.g., Bono, 2002; Mauger, Saxon, Hamill, & Pannell, 1996; Mullet et al., 2003).

#### The Religion-Forgiveness Discrepancy

The above-mentioned research on the links between religiousness and forgiving others is based on measures of people's valuing of forgiveness, their self-reported forgivingness regarding typical or hypothetical transgressions, and their general reasoning about the propriety of forgiveness as a way of dealing with transgressions. However, research on the association of religious involvement with measures of forgiveness in response to specific, real-life transgressions has yielded less consistent evidence (McCullough & Worthington, 1999). McCullough and Worthington referred to this tendency for religiousness to be positively associated with people's self-reported tendencies to forgive others in general but only trivially associated with forgiveness responses to specific transgressions as the *religion-forgiveness discrepancy*. Tsang et al. (2005) investigated the possibility that this discrepancy is caused by the fact that a single measure of behavior does not provide a good indicator of the dispositional or personality-based influences on that behavior because of situation-specific error. Applying the aggregation principle (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1974), Tsang et al. (2005) found that, indeed, when self-reports of forgiveness were based

on transgressions that were recalled under restrictive procedures (i.e., forcing participants to recall specific types of transgressions occurring within specific types of relationships) as well as aggregated across multiple transgressions, positive correlations emerged between religiousness and transgression-specific forgiveness. Measures of religiousness such as religious commitment and intrinsic religious motivation accounted for approximately 4% of the variance in people's typical tendencies to forgive across many transgressions committed by many relationship partners (e.g., friends, parents, and romantic partners). Therefore, studies with improved methods seem to support the proposition that religious individuals are, in general, slightly more forgiving than are less religious people, although this association is rather small.

#### Choosing Forgiveness-Oriented or Revenge-Oriented Aspects of Religious Belief Systems

The research we have reviewed above clearly suggests that people with high levels of religious participation, religious salience, or religious commitment tend to be more forgiving than are their less religious counterparts. However, the major world religions also condone revenge and retributive justice in some contexts. As Tsang et al. (2005) pointed out, support for the doctrine of *lex talionis* (equal and direct retribution) can be found in the Judaic Old Testament (e.g., "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, an arm for an arm, a life for a life"), the Christian New Testament (e.g., "God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you"; 2 Thessalonians 1:6, New International Version Bible), and the Islamic Qur'an (e.g., "O ye who believe! the law of equality is prescribed to you in cases of murder: the free for the free, the slave for the slave, the woman for the woman"; 2:178). The doctrine of karma in Buddhism and Hinduism can also be seen as an endorsement for retributive justice: all our actions, good and bad, will eventually bring proportional consequences. This availability of religious doctrines that promote retributive justice or belief in a just world—the belief that God's (or karmic) justice ensures that wrongdoers will ultimately get what they deserve (Lerner & Simmons, 1966)—may enable people to use their religious beliefs to justify their own vengeful stances toward transgressors.

Tsang et al. (2005) proposed that individuals who are actively motivated to seek revenge in response to a specific transgression might selectively employ religious beliefs that will justify their vengeful stances, presumably to maintain self-consistency. If so, people's religious beliefs and commitments may shift temporarily so that they can maintain self-concepts that are perceived to be in accordance with the mandates of their religious belief systems—a notion that is consistent with models of the self as flexible and subject to momentary shifts to accommodate social goals (e.g., Andersen & Chen, 2002).

To examine this possibility, Tsang et al. (2005) measured Christian university students' transgression-related interpersonal motivations (i.e., how avoidant, vengeful, and benevolent they felt) regarding a transgressor who harmed them within the last 7 days. Tsang et al.'s participants also completed two measures of religiousness to examine whether people who were highly vengeful toward a specific transgressor were using their religious beliefs to rationalize their unforgiving stances. First, participants indicated whether they endorsed a variety of religious sayings (some of which were from the Christian Scriptures and some of which sounded religious but were not from the Christian Scriptures) that were either forgiving or punitive in nature. Participants also indicated the extent to which a set of *justice*-related adjectives (e.g., "just," "fair"), a set of *forgiveness*-

related adjectives (e.g., "forgiving," "merciful"), and a set of *wrath/retribution*-relevant adjectives (e.g., "wrathful," "avenging") accurately described their concept of God (Gorsuch, 1968). There is a long tradition of research finding multidimensional and varied images of God; one reliable dimension is an image of God as a loving/forgiving entity versus a just/punishing entity (e.g., Gorsuch, 1968; Kunkel, Cook, Meshel, Daughtry, & Hauenstein, 1999). Research has shown that holding positive images of God and perceived relationships with God are related cross-sectionally to holding positive mental models of both self and others (Kirkpatrick, 1998), so Tsang et al. reasoned that individuals' working models of God might be related to their current interpersonal motivations vis-à-vis their transgressors.

In support of these ideas, Tsang et al. (2005) found that individuals who were, at the time of testing, motivated to avoid their transgressors were less likely to endorse forgiveness Scripture (e.g., "Forgive as the Lord forgave you"), whereas individuals who were high in benevolence (i.e., wishing goodwill toward their transgressor) were more likely to endorse the forgiveness Scripture and marginally less likely to endorse the retribution Scripture (e.g., "Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, life for a life"). They also found that avoidance motivations were negatively correlated with forgiving images of God, and marginally negatively correlated with justice images of God, whereas benevolence was marginally positively related to forgiving images of God. These results suggest that people may selectively use retributive and forgiving themes inherent in religious meaning systems (whether they pertain to Scripture or conceptualizations of God) to rationalize their current vengeful or forgiving stances, rather than simply relying on their religious beliefs to shape their forgiveness- and revenge-related behavior.

### RELIGION AND THE PROPENSITY TO SEEK FORGIVENESS FROM OTHERS

Confessing, repenting, and seeking forgiveness play important roles in many religious systems. In particular, the Scriptures of all of the Abrahamic religions place a strong emphasis on the importance of confession and contrition as a means of achieving forgiveness and relational wholeness. As a result, it seems likely that religion exerts an influence on whether and how people will seek forgiveness when they harm others.

#### Preliminary Work on Religion and Seeking Forgiveness

Sandage, Worthington, Hight, and Berry (2000) made the first attempt to define and empirically investigate seeking forgiveness. They defined seeking forgiveness as "a motivation to accept moral responsibility and to attempt interpersonal reparation following relational injury in which one is morally culpable" (p. 22). Sandage et al. found no relationship between participants' general religiousness and the extent to which they reported having sought forgiveness after committing a particular transgression. However, their failure to find a significant relationship may be due to some of the methodological factors that McCullough and Worthington (1999) invoked to explain why religiousness tends not to correlate with the extent to which people report having forgiven specific individuals who harmed them in the past.

Indeed, other research that obviates such methodological problems has yielded results that suggest that religiousness does indeed promote seeking forgiveness. In Meek, Albright, and McMinn's (1995) study, participants read a vignette in which they were to

imagine that they had committed a dishonest act for personal satisfaction and then confessed for it. Participants then completed self-report measures of intrinsic and extrinsic religious motivation, along with single-item measures of how much they would feel forgiven by themselves, how much they would feel forgiven by God, and how likely they would be to confess, to feel good about confessing, to feel good for committing the act in the first place, and to repeat the offense. Individuals who were high in intrinsic religiousness reported being more prone to guilt, more likely to confess and to feel good about confessing, more likely to forgive themselves, and more likely to feel forgiven by God than individuals who were extrinsically religious. Moreover, Meek et al. found that guilt completely mediated the negative relationship between intrinsic religiosity and feeling good for committing the dishonest act. Guilt partially mediated the negative relationship between intrinsic religiosity and likelihood of repeating the offense (i.e., intrinsically religious people felt more guilty about their dishonest behavior, enjoyed the act less, and had a decreased likelihood of repeating the act in part because they felt more guilty). Although the validity of Meek et al.'s study was limited by studying people's hypothetical responses instead of their actual behavior, it nonetheless provides preliminary evidence that people who internalize religious values (in this case, within the Christian faith) may seek forgiveness more readily because of a stronger inclination to feel guilt for their transgressions.

Witvliet, Ludwig, and Bauer (2002) examined the physiological correlates of guilt and seeking forgiveness and consequently helped clarify the role that religion may play in seeking forgiveness. In this study, participants identified an incident from their past in which they were to blame for significantly hurting another person. Having recalled an appropriate incident, each participant engaged in five different types of imagery: (1) recalling the feelings associated with hurting the victim; (2) imagining seeking forgiveness from the victim; (3) imagining the victim responding in an unforgiving way; (4) imagining the victim responding in a forgiving way; and (5) imagining the victim responding with some appropriate form of reconciliation.

Witvliet et al. (2002) found that when people focused on recalling what they did and how it harmed the relationship partner, they felt more forgiveness from God, but *less* self-forgiveness, and less forgiveness from their victims, than when they imagined seeking forgiveness from the victim (i.e., confessing the wrong, apologizing, and asking forgiveness). This suggests that thinking about one's harmful behavior may lead to a sense of divine forgiveness, but it may deter one from engaging in interpersonal behaviors that would facilitate interpersonal forgiveness. Conversely, focusing on how one can repair the relational damage probably encourages one to seek forgiveness directly from the victim. Witvliet et al. also found that when participants focused on seeking forgiveness they experienced (1) increased hope; (2) reduced sadness, anger, guilt, and shame regarding the transgression; and (3) smaller increases in *corrugator* (brow) muscle tension, compared to when they simply thought about their harmful behavior. Together, these results suggest that seeking forgiveness directly from the victim may ultimately reduce negative affect, even though the prospect of seeking forgiveness itself is associated with some psychological stress in the short term (as shown by increased corrugator tension relative to baseline).

#### Religion and Humility: A Psychological Pathway to Seeking Forgiveness?

The above results suggest that intrinsically religious individuals are more likely to use interpersonal routes (e.g., confessing, seeking forgiveness from the people whom they in-

jure) rather than strictly religious routes (e.g., seeking forgiveness exclusively from God) when they harm others, and that these interpersonal routes lead to the most enduring psychological and interpersonal benefits. Still, the act of seeking forgiveness is unpleasant and interpersonally risky. Religiousness might make people more willing to take this risk by fostering humility. Humility (i.e., a willingness to incorporate flattering as well as unflattering aspects of one's behavior into one's self-view, along with a realistic assessment of one's strengths and weaknesses relative to others; Emmons, 1999) has been empirically linked to religiousness (e.g., Cline & Richard, 1965). More recent research has shown that people who are high in quest religiousness (i.e., embracing the existential complexity inherent in religious questions, viewing religious doubt as positive, and remaining open to religious change) appear to be relatively humble (Rowatt, Ottenbreit, Nesselrode, & Cunningham, 2002). Although a link between humility and seeking forgiveness has yet to be established empirically, Sandage et al. (2000) found that narcissism—which might be thought of as the mirror opposite of humility—is negatively related to seeking forgiveness.

In summary, the work to date on the influence of religion on seeking forgiveness suggests that people who have high levels of intrinsic religious motivation tend to take more personal responsibility for their wrongdoings and are more inclined to undertake reparative action for them (Meek et al., 1995). On the other hand, studies of forgiveness seeking in the context of real-life transgressions suggest that religiousness does not influence forgiveness seeking (Sandage et al., 2000), or that religion may either encourage forgiveness seeking if people assume that they should focus on reconciling (i.e., confessing for the wrongdoing, apologizing, and asking for forgiveness) or discourage forgiveness seeking if people assume that they should focus exclusively on their relationship with God (Witvliet et al., 2002). To the extent that religions promote humility, they may also be successful in prompting people to seek forgiveness when they harm others.

## RELIGION AND FORGIVING GOD

### When Do People Deliberate about Forgiving God?

What do people mean by the notion of "forgiving God"? This is a third area in which the religious contours of forgiveness have been explored. Many religious people will disagree on theological or philosophical grounds that God can be forgiven, since forgiveness presupposes the ability to commit moral errors, which a perfect God, by definition, cannot possess. But philosophical or theological questions about whether God is a conceptually appropriate target for forgiveness aside, people do seem to feel a need to ask questions about forgiving God, especially when they have difficulty explaining life experiences that they perceive as highly painful or unfair.

The 1988 General Social Survey revealed that only 36% of respondents reported that they "never" felt angry toward God: anger toward God is common and may set the stage for people to ask questions about whether they need to "forgive" God to move on with their lives after they encounter great pain or tragedy. When people's suffering violates their own standards of justice or morality, they may feel disappointed, frustrated, or angry with God, and they may conclude that God has betrayed them. Indeed, undeserved suffering is a dominant theme in people's accounts of why they are unforgiving toward God (see Exline & Rose, Chapter 17, this volume).

Some of the events that can make people feel unforgiving toward God include nega-

tive experiences that seem to involve no direct human agency (e.g., innocents who suffer, evil acts that go unpunished, untimely death or illness, freak accidents, natural disasters); those that involve human agency but seem avoidable or preventable by God (e.g., murder, war atrocities, assault, sexual abuse, divorce, and betrayal); and even common misfortunes that simply seem ill-timed (e.g., rain on a wedding day; Exline, 2004).

Empirical research on forgiving God is scant and has focused on conditions in which these dilemmas arise (as described above) or the personality variables that are relevant to forgiving God. In a review of this literature, Exline (2004) described the main predictors of difficulty forgiving God and discovered that they largely mirror the predictors of anger and unforgiveness toward other people: (1) belief that God intentionally caused severe suffering; (2) an elevated sense of narcissistic entitlement; (3) less closeness to God or insecure attitudes toward religion prior to the negative event; (4) insecure attachment with one's parents or with other important relationship partners; and (5) a larger pattern of emotional and spiritual distress in one's life.

### Forgiving God: Links with Well-Being

Exline (2004) also reviewed research on the outcomes of unforgiveness toward God. She noted correlational work suggesting that resentment toward God is associated with low spiritual well-being, which may lead to psychological distress more generally (see Pargament et al., 1998). Exline, Yali, and Lobel (1999) also conducted research on the negative outcomes of being unforgiving toward God. They administered self-report measures of negative emotion (i.e., depressed mood, anxious mood, and trait anger), religiousness (i.e., religious beliefs, religious participation, and feelings of alienation from God), and forgiveness (i.e., general difficulty forgiving God, forgiving God for a specific incident, and difficulty forgiving the self and others) to 200 people of various ethnicities and religions. They found that difficulty forgiving God was associated with higher levels of anxious and depressed mood and that difficulty forgiving God was distinct from difficulty forgiving the self or others in leading to these outcomes.

Exline et al.'s (1999) study provides preliminary evidence that dilemmas of forgiveness toward God are associated with low psychological well-being. They are also important because of their implications for religious functioning. Dilemmas of forgiveness toward God can be turning points where people question their faith in God and must resolve to make fundamental changes to their philosophy of life—for example, whether to seek ways to strengthen their belief in God or, on the other extreme, abandon their belief in God altogether (see Park, Chapter 16, this volume). More research on this topic would be extremely valuable for understanding religious means of coping with suffering and the implications of such means of coping for religious and psychological well-being.

## RELIGION AND FEELING FORGIVEN BY GOD

As mentioned above, seeking God's forgiveness is a religious preoccupation for individuals from many religious faiths and cultures. Moreover, the extent to which God is viewed as loving and forgiving is a major dimension underlying people's images of God. However, the psychological dynamics of feeling forgiven by God (or other spiritual entities) has received relatively little empirical attention. Using nationally representative data, Toussaint, Williams, Musick, and Everson (2001) examined the experience of feeling for-

given by God (along with other aspects of forgiveness) among adults in three age groups: 18–44, 45–64, and 65+. Feeling forgiven by God was measured by agreement with two self-report items (i.e., “Knowing that I am forgiven for my sins gives me the strength to face my faults and be a better person” and “I know that God forgives me”). The investigators found that older adults were significantly more likely to feel forgiven by God than younger adults and marginally less likely to feel forgiven by God than middle-aged adults. Francis, Gibson, and Robbins (2001) also found that viewing God as loving/forgiving was correlated with self-worth among Scottish adolescents.

Krause and Ellison (2003) investigated in more detail the relationships between feeling forgiven by God and forgiving others. Using nationally representative data, they found that people who felt forgiven by God were less likely to expect people who had harmed them to perform acts of contrition than those who did not feel forgiven by God. This suggests an important relationship between one's sense of having received divine forgiveness and one's behavior toward one's own human transgressors.

#### ADDITIONAL AREAS OF RESEARCH IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION AND FORGIVENESS

Two additional areas of research related to the relationships of religion and forgiveness are worthy of attention in the present chapter. First, we comment on the interrelationships of religion, forgiveness, and aging. Second, we comment on the interrelationships of religion, forgiveness, and health.

##### Religion, Forgiveness, and Aging

Longitudinal studies have shown that as people in the United States age, they tend to become more religious (Argue, Johnson, & White, 1999; see also McFadden, Chapter 9, this volume). There is also good evidence that people who are older tend to be generally more forgiving and less vengeful than are younger people (e.g., Girard & Mullet, 1997; Mullet et al., 2003). For example, Mullet, Houdbine, Laumonier, and Girard (1998) found that two dimensions of a multidimensional construct they called “forgivingness” were positively associated with age in a sample of adults. Their findings also indicated that younger adults forgive because they tend to be motivated by personal and social considerations (e.g., their mood at the time, whether family or friends think they should forgive, or because the consequences of the harm have been canceled in some way) to a greater extent than is true for older adults. This is consistent with previous research that shows that older persons tend to forgive mainly out of strong convictions that forgiveness should be practiced unconditionally (Girard & Mullet, 1997).

Previously, we speculated that the common association of religiousness and forgiveness may come from the fact that as people age, they appear to become both more religious and more forgiving (McCullough & Bono, in press). Work by Carstensen and her colleagues (e.g., Carstensen, 1995; Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999) helps to provide a theoretical account for why this might be so. According to Carstensen's socioemotional selectivity theory, as people age, their goals gradually shift away from future-oriented goals such as acquiring information, and toward more present-oriented goals such as being emotionally satisfied. With the recognition that the years of life they have remaining is becoming ever smaller, people become less motivated to maintain high

numbers of interpersonal relationships irrespective of the quality of these relationships and turn instead to nurturing relatively few higher quality, emotionally satisfying relationships. Thus, as individuals pass through older adulthood, they choose social partners more and more for their emotional value, they regulate their social interactions in a way that optimizes emotionally gratifying outcomes, and they become more vested in the relationships they want to maintain.

In this light, religious concerns may become stronger in older adulthood not only to help people come to terms with their mortality, but also because the interpersonal contacts that are fostered by interaction in religious settings may be particularly satisfying and meaningful. Similarly, people may become more forgiving with age because forgiveness helps them to maintain important, emotionally satisfying relationships even though relational transgressions are probably inevitable. We therefore suspect that forgiveness and religiousness both play larger roles as people age precisely because they serve higher order goals of securing stable and supportive relationships. The relationships among religiousness, forgiveness, and aging have yet to be investigated jointly in empirical research, however.

##### Religion, Forgiveness, and Health

There is considerable evidence that religious involvement is positively associated with many indices of physical and mental health (e.g., Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001; Oman & Thoresen, Chapter 24, this volume; Powell, Shahabi, & Thoresen, 2003). It is possible that religious people's tendency to forgive is one of the mechanisms by which religiousness obtains its associations with positive health outcomes (Koenig et al., 2001; Levin, 1996).

In support of this notion, researchers have found that unforgiving personality traits and/or acute unforgiving thoughts are associated with increases in cardiovascular arousal (Lawler et al., 2003; Witvliet et al., 2001) and increased cortisol secretion (Berry & Worthington, 2001). For example, Witvliet et al. instructed participants (undergraduate students) to engage in four types of thinking about a specific transgression they had incurred in the past: (1) thoughts about holding a grudge, (2) thoughts about revenge, (3) empathic thoughts about the transgressor, and (4) forgiving thoughts. They found that when participants engaged in grudge or revenge imagery, they exhibited increases in facial muscle tension, skin conductance, heart rate, and blood pressure compared to when they engaged in empathic or forgiving imagery regarding their transgressors. Not only did these physiological responses parallel participants' self-reported emotions (i.e., they felt more negative, aroused, angry, and sad, and less in control when engaging in the thoughts about grudges and revenge), but they also persisted into the postimagery recovery period. In other words, the psychophysiological effects of thinking about revenge and grudges persisted even after people had been instructed to stop thinking these thoughts. Based on these findings, Witvliet et al. argued that unforgiving responses to transgressions, if chronic, might erode physical health—particularly by increasing risk for cardiovascular diseases.

In addition, researchers have posited that forgiving one's transgressors has a positive effect on psychological well-being. Interventions designed to help people forgive have been shown to improve psychological well-being, yielding reduced anxiety and depressive symptoms, as well as increased self-esteem and hope (for a review, see Enright & Coyle, 1998). In addition, studies have demonstrated positive correlations between people's self-

reported global tendencies to forgive and measures of psychological well-being (e.g., Maltby, Macaskill, & Day, 2001).

Given the empirically established links between religiousness and forgiveness, and their independent associations with measures of health and well-being, it seems plausible that some of the beneficial influence of religion on health and well-being occurs because religion encourages people to practice forgiveness in their relationships with friends and family. However, the research that directly explores the connections among these three concepts simultaneously has not yet been conducted.

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Research has begun to show a clearer picture of how religion can influence people's seeking and granting of forgiveness in the interpersonal realm. In addition, research has begun to shed light on how people seek forgiveness from God and on the notion of "forgiving God." Although the proposition that God might be an appropriate target for forgiveness is theologically and philosophically problematic from some perspectives, it may nonetheless be experientially real for many people. In this chapter we have also described some promising connections between religion and forgiveness as they relate to aging, health, and well-being.

The concept of forgiveness appears to exist within most religions and most cultures (McCullough & Worthington, 1999; Rye et al., 2000), although each culture works out the specifics of forgiveness in unique ways (e.g., see Sandage, Hill, & Vang, 2003). In particular, religions provide norms, role models, and psychological resources that help people to forgive when they have been harmed by others. Religion also helps to identify what transgressions and transgressors can be forgiven, as well as when and under what circumstances those transactions can take place. In this vein, it is important to note that in many cultures, people often use religion to justify their decisions not to forgive. In some cultures, avenging one's family members who have been killed is even understood to be a solemn duty and a virtue that is readily justified by the dominant religious system (e.g., see Boehm, 1984). Similarly, religion appears to be an important force that shapes people's decisions about when they should seek forgiveness after harming others and when, conversely, they should feel justified in their harmful behavior toward other people.

Research on forgiveness has been growing rapidly, particularly during the last decade. If this progress continues, there is every reason to think that social science will reveal even more about how religion influences granting and seeking forgiveness in interpersonal relations, as well as how seeking forgiveness from God and perhaps forgiving God affect, and are affected by, other religious and nonreligious aspects of people's lives. Perhaps it will soon be time for social scientists who study religion to begin posing more fundamental questions about the relationships between religion and forgiveness: Why is forgiveness so common across cultures? Why does religion so often seem to be important for cultures' social constructions of forgiveness? Why is religion sometimes used to justify forgiveness, but on other occasions to justify revenge instead? Might forgiveness be such a common feature of religious and cultural systems because this concept helped our ancestors solve adaptive problems? Such questions might best be addressed by more explicitly incorporating evolutionary theory (e.g., Buss, 1995; Kenrick, Li, & Butner, 2003) into research and theorizing on religion and forgiveness. Contemporary psychological theorists have recently applied evolutionary thinking to many aspects of religion (e.g.,

Buss, 2002; Kirkpatrick, 1999; Wilson, 2002), and the religious contours of forgiveness also may be amenable to an evolutionary treatment (e.g., see Wilson, 2002). We close this chapter with some preliminary thoughts about how the religious contours of forgiveness might emerge through cultural evolution.

To remain intact, all cultures—especially large ones that are vulnerable to fissioning because of pressures exerted upon them by outside threats—must develop norms for socially acceptable behavior among their members, along with the means to enforce those norms. Recently, researchers have presented findings that suggest that belief in moralizing gods (i.e., gods who tell people what they should and should not do) is especially useful for this purpose (Roes & Raymond, 2003). Wherever societies face high degrees of external threat in the form of wars or droughts, for instance, belief in moralizing gods tends to arise. Belief in moralizing gods is useful in such contexts because the belief can be used to (1) explain why the norms exist in the first place; and (2) enforce the norms more efficiently because people can be convinced that they may receive spiritual sanctions (e.g., being haunted, illness, death, hell) if they violate the norms, and that they may receive spiritual rewards (e.g., wealth, fertility, safe passage to the next life) if they honor them.

However, because some individuals will inevitably violate the norms of these religiously prescribed moral systems, it seems likely that religious systems with moralizing gods will also need to provide adherents with means for seeking forgiveness from those spiritual forces, and by extension, from each other (Wilson, 2002). Without the possibility of forgiveness, after all, how is someone who violates the precepts established by a moralizing god (or gods) able to rejoin his or her community as a member in good standing? Religious systems with moralizing gods must be clear and strict in order to foster the desired level of group cohesion, to be sure, but they must also provide an outlet for reintegrating individuals whose behavior falls below the articulated standards. For some infractions, a community will decide that a permanent exclusion of a transgressor is warranted (i.e., that some sins are unforgivable), but for other infractions, it is more advantageous to rehabilitate the transgressor than to expel him or her through ostracizing or death. The possibility of forgiveness not only allows a reaffirmation of the culture's standards and the rehabilitation of the offending member, but may also make the offending member less self-centered than he or she might have been otherwise (for a nonreligious, modern-day example of this phenomenon in action, see Kelln & Ellard, 1999). Because the belief that people can be forgiven by their moralizing gods might have served this reintegrative function, we tentatively propose that the belief that people can be forgiven by their gods, given the proper demonstrations of contrition or sacrifice, will arise in any religious system in which belief in moralizing gods is also present, although the circumstances under which forgiveness is likely to be perceived to be available as a religious option will no doubt vary across cultures.

Although interpersonal (rather than divine) forgiveness no doubt served adaptive functions for our ancestors (e.g., fostering positive relations among close friends and family members, thereby maximizing inclusive fitness) quite apart from its connections to religion, it seems likely that many of people's ideas about seeking and granting forgiveness will be modeled upon their understandings of how their own forgiveness transactions with their god or gods are believed to occur. Specifically, when people are put in a position to forgive individuals who have harmed them, or to seek forgiveness from others, it seems likely that their religious systems will encourage them to model their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors after the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that their god or gods might experience. If so, then it seems likely that we can shed considerable light on

contemporary differences in forgiveness across religions and cultures (e.g., the substantial differences between Jewish and Christian practices regarding forgiveness) by integrating research findings from modern psychological science with historical and anthropological research that provides a deeper view of particular religions and cultures.

The few paragraphs above are hardly a comprehensive evolutionary account of religious forgiveness. In presenting these ideas (which may turn out upon scientific scrutiny to be completely incorrect), we have merely tried to illustrate some of the issues that might be addressed by evolutionary theorizing. Incorporating an evolutionary paradigm for studying forgiveness, and in particular its religious contours, could provide the field with a better framework for making sense of what we already know about the religious contours of forgiveness. It might also inspire new questions that could lead to a deeper understanding of the many connections between religion and forgiveness.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This chapter was prepared with the support of a grant from the Campaign for Forgiveness Research.

#### REFERENCES

- Andersen, S. M., & Chen, S. (2002). The relational self: An interpersonal social-cognitive theory. *Psychological Review*, *109*, 619–645.
- Argue, A., Johnson, D. R., & White, L. K. (1999). Age and religiosity: Evidence from a three-wave panel analysis. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *38*, 423–435.
- Basden, G. T. (1966). *Niger Ibos: A description of the primitive life, customs and animistic beliefs, etc., of the Ibo people of Nigeria*. London: Cass.
- Berry, J. W., & Worthington, E. L., Jr. (2001). Forgiveness, relationship quality, stress while imagining relationship events, and physical and mental health. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *48*, 447–455.
- Boehm, C. (1984). *Blood revenge: The anthropology of feuding in Montenegro and other tribal societies*. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press.
- Bono, G. (2002). *Commonplace forgiveness among and between groups and cross-cultural perceptions of transgressors and transgressing*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, CA.
- Buss, D. M. (1995). Evolutionary psychology: A new paradigm for psychological science. *Psychological Inquiry*, *6*, 1–30.
- Buss, D. M. (2002). Sex, marriage, and religion: What adaptive problems do religious phenomena solve? *Psychological Inquiry*, *13*, 201–203.
- Carstensen, L. L. (1995). Evidence for a life-span theory of socioemotional selectivity. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *4*, 151–156.
- Carstensen, L. L., Isaacowitz, D. M., & Charles, S. T. (1999). Taking time seriously: A theory of socioemotional selectivity. *American Psychologist*, *54*, 165–181.
- Cline, V. B., & Richard, J. M. (1965). A factor-analytic study of religious belief and behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *1*, 569–578.
- Davis, J. A., & Smith, T. W. (1999). *General Social Survey*. Chicago: National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago, 1999 [producer]. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, 1999 [distributor]. Retrieved on May 7, 2004, from [webapp.icpsr.umich.edu/gss](http://webapp.icpsr.umich.edu/gss).

- De Laguna, F. (1972). *Under Mount Saint Elias: The history and culture of the Yakutat Tlingit*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Emmons, R. A. (1999). Is spirituality an intelligence?: Motivation, cognition, and the psychology of ultimate concern. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, *10*, 3–26.
- Enright, R. D. (2001). *Forgiveness is a choice*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Enright, R. D., & Coyle, C. T. (1998). Researching the process model of forgiveness within psychological interventions. In E. L. Worthington, Jr. (Ed.), *Dimensions of forgiveness: Psychological research and theological perspectives* (pp. 139–161). Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press.
- Enright, R. D., Gassin, E. A., & Wu, C. (1992). Forgiveness: A developmental view. *Journal of Moral Development*, *21*, 99–114.
- Exline, J. J. (2004). Anger toward God: A brief overview of existing research. *Psychology of Religion Newsletter*, *29*(1), 1–8.
- Exline, J. H., Yali, A. M., & Lobel, M. (1999). When God disappoints: Difficulty forgiving God and its role in negative emotion. *Journal of Health Psychology*, *4*, 365–379.
- Finkel, E. J., Rusbult, C. E., Kumashiro, M., & Hannon, P. A. (2002). Dealing with a betrayal in close relationships: Does commitment promote forgiveness? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *82*, 956–974.
- Fishbein, M., & Ajzen, I. (1974). Attitude toward objects as predictive of single and multiple behavioral criteria. *Psychological Review*, *81*, 59–74.
- Francis, L. J., Gibson, H. M., & Robbins, M. (2001). God images and self-worth among adolescents in Scotland. *Mental Health, Religion, and Culture*, *4*, 103–108.
- Girard, M., & Mullet, É. (1997). Propensity to forgive in adolescents, young adults, older adults, and elderly people. *Journal of Adult Development*, *4*, 209–220.
- Gorsuch, R. L. (1968). The conceptualization of God as seen in adjective ratings. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *22*, 56–64.
- Gorsuch, R. L., & Hao, J. Y. (1993). Forgiveness: An exploratory factor analysis and its relationship to religious variables. *Review of Religious Research*, *34*, 333–347.
- Karremans, J. C., Van Lange, P. A. M., & Ouwerkerk, J. W. (2003). When forgiving enhances psychological well-being: The role of interpersonal commitment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *84*, 1011–1026.
- Kelln, B. R. C., & Ellard, J. H. (1999). An equity theory analysis of the impact of forgiveness and retribution on transgressor compliance. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *25*, 864–872.
- Kenrick, D. T., Li, N. P., & Butner, J. (2003). Dynamical evolutionary psychology: Individual decision rules and emergent social norms. *Psychological Review*, *110*, 3–28.
- Kirkpatrick, L. A. (1998). God as a substitute attachment figure: A longitudinal study of adult attachment style and religious change in college students. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *24*, 961–973.
- Kirkpatrick, L. A. (1999). Toward an evolutionary psychology of religion and personality. *Journal of Personality*, *67*, 921–952.
- Koenig, H. G., McCullough, M. E., & Larson, D. B. (2001). *Handbook of religion and health*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Krause, N., & Ellison, K. (2003). Forgiveness by God, forgiveness of others, and psychological well-being in late life. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *42*, 77–93.
- Kunkel, M. A., Cook, S., Meshel, D. S., Daughtry, D., & Hauenstein, A. (1999). God images: A concept map. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *38*, 193–202.
- Lawler, K. A., Younger, J. W., Piferi, R. L., Billington, E., Jobe, R., Edmondson, K., et al. (2003). A change of heart: Cardiovascular correlates of forgiveness in response to interpersonal conflict. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, *26*, 373–393.
- Lerner, M. J., & Simmons, C. H. (1966). Observer's reaction to the "innocent victim": Compassion or rejection? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *4*, 203–210.



- Levin, J. S. (1996). How religion influences morbidity and health: Reflections on natural history, salutogenesis, and host resistance. *Social Science and Medicine*, 43, 849–864.
- Maltby, J., Macaskill, A., & Day, L. (2001). Failure to forgive self and others: A replication and extension of the relationship between forgiveness, personality, social desirability and general health. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 30, 881–885.
- Mauger, P. A., Saxon, A., Hamill, C., & Pannell, M. (1996). *The relationship of forgiveness to interpersonal behavior*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southeastern Psychological Association, Norfolk, VA.
- McCullough, M. E. (2001). Forgiveness: Who does it and how do they do it? *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 10, 194–197.
- McCullough, M. E., & Bono, G. (in press). Religion, forgiveness, and adjustment in older adulthood. In K. W. Schaie, N. Krause, & A. Booth (Eds.), *Religious influences on health and well-being in the elderly*. New York: Springer.
- McCullough, M. E., & Hoyt, W. T. (2002). Transgression-related motivational dispositions: Personality substrates of forgiveness and their links to the Big Five. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28, 1556–1573.
- McCullough, M. E., Pargament, K. I., & Thoresen, C. E. (2000). The psychology of forgiveness: History, conceptual issues, and overview. In M. E. McCullough, K. I. Pargament, & C. E. Thoresen (Eds.), *Forgiveness: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 1–14). New York: Guilford Press.
- McCullough, M. E., Rachal, K. C., Sandage, S. J., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Brown, S. W., & Hight, T. L. (1998). Interpersonal forgiving in close relationships II: Theoretical elaboration and measurement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75, 1586–1603.
- McCullough, M. E., & Worthington, E. L., Jr. (1999). Religion and the forgiving personality. *Journal of Personality*, 67, 1141–1164.
- Meek, K. R., Albright, J. S., & McMinn, M. R. (1995). Religious orientation, guilt, confession, and forgiveness. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 23, 190–197.
- Mullet, É., Barros, J., Frongia, L., Usai, V., Neto, F., & Shafihi, S. R. (2003). Religious involvement and the forgiving personality. *Journal of Personality*, 71, 1–19.
- Mullet, É., Houdbine, A., Laumonier, S., & Girard, M. (1998). Forgivingness: Factorial structure in a sample of young, middle-aged, and elderly adults. *European Psychologist*, 3, 289–297.
- North, J. (1987). Wrongdoing and forgiveness. *Philosophy*, 62, 499–508.
- Pargament, K. I., Zinnbauer, B. J., Scott, A. B., Butter, E. M., Zerowin, J., & Stanik, P. (1998). Red flags and religious coping: Identifying some religious warning signs among people in crisis. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 54, 77–89.
- Poloma, M. M., & Gallup, G. H. (1991). *Varieties of prayer*. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International.
- Powell, L. H., Shahabi, L., & Thoresen, C. E. (2003). Religion and spirituality: Linkages to physical health. *American Psychologist*, 58, 36–52.
- Roberts, R. C. (1995). Forgivingness. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 32, 289–306.
- Roes, F. L., & Raymond, M. (2003). Belief in moralizing gods. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 24, 126–135.
- Rokeach, M. (1973). *The nature of human values*. New York: Free Press.
- Rovinskii, P. (1901). *Chrnogoriia v eia proshlom i nastoiashchem* [Montenegro in its past and present] (Vol. 2, pt. 2). St. Petersburg, Russia: Printing Office of the Imperial Academy of Sciences.
- Rowatt, W. C., Ottenbreit, A., Nesselroade, K. P., & Cunningham, P. A. (2002). On being holier-than-thou or humbler-than-thee: A social psychological perspective on religiousness and humility. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 41, 227–237.
- Rye, M. S., Pargament, K. I., Ali, M. A., Beck, G. L., Dorff, E. N., Hallisey, C., et al. (2000). Religious perspectives on forgiveness. In M. E. McCullough, K. I. Pargament, & C. E. Thoresen (Eds.), *Forgiveness: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 17–40). New York: Guilford Press.
- Sandage, S. J., Hill, P. C., & Vang, H. C. (2003). Toward a multicultural positive psychology: Indigenous forgiveness and Hmong culture. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 31, 564–592.

- Sandage, S. J., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Hight, T. L., & Berry, J. W. (2000). Seeking forgiveness: Theoretical context and an initial study. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 28, 21–35.
- Scobie, E. D., & Scobie, G. E. W. (1998). Damaging events: The perceived need for forgiveness. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 28, 373–401.
- Toussaint, L. L., Williams, D. R., Musick, M. A., & Everson, S. A. (2001). Forgiveness and health: Age differences in a U.S. probability sample. *Journal of Adult Development*, 8, 249–257.
- Tsang, J., McCullough, M. E., & Hoyt, W. T. (2005). Psychometric and rationalization accounts for the religion–forgiveness discrepancy. *Journal of Social Issues*, 61(4).
- Wilson, D. S. (2002). *Darwin's cathedral: Evolution, religion, and the nature of society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Witvliet, C. v. O., Ludwig, T. E., & Bauer, D. J. (2002). Please forgive me: Transgressors' emotions and physiology during imagery of seeking forgiveness and victim responses. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 21, 219–233.
- Witvliet, C. v. O., Ludwig, T. E., & Vander Laan, K. L. (2001). Granting forgiveness or harboring grudges: Implications for emotion, physiology, and health. *Psychological Science*, 12, 117–123.
- Worthington, E. L., Jr. (2001). *Five steps to forgiveness: The art and science of forgiving*. New York: Crown.
- Worthington, E. L., Jr., & Drinkard, D. T. (2000). Promoting reconciliation through psycho-educational and therapeutic interventions. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 26, 93–101.
- Worthington, E. L., Jr., & Wade, N. G. (1999). The psychology of unforgiveness and forgiveness and the implications for clinical practice. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 18, 385–418.
- Wuthnow, R. (2000). How religious groups promote forgiving: A national study. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 39, 125–139.