

# **Blaming the sinner or the sin?**

## **Just world beliefs, religiosity, and explanations for suffering**

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**This thesis is for those, who like Job, seek, scream or cry ... why?**

**Think too of all who suffer as if you shared their pain (Hebrews 13 v 3)**

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<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>2</b>
The Belief in a Just World.....	7
Individual Differences in the Belief in a Just World.....	11
Just World Beliefs and Religion: a review.....	12
Definitions of Religion.....	20
Belief in a Just World and the Blaming of the Poor .....	23
Other Political Correlates of the Belief in a Just World .....	25
Outline of Thesis Structure .....	27
<b>2. “Rain on the just and the unjust”: expanding on the relationship between religiosity and the belief in a just world.....</b>	<b>30</b>
Initial Critique of Past Research .....	31
Different Worlds.....	35
Just World v. Just Universe .....	38
The Nature of Religiosity .....	45
The Content of Beliefs.....	47
Just World Belief or Beliefs? Evaluative and Existential Elements.....	48
Research Questions .....	50
<b>3. Explaining Suffering .....</b>	<b>51</b>
Religion and Suffering .....	54
Liberation Theology .....	56
The ‘Prosperity Gospel’ .....	57
Connecting Religiosity, Just World Beliefs and Suffering .....	58
Specific Religious Explanations for Suffering .....	59
Relating Suffering to Jesus.....	72
Relating Explanations for Suffering and the Belief in a Just Universe .....	73
Conclusion.....	74
<b>4. Methodological Issues and Introduction to Studies .....</b>	<b>76</b>
The Tradition of Research Methodology in Just World Belief Research.....	76
Methodological Issues .....	78
Research Design .....	82
Operationalisation of Dependent and Independent Variable.....	82
Measurement of the Belief in a Just World .....	84
Statistics Used.....	85
Summary of Studies .....	86

## **CASE STUDIES**

<b>5. Replicating Past Research on Just World Beliefs and Religiosity .....</b>	<b>88</b>
Method.....	89
Results.....	90
Conclusion.....	100

<b>6. Exploring new aspects of the relationship between Just World Beliefs and Religiosity.....</b>	<b>103</b>
Method.....	103
Results.....	106
Conclusion.....	131
<b>7. Religious Explanations for Suffering and Beliefs about Justice .....</b>	<b>135</b>
Method.....	135
Results.....	138
Conclusion.....	161
<b>8. Blaming the sinner? Conclusions .....</b>	<b>166</b>
Beliefs about Suffering .....	167
Relating Just World Beliefs and Religiosity .....	170
Beliefs about Human Suffering and the Belief in a Just World .....	171
The Belief in a Just Universe.....	172
Contributions .....	173
Some Qualifications and Discussion on the Generalisability of Findings ..	177
More Questions .....	181
Final Thoughts.....	182
<b>APPENDIX 1 : FIRST STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE .....</b>	<b>183</b>
<b>APPENDIX 2 : SECOND STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE .....</b>	<b>212</b>
<b>APPENDIX 3 : THIRD STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE.....</b>	<b>227</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>244</b>

## TABLES

<b>Table 1.1:</b> Comparison of studies on belief in a just world and religiosity.....	14
<b>Table 3.1:</b> Comparing Specific Explanations for Suffering.....	66
<b>Table 5.1:</b> Assessment of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale.....	91
<b>Table 5.2:</b> Correlations between Just World Beliefs and Religiosity.....	94
<b>Table 5.3</b> Religious Group Comparisons of Global Belief in a Just World Scale.....	99
<b>Table 6.1:</b> Comparison of studies with regard to the Global Belief in a Just World Scale .....	107
<b>Table 6.2:</b> Bivariate Correlations (r) and significance levels (p) between measures of just world belief and related constructs .....	111
<b>Table 6.3:</b> Correlation Coefficients (r) Just World Beliefs and Religiosity.....	113
<b>Table 6.4:</b> Comparison of religious group scores on the Global Belief in a Just World Scale .....	114
<b>Table 6.5:</b> Percent who accept different religious beliefs and correlations (r) with importance of religion and frequency of attendance .....	116
<b>Table 6.6:</b> Bivariate Correlations (r) and Significance levels between measures of religious beliefs and just world beliefs .....	117
<b>Table 6.7:</b> Study 2: Bivariate Correlations (r) Just World Beliefs and Ultimate Justice.	119
<b>Table 6.8:</b> Belief in a Just World and Belief in a Just Universe.....	121
<b>Table 6.9:</b> Belief in a Just World and Belief in a Just Universe (Christian only).....	121
<b>Table 6.10:</b> Responses to beliefs about suffering .....	123
<b>Table 6.11:</b> Responses to beliefs relating God and suffering for those who believe in God.....	124
<b>Table 6.12:</b> Correlations (r) between beliefs about suffering and the belief in a just	

universe.....	130
<b>Table 7.1:</b> Analysis of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale.....	139
<b>Table 7.2:</b> Agreement and Disagreement with items making up the Global Belief in a Just World Scale .....	142
<b>Table 7.3:</b> Bivariate Correlations (r) Just World Beliefs and the belief in a Just Universe .....	146
<b>Table 7.4:</b> Belief in a Just World and Belief in a Just Universe.....	147
<b>Table 7.5:</b> Responses to open-ended questions on explanations for suffering.....	149
<b>Table 7.6:</b> Responses of the highly religious to specific beliefs about suffering.....	153

## FIGURES

<b>Figure 2.1:</b> Interaction of the Belief in a Just World and a Just Universe	41
<b>Figure 5.1:</b> Distribution of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale	92
<b>Figure 6.1:</b> Distribution of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale	108
<b>Figure 7.1:</b> Distribution of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale	140

## ABSTRACT

Within the literature on just world beliefs there is a recurring argument that religiosity is positively related to just world beliefs. This thesis, along with other studies, indicates otherwise. Measures of religiosity and general religious beliefs were not substantively related to the belief in a just world in two surveys of university undergraduates.

Unsatisfactory accounts of the relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs obscure some previously unexamined assumptions about this relationship. This thesis has examined the assumption that the Christian religion promotes the belief in a just world, revealing that religious beliefs about suffering challenge the belief in the justness of the world. Highly religious Christians indicated negligible support for the belief that people who are suffering are being punished by God. The dominant explanations for human suffering were that suffering is a result of the fallen state of humankind and the consequence of the actions of sinful people. Religious beliefs about suffering were argued, and found in some instances, to be important in determining the nature of the relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs.

The research presented here provides a more accurate description of the nature of the relationship between the belief in a just universe and the belief in a just world. There has been a tendency to overstate the case for a positive relationship between just world beliefs and religiosity, based on the explanation that religious people believe in ultimate justice. The thesis found that just world beliefs and just universe beliefs are distinct and possibly independent beliefs. Believing that the universe is just is not likely to be highly related to the belief in justice on earth. In contrast to just world beliefs, religiosity was found to be strongly related to the belief in the justness of the universe.



# 1. Introduction

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People in general care about just or fair outcomes. One reason for this is that people do not like it when bad things happen to them or their loved ones. For example, if a person works hard, she will probably think that she should be rewarded for her good work. If, instead of a reward, she is fired from her job, she will feel that this is not just, not fair, or not deserved. People's perceptions of justice are closely tied to conceptions of what is right and wrong. The person who works hard but is fired will inevitably think that this outcome is wrong. The moral aspect of justice is important in lending legitimacy to the thoughts and behaviour that flow from an unjust outcome. Not only is injustice wrong, but our attempts to restore justice are right. This is important not only at the level of the individual's attempt to restore justice, but also in the way in which groups of individuals are driven by their moral convictions to fight injustice.

Justice is a concept important to the functioning of both individuals and societies. Deutsch (1975) has suggested that a society functions well when its members are satisfied with life and that individuals are most satisfied when society functions well. Justice is integral to this circle, allowing individuals to coexist as stable collectives (140). Justice is important to the stable functioning of society. As an issue, justice is both motivation and constraint, propelling and limiting the actions of political leaders and whole populations of political actors. For instance, notions of what is just guide the formation of policy and law, and legitimate participation or non-participation in war. The perception of injustice, presumably, has the potential to ruin the relationship between satisfied individuals and stable societies. Decisions perceived as unjust will lack support, while the creation or amendment of laws is often a reaction to the exposure of injustice.

Karniol and Miller (1981) argue that justice and injustice cannot really be separated. Each concept is defined in relation to the other. Injustice often directly results in human suffering. Some types of suffering are, however, 'justified'. People who are sick, unemployed, or poor are often perceived as deserving their particular suffering through their actions or deficiencies in their character (Lerner, 1980).

There is a difference between thinking that something that happens to us is specifically just or unjust, and thinking that the world is generally just or unjust. Our perception of the world as just guides our interpretations of the events we observe. If we perceive the world as generally just, then the things that happen to people around us are also just. If we perceive specific events as just, then there is no justice to be restored. If the injustice involves the suffering of people, the sufferers may be left to their own fate. After all, they deserve it. Perceiving the world as not just also guides our interpretations of the events we observe, and it may contribute to a fatalistic attitude. If outcomes are independent of effort, what can we do?

The belief that the world is just<sup>1</sup> is deeply political. It affects the way in which people perceive the actions of political leaders as right or wrong. There are implications for the legitimacy of political leaders. For instance, if someone has power over other people, that power is perceived as deserved. This has implications for the license given to political leaders to act. People who believe the world is just will not act to change the world, as there is no need. The perception of a just world is unlikely to produce political action against the state. There are also policy implications for the perception that the world is just. If a person's suffering is seen as deserved, then this may contribute to individualistic interpretations of suffering and a change-the-individual orientation to social problems.

Where do these perceptions of justice come from? There are a variety of sources of beliefs about justice. One important source of ideas about justice is religion. In fact, Solomon (1995) likens the way people often think of justice to a "religious notion". Justice is thought of as "incontrovertibly grand, cosmic, universal, and necessary for the very existence of human life as such" (5). Justice is a central

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<sup>1</sup> The belief that the world is not just is also political.

concept in the religions of the world. Passages of the Bible illustrate the importance of justice in a religious context. Firstly, God is depicted as just:

Great and marvellous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages (Revelation 15 v 3b).

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you (Psalm 89 v 14).<sup>2</sup>

The image of God as just also implies what outcomes in particular are just. It also adds a sense of the divine and 'rightness' to particular actions and outcomes. For example:

Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent - the Lord detests them both (Proverbs 17 v 15).

Secondly, people's desire for God to "do" justice is recorded throughout the Psalms:

How long will you defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked? Defend the cause of the fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked (Psalm 82 vv 2-4).

Rise up, O Judge of the earth; pay back to the proud what they deserve. How long will the wicked, O Lord, how long will the wicked be jubilant? (Psalm 94 v 2-3).

Do not let the oppressed retreat in disgrace; may the poor and needy praise your name. Rise up, O God, and defend your cause ... (Psalm 74 vv 21-22).

As mentioned at the beginning of this discussion people care about just outcomes. These expressions illustrate this. The act of expressing injustice to God reveals the unholy or even evil nature of injustice for religious believers. The expression, in itself, may represent a way of coping with injustice.

Thirdly, principles of justice are set out in religious teachings. The passages above reveal what is to be considered just and unjust. Therefore, "doing justice" will guide the behaviour of religious individuals or at least provide a model of what this

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<sup>2</sup> All biblical references in this thesis will be taken from The Holy Bible: New International Version, © 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. This version is available on the world wide web (<http://bible.gospelcom.net/>)

behaviour should involve. Collectivities of religious believers, motivated to “do justice”, will have an important impact on society at large. Religious conceptions of what is just may influence the perceptions of justice in the wider society in the present time. Religious principles of justice in the past may be the basis for modern conceptions of justice. For instance, clichés about principles of justice such as “he reaped what he sowed” or “an eye for an eye” are derived from their expression in the Judaeo-Christian tradition.<sup>3</sup>

This thesis examines how religious people perceive justice in the world. Lerner introduced the “just world hypothesis” (see Lerner and Miller, 1978 and Furnham and Proctor, 1989 for reviews of the literature). Stated most simply, the hypothesis is that “Individuals have a need to believe that they live in a world where people generally get what they deserve” (Lerner and Miller, 1978). This has been argued to be related to beliefs put forward by Judaism and Christianity (Lerner, 1980; Rubin and Peplau, 1975; Furnham and Proctor, 1989). Research has related religiosity, or being religious, to the belief that the world is a just place. The research presented in this thesis, firstly replicates the research of others in this field. This research will attempt to confirm the differences found in prior studies on just world beliefs based on measures of religious identification and religiosity. While most of the previous research has been conducted in the North American and European contexts (with their particular cultures, histories, and religious traditions), this study is the first to specifically examine the relationship between the belief in a just world and religiosity in the New Zealand context. To understand the relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs, it is important to reveal and examine a number of important aspects of the relationship.

The belief that the world is just implies the question of *how* the world is just. Individuals’ beliefs regarding the reasons why the world is or is not a just place are backed up by specific theories or explanations, both secular and religious. One example of this would be the belief that the world is just because God is just and God

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<sup>3</sup> The biblical quotes that these derive from are “A man reaps what he sows” (Galatians 6 v 7) and “eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise” (Exodus 21 vv 24-25).

is in control. Another belief would be that the world is not just because sin governs human existence and relations on earth.

The relationship between religiosity and conceptions of the justness of the world is a complex one. One step in acknowledging this complexity is to go beyond measures of religiosity and religious identification to examine the relationship between the belief in a just world and specific religious beliefs. Just world beliefs do not derive simply from identification as a Christian or a Jew or a Hindu, or the strength of a person's commitment to a religion. However, the majority of prior research has seemed to approach the relationship between religious belief and the belief in a just world in this way. Measurement of the strength of religiosity (whether by attendance, prayer, or self-rated importance) and religious identification (for instance as Christian, or more specifically as Anglican or Catholic etc.) are, however, insufficient to properly account for the influence of religion on beliefs about the justness of the world. Just world beliefs derive from the *content* of religion, namely specific beliefs and networks of beliefs, not just the *form* of religion. Simplistic statements of a positive relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs do not take into account the diversity of beliefs within the western religious tradition, including the belief that the *universe* is ultimately just.

One element of the content of religion is beliefs about suffering. Previous attempts to understand the relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs have failed to take into account the various explanations for suffering in religious discourse. Just world beliefs may be viewed as a reaction to the more general problem of suffering. Just world beliefs allow people to explain suffering: people suffer because they deserve it. This allows people to act with a degree of predictability and control: if they are good they will not suffer. When it is understood how just world beliefs function in explaining suffering, we can see that, by examining the other beliefs that people hold about suffering, we can more fully understand how the belief in a just world relates to religious belief. This is especially the case for those beliefs that are endorsed by particular religious groups and traditions.

This thesis advocates the importance of an understanding of the content of

religious belief for insight into the relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs. This approach is useful for the study of the relationship between religion and politics in general. Moving from a unidimensional to a multidimensional understanding of what it means to be religious is important for understanding the way in which religion and politics interact. Erich Fromm's definition of religion as "any system of thought and action shared by a group which gives the individual a frame of orientation and an object of devotion" (1951: 29) points to the wider relevance of this thesis. This definition could encompass Christianity, Buddhism, nationalist ideologies, political ideologies and even devotion to sport. There is much to be gained by learning how religion and religious belief systems affect other beliefs and behaviour. The discussion here on religion and just world beliefs may provide insights into how belief systems in general are constructed and interact. Specific religious beliefs will tend to relate to other constructs more than simply being religious.

Three studies were undertaken as part of this thesis. The first two, conducted with undergraduates at the University of Canterbury, examined the relationship between just world beliefs and religiosity. The first study replicated previous research on just world beliefs and religiosity. The second study introduced measures of specific religious beliefs, measures of beliefs about suffering, and measures of the belief that the universe is ultimately just. The third study explored the beliefs of highly religious people, students at a Bible College, about suffering and related these to the belief in a just world.

This chapter will review the literature on the belief in a just world and the relationship between this belief and religiosity. The political implications of the belief that the world is just will be outlined and the research topic will be related to the field of political science. The final task of this chapter is to outline the remainder of this thesis.

### ***The Belief in a Just World***

According to Canadian psychologist Melvin Lerner, people have a need to live in a world that they believe is just (Lerner, 1970; Lerner, 1980; Lerner, Miller, and

Holmes, 1976; Lerner and Miller, 1978). Stated most simply, a just world is “one in which people ‘get what they deserve’” (Lerner, 1980: 11). In a just world, good things happen to good people, and bad things happen to bad people. Lerner begins the preface to his 1980 book by stating the importance to people of the belief in a just world:

The ‘belief in a just world’ is an attempt to capture in a phrase one of the ways, if not *the* way, that people come to terms with - make sense out of - find meaning in, their experiences. We do not believe that things just happen in our world; there is a pattern to events which conveys not only a sense of orderliness or predictability, but also the compelling experience of appropriateness expressed in the typically implicit judgment, ‘Yes, that is the way it should be.’ (1980, vii).

The belief that the world is a just place stamps its order on the negative occurrences that invade the lives of ourselves and others. The belief that the world is just implies that what happens to ourselves and others, whether positive or negative, is also just.

The belief in a just world can perhaps most clearly be illustrated by the tension or even outrage that surfaces in those instances when the good heroes of the books we read or the movies we watch meet with unhappy or unfair outcomes. Almost invariably, justice is restored by the end of the story, and this is one of the primary ways in which our attention is sustained by the storyteller. When justice is not restored, the tendency is for people to be shocked, and often, to not understand. We all know what should happen to the innocent man on deathrow, the person who works harder in their job than others, the lazy person who takes any opportunity to avoid work, the person who cheats, or the politician who lies or takes bribes. Challenges to our belief in a just world require at least some psychological reaction and often a behavioural reaction to resolve the injustice.

The belief in a just world is argued to be very important to us as it allows meaningful and predictable action in our physical and social environment (Lerner, 1980). The belief that we live in a world in which we get what we deserve is necessary in order to allow the feeling that our actions, present and planned, will achieve deserved outcomes. The belief that the world is just not only reassures us that good deeds will be rewarded and are therefore worthy of undertaking, it also alerts us to the

possibility that if we engage in activities that are not socially sanctioned, we will be punished.

We are continually confronted with others who are experiencing some degree of suffering. This is distressing to us if we see ourselves as similar to these suffering people. If people like us can suffer, then we also can suffer. Observing the undeserved suffering of others threatens our belief in a just world if we see ourselves as similar to the 'others'. Their failure to achieve a deserved outcome is an indicator that we also may not be able to achieve a deserved outcome. A concern for the suffering of others (and suffering as a problem in general) is not only motivated by the selfish reason of our own potential suffering. A concern for other people is basic to human society and this concern is encouraged through the various agents of socialisation (including the family, education system, media and religion).

Lerner argued (and has undertaken research to demonstrate) that when people are faced with challenges to their just world beliefs, they are left with two basic options to cope with this challenge (1970: 208). Firstly, people may attempt to restore justice to the situation by compensating the victim of suffering. This may not only support and motivate individual charitable giving, but may also lend legitimacy to collective endeavours at restoring justice, such as social welfare transfers and the legal system.

Secondly, people may convince themselves that the suffering is in fact deserved, either by the undesirable actions of the person or by the nature of their character. This is more likely the more difficult it is to compensate the victim or victims. By blaming victims of suffering for their situations, people can psychologically distance themselves from those who are suffering. They can thus convince themselves that they will never encounter the same negative outcome because they are not like those who are suffering. People effectively persuade themselves that because they are nothing like the person suffering and because they would never do something to deserve suffering then they are themselves safe. Viewing the world as just removes our empathy for victims of social problems, such as poverty, because it is thought that they must deserve their situation. A lack of



empathy is important in distancing ourselves from society's victims. We may therefore fail to help people. The belief in a just world allows us to minimise the psychological distress of being confronted with our own and others' suffering by providing a framework in which to explain this suffering. The belief that people get what they deserve is thus a mechanism for giving meaning to our own<sup>4</sup> and others' suffering, and perhaps human suffering in general.

There are several explanations concerning the origins and development of an individual's belief in a just world. These explanations are, in part at least, complementary. First, "[c]hildren growing up in Western societies are often explicitly taught that the world is a just place" (Rubin and Peplau, 1975: 73). From Cinderella to Pinocchio to Santa Claus, notions that people get what they deserve are taught in children's stories. Western religions and the media, according to Lerner, also enforce the notion that good things will happen to good people and bad things will happen to bad people (1980: 13). These themes run through Western culture and consequently those who grow up in Western culture may take on these beliefs.

Second, as already mentioned, because people need to believe that their actions will result in an outcome which is deserved, it is argued that people are "motivated to believe that others also get what they deserve" (Rubin and Peplau, 1975: 74). There is thus an important functional aspect to this belief (Lerner, 1980: 14-15).

Third, Rubin and Peplau (1975) state that research into the development of children's beliefs about morality points to another source of the development of the belief in a just world. Piaget (1968) found that young children tended to believe in immanent justice; that behaviour is automatically punished or rewarded. Although eroded by experiences of injustice and learning, the belief in immanent justice may persist, at least in some degree, into adulthood (Rubin and Peplau, 1975: 75).

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<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that there are differences in the way in which we perceive our own and others' suffering. However, Hafer and Olson (1998) reveal that high just world believers do see their outcomes as deserved.

The belief in a just world is not just an individually based phenomena, it is a shared belief. The world is just for many of us because others in our societies believe that the world is, or at least should be, a just place, and because they know and attempt to enforce the ‘deserving rules’ that stipulate which behaviours and which attributes deserve reward and punishment. The world is often a just place because others like us reward and punish us for what we do. For instance, employers often reward the employees who work hard with bonuses or promotions, and punish the employees who are lazy by demoting or firing them. Similarly, the legal system often imprisons or fines people who steal or cause injury to other people. Without other people and structures in society enforcing deserving rules, the belief that the world is just would not be preserved.

### ***Individual Differences in the Belief in a Just World***

Whereas Lerner and his associates concentrated on the shared, cultural, and functional nature and origins of the belief in a just world, Rubin and Peplau (1973) changed the focus of just world research by conceptualising the belief in a just world as a trait which some individuals hold to a greater extent than others. Lerner also indicated that while almost everyone possesses some form of just world belief, there are differences in the extent to which individuals accept these beliefs (Lerner, 1980: 137-8). Finding the sources of these differences in the belief in a just world goes some way to explaining differences in other attitudes and beliefs which are influenced by the belief in a just world.

The context of this study is New Zealand. Since most of the research on just world beliefs has been undertaken outside of New Zealand, it is worthwhile to compare the degree of belief in a just world in New Zealand with other countries. Furnham (1992) compared just world beliefs in twelve countries (Australia, Britain, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, India, Israel, New Zealand, South Africa, United States, West Indies, and Zimbabwe). Furnham, using an adaptation of Rubin and Peplau’s (1973) Belief in a Just World Scale, found that New Zealand was eighth highest out of the twelve on the Just World score. India, the US and South Africa, in

contrast to New Zealand, scored the highest on the Just World scale. Although New Zealanders may demonstrate weaker beliefs in a just world than other nations, research in New Zealand by Hirshberg and Ford (1998), which is described in the next section, found important individual differences based on the belief in a just world.

### ***Just World Beliefs and Religion: a review***

Most of the prominent literature on just world beliefs identifies *religiosity*, or being religious, as one source of individual difference. It is argued that religion in the western tradition emphasises the belief that the world is just (see Lerner, 1980; and Rubin and Peplau, 1975). Thus, the more someone is socialised into and accepts these religions, the more strongly they would be expected to believe in the justness of the world. The non-religious are argued to be less likely to accept the belief that the world is just than the religious. Non-western religions are largely ignored in the literature.<sup>5</sup>

Researchers have pointed to the link between religion in the western tradition and the belief in a just world (Lerner, 1980: 13; Rubin and Peplau, 1975: 78; Furnham and Proctor, 1989: 372-373). Lerner states that just world themes are found throughout the Bible and Judaeo-Christian tradition (1980: 13). He states:

The Western religions stress the relation between sin, doing harm to others, and suffering. Although the ultimate accounting is expected to take place in the next world and for eternity, there are strong themes running through the Judaeo-Christian tradition which links signs of one's fate on earth with virtue and a state of grace - Job, in the Bible, suffered long and grievously, but he was more than compensated, not in heaven but on this earth. The Old Testament contains many examples which illustrate that the 'righteous will triumph and the wicked be punished.' (Lerner, 1980: 13)<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The focus of this thesis will primarily be on Christianity. This is not to say that other religions do not express themes consistent with the belief in a just world. This is partially a reaction to the literature, which basically only deals with the Christian religion, and to ease of researching the Christian religion in a 'Christian' country. There are very few adherents to non-Christian religions in New Zealand.

<sup>6</sup> It is worthwhile to briefly describe the story of Job here for those who are unfamiliar with it, as this story is referred to frequently in the literature relating just world beliefs and religion and will be referred to throughout this thesis. In the story God allows Satan to test Job, a righteous man. Job loses all his possessions, members of his family die and he is afflicted by disease. Job's friends, seeing the bad things happen, assume it must be due to some sin committed by Job. Knowing that he is a righteous man, Job cannot understand the calamities that have happened to him. Job challenges God,<sup>12</sup>

Wagner and Hunsberger (1984) give further examples that emphasise the themes of a just world:

Old Testament stories such as the drowning of the disobedient and sinful during the great flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah because of its sexual perversions, and the rescue of the innocent Daniel from the lions (sic) den, all emphasize the theme that God is just and will punish evil while rewarding righteousness (5).

Similarly, Rubin and Peplau state that: “Belief in a just world may also be fostered by religions such as Judaism and Christianity which teach that although just rewards may not occur immediately, they are ultimately inevitable” (1975: 73). This is echoed by Furnham and Proctor, who place emphasis on the idea in the western religious tradition “that sins will be punished and that good deeds will be rewarded” (1989: 372).

The reasoning is consequently that religious believers, due to the promotion of just world beliefs by their religions, are more likely to believe in a just world. For instance, Rubin and Peplau state: “Because the major Western religions endorse the belief in a just world to a significant extent, it was hypothesized that people who are relatively religious will be especially likely to espouse this belief” (1975: 78).

Although initial studies on the belief in a just world supported the contention that religiosity was a source of individual difference in just world beliefs (Rubin and Peplau, 1973; Sorrentino and Hardy, 1974), later studies have found that the relationship between religion and just world beliefs is more complex than initially thought (Zweigenhaft, Philips, Adams, Morse, and Horan, 1985; Crozier and Joseph, 1997; Benson, 1992). Table 1.1 summarises the results of studies conducted that examine the relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs.

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but does not lose his faith. God responds by affirming his power and wisdom. Job acknowledges that God is powerful and wise and repents for his brash words. Job is finally restored to a position more prosperous than before.

**Table 1.1 Comparison of studies on belief in a just world and religiosity**

Study	Population	Measurement of Just World Beliefs	Measurement of Religiosity and Religious Beliefs	Results
Rubin and Peplau, 1973	PART 1: 48 20-year-old University students.  PART 2: 180 US Undergraduates	PART 1: Rubin and Peplau's 16-item Belief in a Just World Scale (BJWS) PART 2: 20-item BJWS	PART 1: Belief in God  PART 2: Belief in an active God Frequency of church attendance Self-ratings of religiosity	PART 1: Significant association: $r=0.32$ , $p<0.05$  PART 2: Significant association: $r=0.31$ , $p<0.001$ Significant association: $r=0.45$ , $p<0.001$  Significant association: $r=0.42$ , $p<0.001$
Sorrentino and Hardy, 1974	80 Canadian Undergraduates	Single item: "To what extent do you believe in a just world?" (375).	A single item which measured the "extent to which they [respondents] felt religion was important in their everyday life" (374).	Significant association: $r=0.38$ , $p<0.01$
Furnham and Gunter, 1984	221 English adults	16-item BJWS	Religious affiliation	"Church of England and Jewish subjects had significantly higher 'just world' beliefs than other Protestants ... or agnostics. All the believers (including agnostics) had significantly higher scores than atheists. ... all subjects had similar 'unjust world' beliefs" (267-268).
Wagner and Hunsberger, 1984	92 Canadian Undergraduates	20-item BJWS	Christian Orthodoxy Scale	Significant association: $r=0.15$ , $p<0.01$

Zweigenhaft et. al., 1985	195 US Undergraduates	BJWS	Religious affiliation, importance of religion, frequency of attendance at a place of worship.	Agnostics < Quakers < Catholics < Protestants < Jews (F(4)=2.75, p<0.03). For Catholics there were significant positive associations between BJWS and importance of religion (r=0.41, p<0.05) and BJWS and frequency of attendance (r=0.38, p<0.05). For Baptists there was a significant negative correlation between BJWS and importance of religion (r=-0.45, p<0.05). For Quakers there were non-significant negative correlations between BJWS and importance of religion (r=-0.29) and BJWS and attendance (r=-0.15).
Ma and Smith, 1985	1091 Taiwanese University students	20-item BJWS	Single items: religious affiliation, belief in God	No significant associations
Szmajke, 1991	110 Polish adults	16-item Polish JWS (based on Rubin and Peplau BJWS)	47 'Highly religious' (Catholic) group, 63 Control group (less religious)	Slightly higher JWS for the Highly religious group (t(108)=1.7, p< 0.1).
Benson, 1992	283 Northern Irish adults	3 items from the BJWS	A single item ("How important is religion to you?") and the orthodoxy index from Glock and Stark's Dimensions of Religious Commitment Scale	No association found between religiosity and just world beliefs
Crozier and Joseph, 1997	143 English students (16-18 years old)	Global Belief in a Just World Scale (GBJWS), Multidimensional Belief in a Just World Scale (MBJWS).	Francis Scale of Attitudes towards Christianity (FSAC).	FSAC not significantly associated with the GBJWS, the Sociopolitical Just World Belief (SJW) or Interpersonal Just World Belief (IJW) subscales of the MBJWS. There was a weak positive association between the FSAC and Personal Just World Belief subscale of the MBJWS (r=0.14, p<0.05 one-tailed test).

Initial research found that just world beliefs, as measured by Rubin and Peplau's (1973) Belief in a Just World Scale, were positively correlated with measures of religiosity. Rubin and Peplau initially surveyed forty-eight 20-year-old University students and found that there was a significant association between belief in God and their 16-item Belief in a Just World Scale ( $r=0.32$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). In a later survey of 180 US undergraduate students (discussed in the same paper), there were significant associations found between their 20-item scale and frequency of church attendance ( $r=0.45$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), self-rated religiosity ( $r=0.42$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and the belief in an active God ( $r=0.31$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Rubin and Peplau concluded that: "Although the direction of the causal link is not certain, the results suggest that religious ideologies which stress the presence of an active God (which tends to be characteristic of the Western religions) help to instil the belief that the world is a just place" (89).

Sorrentino and Hardy (1974) in a sample of 80 Canadian undergraduate students, also found a positive relationship ( $r=0.38$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) between religiosity and belief in a just world. Religiosity was measured by a single item asking subjects the extent to which religion was considered important in subjects' everyday lives. Belief in a just world was also measured by a single item ("To what extent do you believe in a just world?") (375). Another study of 92 Canadian undergraduates, by Wagner and Hunsberger (1984), also found a significant but low positive association between strength of religiosity, measured by the Christian Orthodoxy Scale, and the 20-item Belief in a Just World Scale ( $r=0.15$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). However, they expressed reservations about the result given the poor psychometric properties of the Belief in a Just World Scale.

Although only measuring the religious affiliation of their 221 English subjects, Furnham and Gunter (1984) found some group differences in the belief in a just world. Furnham and Gunter divided the 16-item Belief in a Just World Scale into 'just world' and 'unjust world' subscales. All subjects, whether Church of England, Jewish, other Protestant, agnostic or atheist, had a similar belief in an 'unjust world'. Subjects differed significantly however on 'just world' scores: "Church of England and Jewish subjects had significantly higher 'just world' beliefs than other Protestants (Methodist, Baptist, Fundamentalist, etc.) or agnostics. All the believers (including agnostics) had

significantly higher scores than atheists" (267-268). Although not separating between those who identify with a religion nominally and those who practice religion, the difference between non-believers (i.e. atheists) and believers lends some support to the notion that strength of religious commitment is related to the strength of belief in a just world.

Later research has revealed that the relationship between just world beliefs and religiosity is not as straight-forward as had previously been suggested. Perhaps the most important study, Zweigenhaft et al. (1985) (testing a sample of 195 undergraduate students from the United States), found that there was a significant difference in scores on the Belief in a Just World Scale between different religious groups ( $F(4)=2.75, p<0.03$ ). On average, Agnostics scored the least, followed by Quakers, Catholics, Protestants and Jews. For Catholics the Belief in a Just World Scale was positively related to importance of religion ( $r=0.41, p<0.05$ ) and frequency of church attendance ( $r=0.38, p<0.05$ ). For Baptists, however, there was a significant negative correlation between the Belief in a Just World Scale and importance of religion ( $r=-0.45, p<0.05$ ). Although not reaching a statistically significant level, negative correlations were also found between the Belief in a Just World Scale and importance of religion ( $r=-0.29$ ) and attendance ( $r=-0.15$ ) for Quakers. The pattern for Baptists and Quakers in the Zweigenhaft et. al. study was the opposite of what had traditionally been argued was the relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs. Thus Zweigenhaft et. al. concluded that the "relation between religiosity and belief in a just world depends more on the manner that one is religious than on simply whether or not one is religious" (1985: 347).

Other studies have examined just world beliefs and religiosity outside of North America and England. Research by Szmajke (1991) in Poland found a slightly higher just world belief in a highly religious Catholic group ( $n=47$ ) compared to a less religious Control group ( $n=63$ ) ( $t(108)=1.7, p<0.1$ ). The lack of research conducted on religiosity and just world beliefs in non-western cultures is perhaps the most significant gap in the literature. Ma and Smith (1985) surveyed 1091 Taiwanese University students. Only small and non-significant associations were found between the 20-item Belief in a Just World Scale and measures of religious affiliation and



belief in God.

A study by Benson (1992) of a non-student adult sample in Northern Ireland (n=283) tested whether high religiosity was an explanation for high just world beliefs. Benson measured just world beliefs with three items, derived by factor analysis from the Belief in a Just World Scale:

1. Basically the world is a just place.
2. By and large people deserve what they get.
3. People who meet with misfortune have brought it on themselves.

Two measures of religiosity were used. The orthodoxy index from Glock and Stark's Dimensions of Religious Commitment scale asked subjects about their beliefs about God, Jesus Christ, the Bible and the devil. Subjects were also asked to rate how important they felt religion was to them. Neither bivariate correlational data nor regression analysis showed any support for a relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs. Benson points to three limitations of the study that are worth bearing in mind (96). First, although the characteristics of his sample appear to match the characteristics of the general population of Northern Ireland on a number of demographic variables, the response rate was lower than would be preferred. Second, the psychometric properties of the measure of just world beliefs was less than optimal. Third, a more "intensive test" with a "variety of measures" might have increased support for any relationship (96).

Two further studies exploring just world beliefs and religious identification in Northern Ireland have some tentative relevance here also. Glennon, Joseph and Hunter (1993) hypothesised that just world beliefs would be lower for Catholics than Protestant students due to Catholics' greater experiences of injustice. They found support for this hypothesis ( $t(141)=2.91, p<0.005$ ). Joseph and Stringer (1998) found no significant difference between those with a Catholic or Protestant background. In both these studies, Lipkus' (1991) Global Belief in a Just World Scale was the instrument used to measure just world beliefs. The Glennon et. al. study, the Joseph and Stringer studies, and perhaps research into religion in general in Northern Ireland is problematic due to the confounding of religion with salient political, economic and

ethnic groups; the Protestant and Catholic categories are identifiers for separate sides of a conflict in Northern Ireland, each with varying experiences of injustice.

Deficiencies in Rubin and Peplau's (1973) Belief in a Just World Scale are a possible reason for inconsistent findings between religiosity and just world beliefs. Wagner and Hunsberger (1984) refer to this in interpreting the significant but weak association they found. Likewise, in an attempt to improve the measurement of the belief in a just world, Benson (1992) reduced the number of items used to measure just world beliefs to three from Rubin and Peplau's original twenty. Consistent criticism of the psychometric properties of the Belief in a Just World Scale in terms of its multidimensionality, has thus led to alternative but limited attempts to measure just world beliefs both as a unidimensional and as a multidimensional construct (Furnham, 1998; Maes, 1998). Lipkus (1991) developed the Global Belief in a Just World Scale as a unidimensional measure of just world beliefs. The Global Belief in a Just World Scale has advantages over the Belief in a Just World Scale in that it has been demonstrated to possess superior psychometric properties and has less than half as many items. A Multidimensional Belief in a Just World Scale has also been developed by Furnham and Proctor (1988) which distinguishes between conceptions of the justness of the world in the personal, interpersonal and socio-political spheres. Unfortunately, according to Lipkus (1991) and Furnham (1998), the Multidimensional Belief in a Just World Scale has been found to possess poor internal consistency.

Crozier and Joseph (1997) have tested, on a sample of 16 to 18 year old English students, whether religiosity (measured by the Francis Scale of Attitudes to Christianity) was associated with just world beliefs (measured using the Global Belief in a Just World Scale and the Multidimensional Belief in a Just World Scale). No association was found between attitudes to Christianity and the Global Belief in a Just World Scale, or between the Interpersonal Just World Belief and Socio-political Just World Belief subscales of the Multidimensional Belief in a Just World Scale. A weak, though significant, correlation ( $r=0.14$ ,  $p<0.05$  one-tailed test) was found between the Personal Just World Belief subscale of the Multidimensional Belief in a Just World Scale and the Francis Scale of Attitudes to Christianity .

In the 30 years that research has been undertaken on just world beliefs, there have been only a handful of studies that explore the relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs. This is an area that is still in need of research *and* comprehensive theory. Some researchers have suggested that the relationship between just world beliefs and religiosity are complex (Crozier and Joseph, 1997; Zweigenhaft et al., 1985). There have been only limited attempts to explain or understand the complexity of the relationship between religious beliefs and beliefs about the justness of the world. What does complexity mean beyond positive, negative and no apparent associations between just world beliefs and religiosity? The following chapter will expand on this relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs, criticise past research and present some new research questions.

## ***Definitions of Religion***

Thus far we have been using terms such as religion, religious beliefs and religiosity without defining exactly what is meant by them. Religiosity has been defined previously in this chapter as “being religious”. The lack of a theoretical definition of religion is not unprecedented in work in the psychology of religion. The writers of one of the most influential texts in the psychology of religion “avoid the pitfalls of unproductive, general, theoretical definitions” (Spilka, Hood and Gorsuch, 1985: 4). Instead they favour operational definitions “about which there is little or no argument” (4). An operational definition of religion concentrates on the “measurable aspects and qualities” of religion (31). Spilka et. al., however, also point out that “no operational definition can describe or explain the total concept from which it is derived” (31). Among the many types of operational definitions for religion and religiosity are those based on religious behaviour, such as church attendance or prayer, and definitions based on beliefs and attitudes, such as belief in God or religious miracles.

Some people might argue that choosing not to define a concept central to one’s field of study represents serious academic neglect. However, the position of Spilka et. al. is to be respected, and it is not the purpose of this thesis to review all definitions of

religion or create new definitions of religion. Definitions and words more generally in this context are tools to further our understanding of social phenomena.

Having said this, it is important to relate our understanding of religion, religiosity and religious belief to the definitions of these concepts used in the literature reviewed in the last chapter. How are these concepts defined in studies investigating the relationship between just world beliefs and religion? Among the most important research on just world beliefs and religion, none of Rubin and Peplau (1973; 1975), Sorrentino and Hardy (1974), Wagner and Hunsberger (1984), Zweigenhaft et. al. (1985), Furnham and Proctor (1989), Benson (1992), or Crozier and Joseph (1997) provide theoretical definitions of religion or religious belief. Their discussions focus on which specific religions promote just world beliefs. These are often described alternately as Western or Judaeo-Christian, but what really is meant is the Christian or Jewish faiths.

What is obvious from a review of the literature on just world beliefs and religion is the emphasis on operational definitions of religion, religiosity and religious belief, examples of which include belief in God, attendance of religious services, self-ratings of religiosity, identification as a member of a religion, and specific religious beliefs. It is with regard to the operationalisation of religion that controversy and differentiation between authors is evident. For instance, Benson (1992) criticises equating religiosity with frequency of attendance at a place of religious worship (used by Rubin and Peplau, 1973 and Zweigenhaft et. al., 1985). Instead, he favours a scale measuring religious orthodoxy and an individual's self-rating of the importance of religion. Further, Crozier and Joseph (1997) emphasise the multidimensionality of religion and suggest that the assessment of different dimensions is the most effective way to investigate the relationship between just world beliefs and religion.

Much importance is given to operational definitions by Spilka et. al. and in the literature relating to just world beliefs and religion. In this thesis, I will follow convention and concentrate on the operational orientation in the psychological literature to the definition of religion. Operational definitions of religion utilised in this thesis will follow those used in the literature on just world beliefs and religiosity

(including frequency of attendance at a place of worship, importance of religion, religious identification and the degree of acceptance of various religious beliefs), and will be supplemented by those developed from the discussion to follow. It should be emphasised that theoretical definitions should not be rejected altogether. In particular, there is some merit to the discussion of functional definitions of religion.

One stream among the various approaches to defining religion holds some interest in relation to just world beliefs. *Functional* definitions of religion characterise religion by what it does. This is relevant to this discussion due to the emphasis, placed by Lerner in particular, on the theme of the functions of just world beliefs. One way in which we can look at the relationship between religion and the belief in a just world is to look at their respective functions: what religion and just world beliefs 'do'.

According to Frigerio (1996):

Through the explanation of the reasons for human suffering, most religions alleviate in an indirect manner the tensions which such suffering produces. For those who are followers of such religions the problems of life become less perceived as senseless, unjust and inexplicable through acquiring a meaning. The doctrinal explanations for suffering give a foundation at the same time for the justification of religious practices designed to overcome such suffering: the postulating of the causes of the problems of life may be regarded as the basis for the development of programs of actions to overcome them (web page: <http://www.newreligion.on.ca/ENG/Frigerio/index.htm>).

Like religion, the belief in a just world has explanatory functions in the face of suffering (if bad things happen to someone they must have done something bad) and coping functions in the face of suffering (they deserved it because they were bad; if I am good nothing bad will happen to me). Thus it can be argued that religion and just world beliefs share functions for the individual by creating meaning in the face of suffering and injustice, and allowing the individual to cope with suffering. The relationship between religion, just world beliefs and suffering will be elaborated on in the third chapter.

As a final note on definitions it should be clarified that in this thesis religion (and the related concepts of religiosity and religious beliefs) will be used as a loose substitute term for the Christian religion. This, however, does not imply that

Christianity is the only religion that is related to just world beliefs.

### ***Belief in a Just World and the Blaming of the Poor***

Although introduced as a concept in the discipline of psychology, there are a number of political implications of the belief in a just world. The belief that people get what they deserve tends to translate into the idea that people deserve what they get. So, on seeing a successful person or a suffering person, the tendency is to assume that they deserve, whether by their actions or attributes, their lot in life. Lerner (1980) and others have demonstrated through a series of studies the tendency for people to “blame the victims” of suffering for their own plight. For example, “victims” of AIDS, mental illness, physical disability, traffic accidents, rape, unemployment and poverty are often blamed for their plight (Montada & Lerner, 1998). Ropers (1991) contends that basic to “blaming the victim” is “An inversion of cause and effect, such as attributing the lifestyles of those afflicted by a social condition to be the cause of that condition” (115). This attribution process goes so far as to inhibit people helping those who are suffering. The inaction of individuals, groups, and society as a whole to help sufferers is justified by the argument that if the suffering is the fault of the person they do not deserve help. By this reasoning, people who believe in a just world will be less likely to support policies designed to help the victims of suffering.

Research has identified a relationship between the belief in a just world and a tendency to blame the poor for their inability to escape their continuing poverty (Rubin and Peplau, 1975: 67). This results in an unwillingness to confront systemic injustice and physical deprivation. The belief in a just world thus leads to a tendency to neglect those explanations for suffering which emphasise the role of the socio-economic system in favour of individualistic explanations. This results in the poor themselves becoming the target of specific policies. The belief is that the individual poor person must be changed to end poverty (Ryan, 1971: 8). It is easier and politically safer to advocate change of the individual rather than change of the system (Augoustinos and Walker, 1995: 204). There is also little incentive for the rich and powerful in society to change a system that allows them continued prosperity and

power (Ryan, 1971: 11). Not only are the poor blamed for their plight, but they are also thought of in a negative light. The tendency for just world beliefs to be associated with negative attitudes towards the poor has been demonstrated empirically (Furnham and Gunter, 1984).

What the non-poor think of the poor, what they believe are the reasons for poverty and, consequently, their reactions to the poor are important factors in the perpetuation or alleviation of poverty. The non-poor often have the power, which the poor lack, to bring about change. Understanding how the non-poor think about and react to the poor is one step towards the alleviation of the suffering of many. The idea that people tend to believe in a just world contributes to an understanding of why people allow situations of poverty to continue.

Ryan (1971) relates how blaming the victim is commonly employed in the United States to understand and solve social problems. Deficiencies of the poor are frequently characterised as the cause of their condition rather than a result of systemic factors outside the control of the individual. By focusing on the individual's problems, blaming the victim ultimately results in support for action to change "society's victim" (Ryan, 1971: 7). Ryan describes a frequent process that results in these change-the-individual policies (8). First, a social problem, such as poverty, is identified. The problem is then studied and differences identified between victims and non-victims. This difference is defined as the cause of the problem, rather than the possible result of being a victim. Once the "real" cause is identified, policies are designed to change the individual. Ropers (1991) reviews a number of victim blaming ideologies related to poverty, including Social Darwinism and some ideas surrounding IQ testing. He contrasts blaming the victim with explaining poverty as a result of structural factors or "blaming the system" (115). Feagin (1975) also contrasts victim and system blaming beliefs, stating that: "individualistic interpretations reflect false consciousness and mesh well with establishment attempts to maintain the status quo, whereas structural interpretations lend themselves to attempts at counter-ideologies and at structural reforms in society" (126).

## ***Other Political Correlates of the Belief in a Just World***

Believers in a just world are expected to be more likely to show support for the rich and powerful (Rubin and Peplau, 1975: 81-82). The assumption is that the success of the rich and powerful, just like the suffering of the poor, must be a result of receiving what they deserved. If a person is rich and powerful, it is because they deserve it, and hence should be respected and perhaps followed or obeyed. This has been supported by moderate correlations between measures of authoritarianism, particularly focused on submission to authority, and the belief in a just world in the United States, Australia, and Germany (Maes, 1998; Furnham and Proctor, 1989: 372).

The belief in a just world has been associated with support for the maintenance of the social and political status quo (Rubin and Peplau, 1975: 81-82). Furnham and Proctor state: "One of the most consistent correlates of BJW [the belief in a just world] is the political support for conservative policies as well as general social attitudes that are conservative in nature" (1989: 374). This means that believers in a just world are not likely to engage in behaviour designed to change the system (Rubin and Peplau, 1975: 82; Furnham and Proctor, 1989: 374). If people perceive the world as just, they are less likely to rebel against the political leaders in their just world. Believers in a just world have also been found to show a tendency to favour and vote for conservative political parties (Furnham and Proctor, 1989: 374).

Hafer and Olson (1998) indirectly provide additional support for the relationships found between political attitudes and just world beliefs. They present evidence that suggests that people with high belief in a just world also perceive their *own* misfortune as deserved. High just world believers were likely to be less discontent (for example, angry or resentful) about their misfortune. There was also limited support that they were also less likely to react with behaviour aimed at resolving their misfortune. There are political implications of just world believers seeing their outcomes as fair and being content with these outcomes. People who are content, even when suffering, are arguably less likely to contradict the status quo,



easier to control and less likely to revolt.

There is strong empirical support for the relationship between the belief in a just world and acceptance of the Protestant work ethic. Central to the conception of the Protestant work ethic, as measured in psychology, is the “emphasis on hard work both as a value in its own right and as a key to success” (Rubin and Peplau, 1975: 78). An ethic emphasising hard work is essential to the functioning of capitalist society. Furnham and Proctor (1989) list several studies over diverse populations which have found a positive relationship between the two constructs of just world beliefs and the Protestant work ethic, which consequently demonstrate the external validity of the relationship (373). According to Furnham and Proctor (1989) “there are good theoretical reasons why the two concepts overlap, as the PWE is predicated on the belief that the rain falls on the unjust but not on the just, hence the ability to discriminate the elect from the damned” (373). The belief that hard work will be rewarded by success, the component of the Protestant work ethic usually measured in psychological research, is consistent with just world beliefs. This is an important point: the Protestant work ethic measured in psychological research may be viewed as a specific case of the more general rule: the belief in a just world. Hard work may be viewed as good behaviour, which in a just world will be rewarded by a positive outcome, namely success.

Hirshberg and Ford (1998) show strong associations among the following variables: the belief in a just world, Protestant work ethic beliefs, the tendency to attribute poverty to the poor individual rather than the system in which the individual exists, negative attitudes to the provision of social welfare by the government, and a rightist ideological orientation. It is argued that just world beliefs and Protestant work ethic beliefs lead to the tendency to blame the poor individual (rather than the system) for the existence of poverty, which in turn leads to negative attitudes regarding support of the poor by the government. This study, conducted in New Zealand, demonstrates both the general and culturally-specific importance of just world beliefs in relation to other important political variables.

There are a number of specific political implications of the belief in a just

world, including blaming and derogating victims of suffering, the support for policies designed to change the individual rather than the system, support for the rich and powerful, conservative political beliefs, support for conservative political parties and policies, and acceptance of the Protestant work ethic. By understanding the functioning of just world beliefs, including the relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs, we may better understand people's political beliefs.

### ***Outline of Thesis Structure***

The remainder of this thesis examines in more detail the relationship between just world beliefs and religiosity. As already mentioned, the second chapter will expand on this relationship. A number of criticisms of past research will be outlined. Included in this chapter is the development of ideas about the differences between believing in a just world and believing in a just universe, a discussion of beliefs about the non-justness of the world, and an examination of the content of beliefs about the just world and the nature of religiosity.

The third chapter focuses on the relationship between the belief in a just world, religion and suffering. This includes a comparison of two branches within the Christian tradition: Liberation theology and the Prosperity Gospel. Important beliefs about suffering are discussed with an emphasis on religious explanations for suffering. Possible relationships between these specific beliefs about suffering and the belief in a just world are proposed.

Chapters two and three present a number of possible research questions. It is not possible to examine all the questions presented in this thesis. The fourth chapter describes the research questions to be examined and the methodological issues involved in examining the relationship between just world beliefs and religiosity. The methodological approach to be taken will be outlined. It should be emphasised that although the literature focuses generally on the Judaeo-Christian religions, namely Judaism and Christianity, the major focus of the theory and research in this thesis is on the Christian religion. A number of the observations made concerning the relationship between Christianity and just world beliefs are generalisable to the

relationship between other religions and just world beliefs.

The next three chapters describe the three studies undertaken as part of this thesis. Chapter five describes the initial study of 161 undergraduate students at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, New Zealand. The primary goal of this study was to replicate past research on just world beliefs and religiosity.

The second study, described in chapter six, again undertaken with undergraduate students at the University of Canterbury, focused on some of the research questions developed in this thesis. Firstly, more complex measures of religious beliefs were included. Secondly, the relationship between the belief in a just world and the belief in a just universe were explored. Thirdly, beliefs about suffering were examined and the nature of the relationship between these beliefs and the belief that the world is a just place were explored. The second study offered the possibility of comparison of religious and non-religious respondents.

Chapter seven describes the third study. A survey administered to thirty-one highly religious people, all students of the Bible College of New Zealand, primarily examined the beliefs of the highly religious about suffering and related these beliefs to the beliefs that the world and universe are just. Examining a group of highly religious people in the last study effectively controlled for religiosity by selection. As the respondents could all be classed as highly religious, this provided the opportunity to examine differences in perceptions of the justness of the world based on specific religious beliefs about suffering and the justness of the universe. The use of open-ended questions in the third study allowed a number of insights into the belief structure of the highly religious about suffering.

To my knowledge, these three studies are the first to examine just world beliefs and religiosity in the New Zealand context. The three studies are complementary. The first study replicated, with a large N, previous research on just world beliefs and religiosity. The second and third studies, with smaller groups, explored specific aspects of the relationship between just world beliefs and religiosity.

The final chapter of this thesis examines the collective contribution made by

both the theoretical discussion and the studies undertaken to provide an understanding of the relationship between just world beliefs and religiosity. Given that this research differs in context from other studies, the generalisability of this research will be discussed in the last chapter. Suggestions will be made for further research in the area of just world beliefs and religiosity, and beliefs about suffering.

## **2. “Rain on the just and the unjust”: expanding on the relationship between religiosity and the belief in a just world.**

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It is clear from the preceding chapter that the initial relationship between just world beliefs and religiosity is not as obvious as some researchers have maintained. Various measures of religiosity have not been shown to be consistently related to measures of just world beliefs. Far from arguing that there is no relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs, I would argue and reiterate others' arguments that the linkages between religiosity and just world beliefs are not simple but quite complex (Zweigenhaft et. al., 1985; Crozier and Joseph, 1997).

Because a relationship between two constructs is complex does not mean we should neglect to study it in favour of “simpler” research. The challenge of complexity requires adequate theory. Adequate theory, in turn, requires an understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

This chapter will explore the relationship between just world beliefs and religion in more depth, seeking to shed light on the complex relationship them. An additional goal of this chapter is to raise questions for further research and, perhaps

more importantly, formulate questions for investigation in the rest of this thesis.

## ***Initial Critique of Past Research***

The basic argument underlying most of the research discussed in the previous chapter for the connection between religiosity and just world beliefs can be expressed simply in two propositions:

1. The theme that the world is just is enshrined in the Judaeo-Christian religions (e.g. “Many of the major religions of the Western world appear to endorse the BJW: that sins will be punished and that good deeds will be rewarded” (Furnham and Proctor, 1989: 372)).
2. Those ‘brought up’<sup>7</sup> in the Judaeo-Christian religions learn and come to accept the belief in a just world to a greater extent than those who are not brought up this way (e.g. “... children who grow up in ‘religious’ households are likely to develop a strong belief in a just world” (Rubin and Peplau, 1975: 73)).

This argument, including both of its propositions, seems plausible. Past research has set out to examine the second part of the argument assuming the first part of the argument to be fundamentally true. We should consider each of these propositions in turn.

The first proposition states that the belief in a just world is enshrined in the Judaeo-Christian religions. Criticism may be levelled at Lerner and others based on the recognition that their reasoning, regarding the relationship between religiosity and the perceived justness of the world, is based on their selective readings and interpretations of religious writings and doctrines. Emphasis is commonly placed on passages that appear to teach the belief in a just world, such as the story of Job, rather

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<sup>7</sup> It is unclear, in this argument, whether those who convert to a religion later in life are exempt from this socialisation process. The measures of religiosity frequently used, such as frequency of church attendance, importance of religion, religious affiliation, and belief in God do not discriminate between those who are recent converts and believers, and those who have been involved in a religion and accepted its beliefs all their lives. This is one factor that could potentially have lowered associations between religiosity and just world beliefs in past studies. It is also possible that certain beliefs, such as the belief in a just world, which may be learnt during childhood, may predispose people to ‘convert’.<sup>31</sup>

than passages that might contradict it. One example of this is Jesus' rejection of victim blaming:

Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them - do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish" (Luke 13, verses 1-5).

Rather than blaming specific victims, Jesus points out that people generally are sinners. In another passage Jesus rejects the idea that a man was blind as a result of his own or his parents' sin (John 9). Statements by Jesus appear to contradict the idea that wealth and comfort are indicators of goodness, and, moreover, to support the idea that those suffering now are the people who deserve blessings:

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. ...

But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.

Woe to you who are fed now, for you will go hungry.

Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep (Luke 6, verses 20-25).

In Christian writing this has been called the "theology of reversal" (Yancey, 1977). According to Hart, Jesus' teachings emphasise that:

we are to reject earthly standards of what is good and valuable: wealth, power, and status. The world we know is mostly ruled by evil and death; it is a place of suffering and testing, and it will soon come to an end (1996: 56).

Furthermore, the New Testament book of James condemns favouritism directed towards the wealthy, and, points out how the rich exploit others. James also rejects the notion that those who are successful deserve their success by virtue of their good behaviour or nature.

The New Testament also tackles, in multiple instances, the problem of

persecution. Hebrews 11 describes examples of devout believers who were tortured, imprisoned, shamed and killed. Later in the book of Hebrews, believers are instructed to: “Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering” (Hebrews 13v3). Participation in the religious beliefs and practices of those in the early church, by definition good to the believers, often resulted in suffering at the hands of the rulers of the day. These teachings on persecution are primarily applied to the experiences of Christians, providing comfort and giving meaning to their unfair experiences. In the next chapter, beliefs about the suffering of Jesus will be discussed. This is the most pertinent example of unjust suffering in the minds of religious believers. The innocent son of God, put to death, is a reminder that this world is less than just.

The emphasis in Christian theology on grace provides a challenge to “deserving” as a criteria for justness. The traditional Christian concept of grace is that our redemption or salvation is not conditional on what we as humans can do; it is granted to us despite our sinful nature. The concept of grace may be viewed as unjust if justice is defined by deserving; grace is the forgiveness of all sins and the granting of salvation regardless of deserving actions. In its most extreme form, as emphasised in Calvinist theology, we gain salvation by grace alone.

Individual religious belief is not solely a function of the sacred writings of a particular religion. Although the principle of ‘sola Scriptura’ or ‘Scripture alone’ has been crucial, particularly to Protestant thought since the Reformation (Fackre, 1982: 31), a believer’s understanding of the sacred writings is mediated, at least in part, by the sources of religious authority: religious organisations and their leadership, traditional doctrinal interpretations, the experiences of the individual, and the influences of the wider culture in which the individual and church are both situated. Consequently, even if the sacred writings of a particular religion said explicitly “*thou shalt believe that the world is just*”, the religious individual will not necessarily come to interpret this text literally. Understanding what other sources of religious authority say is important to understanding what the individual actually comes to believe.

To give us the greatest understanding of how beliefs about the justness of the



world are enshrined in religion, it should thus be an important research endeavour to examine the content of the various religious authorities' messages on just world beliefs. This is not, however, a task undertaken in this thesis. What is important to point out at this stage is that there are rival messages potentially promoted by the various sources of religious authority. It may well be that 'just world'-type beliefs are the dominant beliefs promoted regarding the justness of the world, but they are certainly not the only possible beliefs promoted regarding the justness of the world by religious groups.

Therefore, what is important is *not* the opinions or perceptions of secular scholars regarding the meaning of the lessons of religious writings (such as the book of Job) and religious traditions, nor the assumptions of scholars as to what religious believers actually believe regarding the justness of the world. What *is* important for us to understand the relationship between religiosity and the perceived justness of the world is the emphasis placed on specific texts, interpretations of texts, and doctrines by religious believers.

The second proposition, that those socialised into the Judaeo-Christian religions accept the belief in a just world to a greater extent than others, is dependent on the first proposition. The attempts to test this proposition may be criticised for their failure to measure, in some way, the extent to which people have been socialised into religious belief. In the research described in the previous chapter, not one of the studies examined whether religion was influential in the development of subjects. A variety of measures were used to examine participants' present strength of religiosity and specific religious beliefs, practices and forms of identification. Past research has, assuming that just world themes are enshrined in the Judaeo-Christian religions, examined with deficient measures the proposition that those socialised in the ways of these religions are more likely to accept the belief in a just world.

This initial critique may go some way to explaining why it is that past research has failed to establish a robust relationship between religion and just world beliefs. In light of these brief initial criticisms, we may express a new argument related to the argument stated above:

1. The Judaeo-Christian religions have a variety of possible themes regarding the justness of the world that may be taken out of them.
2. Religious believers are taught particular themes about the justness of the world and may come to accept these beliefs.

Which themes the religious believer learns and accepts is dependent on those themes promoted by their sources of religious authority and the religious believer's perception of their experiences in light of these themes.

This thesis, while recognising that justice is a concern of religion and religious people, does not assume that the message, "the world is just" is the only message on the justness of the world communicated by sources of religious authority. The various themes on the justness of the world will be elaborated on in the next sections. A second implication of this argument is the necessity of measuring religious socialisation. A later section in this chapter will elaborate on the nature of religiosity. It is important to recognise that the degree of religiosity is not the only dimension of religiosity that might influence the relationship between just world beliefs and religiosity. Religious people differ in how they are religious.

## ***Different Worlds***

Furnham and Proctor discuss the possible existence of three types of worlds: the *just* world, *unjust* world, and *random* world (1989: 378). The just world is a world where the good are rewarded and the evil are punished. The unjust world is a world where the good are not rewarded and sometimes punished, and the evil are rewarded. The random world is a world where rewards and punishments are not allotted according to the character of the recipient or the goodness of their deeds. Although the literature has tended to emphasise how the western religious tradition promotes the belief in a just world, all three conceptions of how the world works are consistent with and do exist within the framework of Christian religious belief. It should be emphasised again that beliefs in an unjust or random world are not inconsistent with a belief in ultimate justice in an eternal sense.

The belief in a just world is not the only worldview that is consistent with Christian belief. The Zweigenhaft et. al. (1985) study demonstrates clearly that high religiosity does not necessitate high just world beliefs. In their study, just world beliefs were found to be negatively correlated with religiosity for Quakers and Baptists. They state: “Our findings indicate that belief in a just world, or an unjust world, must be compatible with one’s religious beliefs” (341). By using Rubin and Peplau’s (1973) Belief in a Just World Scale, Zweigenhaft et. al. restrict the interpretability of a negative correlation as a low score on the Belief in a Just World Scale can indicate either belief in an unjust or a random world.<sup>8</sup> Their reasoning, however, makes theoretical sense of their results.

Zweigenhaft et. al. argue that for many Quakers the world is viewed as an unjust place (1985: 336). Quakers have historically been committed to various struggles against injustice that have frequently brought them into confrontation with the social and political establishment (Harris, 2000). Through their involvement in the abolition, civil rights movement, and anti-war movements, Quakers have directly observed injustice against the groups they were helping and, as a result of their actions, have themselves experienced unjust treatment. This dual exposure to injustice, observed and personal, has influenced their view of the world as unjust.

Other religious believers have different reasons for viewing the world as unjust. They may take the view that as a result of the fall of humankind, evil dominates the earth, and hence the world is unjust. This belief will inevitably be accompanied by the belief in a just universe. After the final judgment of humankind, justice, or ultimate justice, will prevail. This is backed up by the argument of Zweigenhaft et al. (1985) concerning the just world beliefs of Baptists. They state that: “most believe the best way to help people is to encourage them to save their souls rather than to encourage them to seek justice on earth. Life on earth, in fact, is recognized as being sinful and unjust” (342). The belief in the justness of the universe will be discussed next and related to belief in the justness or non-justness of the world.

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<sup>8</sup> Lipkus’ (1991) GBJWS can also be criticised due to the fact that it only measures just world beliefs. A low score on the scale is not an indication of a belief in an unjust world. A low score may mean a belief in an unjust or a random world.

The importance of an understanding of sin will be discussed in the next chapter in relation to explanations for suffering.

It may be argued that the belief in a random world is also consistent with Judaeo-Christian beliefs. Furnham and Proctor quote the New Testament which states that: “God maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth the rain on the just and unjust” (Matthew 5:20) (1989: 378). The author attended a meeting of a group of young Christians in 1998, where a major theme of the meeting - printed clearly on the wall - was that “sometimes bad things happen to good people”. Although there is a clear analytical distinction that can be made between random and unjust world beliefs, there are problems in separating these empirically, as there are gradations between these beliefs. No known studies have measured beliefs in a random world directly. As described in the first chapter, past research using just world scales has found correlations between just world beliefs and related concepts (for example authoritarianism, political beliefs, work ethic beliefs), which implies that the distinction between random and unjust world beliefs may not be as important as the distinction between just and non-just beliefs. Therefore, it may be satisfactory to speak simply of just and non-just world beliefs.

The existence of these varying beliefs about just world beliefs is demonstrated by the different emphasis which just world theorists place on the biblical story of Job. Lerner places emphasis on the eventual righting of the undeserved outcomes as evidence of the promotion of conceptions of a just world; Job, it is argued, was eventually rewarded despite experiencing a period of suffering (1980: 13). In contrast to this, Rubin and Peplau point to Job’s rejection of a belief in a just world:

Job, on the other hand, resists this popular argument, for he is not aware of any great sin that he has committed. He admits his humility before God, but never his blameworthiness, and complains that ‘Though I be innocent, He shall prove me perverse’ (Job 9:20). In Job’s view, the world is not a just place at all, but rather a place where rewards and punishments are often unfair or capricious (Rubin and Peplau, 1975: 66).

Both just and non-just perspectives may be discerned from the account of Job. The lesson a religious believer learns from the account of Job will be influenced by which particular perspectives are emphasised by their salient sources of religious authority.

As already mentioned, not only the sacred text itself but also the influence of other legitimate religious authorities will be important in determining which orientation is accepted. Religious believers will also come to understand religious teachings, such as those about Job, in light of their existing just world beliefs, which are influenced by more than an individual's religious beliefs.

This discussion has revealed more on the variety of perspectives on the justness (or non-justness) of the world that may be argued within a Christian worldview. Recognising this contributes to an understanding of the variety of results (positive, negative, and no relationship) that have been obtained in past research on just world beliefs and religiosity. In the next chapter it is argued that if just world beliefs are viewed as a reaction to human suffering, then other beliefs, in particular religious beliefs that are held about suffering may influence the religious believer's view of the justness of the world.

### ***Just World v. Just Universe***

When Lerner and others, in the literature on just world beliefs, discuss religion, frequent allusions are made to Christianity's promise of eventual judgment of the wicked and reward of the good (Lerner, 1980: 13; Furnham and Proctor, 1989: 372; Rubin and Peplau, 1975: 73). The resolution of a state of justice in the afterlife is distinct from the notion of justice in this life which is the fundamental concern of the just world hypothesis. The implications for thought and behaviour in this world are likely to differ between beliefs about justice in this life and the next.

Lerner describes a belief in "immanent" justice associated with childhood where "people are punished or rewarded in the next psychological moment" (1980: 22). This concept is derived from the research of Piaget and his associates (1968). According to Piaget, young children "believe that the physical universe functions like a policeman" (1968: 256). In Piaget's research children were asked questions regarding stories that were told to them. For instance, one story describes a child who, after stealing apples, runs away and falls off a bridge into a river. The younger children (especially those between six and eight years old) seemed to believe that the

child in the story was being punished when they fell into the water. For example:

Eur (6 years): *The bridge must have known, since it gave way and he was punished.*

Interviewer: And if he had not stolen any apples, would he have fallen into the water?

Geo (7): *No. It was his punishment, because he had stolen apples.*

Interviewer: Did the bridge know?

Geo: *No, but it broke because there was a wind, and the wind knew.*

Se (6½): *It wouldn't have happened if he hadn't picked apples.*

Interviewer: Did the bridge know what the boy had done?

Se: *No.*

Interviewer: Then why did it break?

Se: *Perhaps the thunder made the bridge break.*

Interviewer: And did the thunder know?

Se: *Perhaps God saw, and then he made thunder by scolding. That broke the bridge and he fell into the water.* (Piaget, 1968: 256-7).

Several of the children's responses that Piaget describes mention how God initiated the punishments. Piaget states that this is a demonstration of an explanation taught by adults (254). Apart from this learned recurring mechanism for enacting justice, Piaget argues that for children, there are no considerations about *how* this form of justice works; the belief in immanent justice seems natural in the belief system of the child:

Nature [for the child] is a harmonious whole, obeying laws that are as much moral as physical and that are above all penetrated down to the least detail with an anthropomorphic or even egocentric finalism. ... What difficulty should there be in a bridge giving way under a little thief, when everything in nature conspires to safeguard the Order, both moral and physical, of which the grown-up is both the author and the *raison d'être*? (1968: 255).

It is argued that this early belief in immanent justice is supplanted by a belief in "ultimate justice" due to the individual's necessary confrontations with the setbacks of life (Lerner, 1980: 22). The belief in justice is still sustained, while there is recognition that rewards and punishments will not be accrued immediately. Lerner claims that this belief is not only held by the religious believer, but also by those who

have no religious belief system. For those who have no religious beliefs, “the source of ultimate justice can vary from situation to situation” (Lerner, 1980: 22). The point that Lerner does not make is that in the case of the religious believer, a conception of ultimate justice may be related to both temporal and/or eternal accrual of rewards and punishments. The belief in a just *universe* is, however, quite different from a belief in a just *world*. For a religious believer, accepting a notion of ultimate justice does not require its realisation in this world. In other words, a belief in a just universe does not imply a belief in a just world.

Religiosity may impact on conceptions of both a just world and a just universe. However, the distinction between the believed justness of the world and the justness of the universe is not given proper theoretical emphasis in the literature beyond stating that both themes exist (Lerner, 1980: 13, 164; Dolinski, 1991:48). Elsewhere, as mentioned above, the frequent allusion is made to Christianity’s promise of eventual judgment of the wicked and reward of the just as support for a relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs (Lerner, Miller and Holmes, 1976: 137; Furnham and Proctor, 1989: 372; Rubin and Peplau, 1975: 73). It is important at this point to emphasise that belief in a just universe does not imply a belief in a just world. The side effect of including both in a conception of just world beliefs is to exaggerate the relationship on the theoretical level between just world beliefs and religiosity. Due to the fact that studies tend to measure just world beliefs only, by not including just universe beliefs the measured relationship inevitably will fall short of the theorised relationship.

Based on the idea that people may have just world and/or just universe beliefs, we may consequently conceive of four types of believers in relation to this (shown in figure 2.1). The first group of believers will accept both the belief in a just world and the belief that the universe is just. These people will perceive justice everywhere. A second group of people will believe in a just universe but not in a just world. The belief that the universe is a just place may be considered an indicator of at least some sort of religious belief, although disbelief in a just universe does not imply that a person has no religious beliefs. We would expect a large proportion of non-religious people would reject the belief in a just universe. A third group of believers will accept

that the world is a just place but reject the notion that the universe is just. There are two reasons why they may do this. They will either believe that there is no justice in the afterlife, or they will reject the notion of an afterlife altogether. The final group are people who reject notions of a just world and a just universe. Again, the rejection of a just universe may be on the grounds of not believing in an afterlife, or of believing in an afterlife but believing that it will not be just. It will be a fruitful research endeavour to examine the interaction of these beliefs in more detail. Since the confusion in equating these beliefs may have led to a theoretical overstating of the relationship between just world beliefs and religiosity, it will be interesting to see whether religious believers do accept both beliefs or not.

**Figure 2.1 Interaction of the belief in a just world and belief in a just universe**

		Believe that the universe is just	
		Yes	No
Believe that the world is just	Yes	Justice everywhere	Only the world is just
	No	Justice only in afterlife	No justice anywhere

Wagner and Hunsberger (1984) do make a distinction between just world beliefs and concepts of ultimate justice, although this is given brief treatment in their paper. Four items were administered “to investigate the possibility that high (sic) religious individuals maintain a perspective of ultimate justice and therefore refrain from derogating the victim” (12). However, in their discussion, Wagner and Hunsberger did not adequately distinguish between earth-based and afterlife-based ultimate justice. They included items measuring both earth-based and afterlife-based



conceptions of ultimate justice. The items Wagner and Hunsberger used which measured a just universe<sup>9</sup> were highly and positively related to belief in orthodox Christian doctrines (as defined by the Christian Orthodoxy scale). The inclusion of religious language in the items may have accounted for some of the relationship. Non-believers would be likely to immediately reject the items based on the religious language. There were only small correlations between the Belief in a Just World Scale and the items measuring just universe beliefs. There was, however, no significant correlation between any of the ultimate justice items and scores on Wagner and Hunsberger's Derogation Scale. Since these items used religious language, it is not possible to determine whether beliefs about the justness of the universe are more strongly related to religious beliefs than are beliefs about the justness of the world. However, it seems likely that the belief in a just universe is related to religiosity. Further research would be required to support this contention, and also to explore how just world beliefs and just universe beliefs are related to one another. These will be two of the research tasks of this thesis.

Maes (1998b) also addresses "ultimate justice". Maes examines the distinction between immanent and ultimate justice. He describes how ultimate justice is related to religious belief. While distinguishing between ultimate justice on earth and ultimate justice beyond the realm of earth, Maes did not integrate this into his empirical research. Although Maes found positive moderate correlations between ultimate justice (that justice will be restored in the long run) and importance of religion, this does not reveal anything about justice in a universal sense. It is impossible to know whether the relationship is due to "the long run" being defined as the afterlife or not.<sup>10</sup>

Lerner (1980) argued that the belief in a just world is functional for action in the social and physical environment, thus, in the case of religious believers, it is important to distinguish between belief in justice in the temporal sense and belief in

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<sup>9</sup> These items were "After death God will right every wrong" and "Those presently suffering can take heart because they will be rewarded in heaven" (29).

<sup>10</sup> As discussed previously, the argument has been presented in the literature that immanent justice becomes supplanted by ultimate justice. There appears to be very little support for the items Maes used to measure immanent justice. Five out of six of the immanent justice items had means below one. The scale of measurement was between zero (disagreement) and five (agreement).

justice in the eternal sense. This distinction relates firstly to the thoughts and actions that develop from these conceptions of a just world and a just universe. Religious believers' orientations to the justness of this world and the consequences of this belief, in terms of thoughts and actions, have been given the majority of attention in the existing literature. The belief in the justness of the universe is important to the way people's conceptions of justice relate to their thoughts and behaviour in the socio-political environment. In other words, the achievement of a good just result in the afterlife may require certain thoughts and behaviours here on earth. Hart discusses how for early Christians, their 'otherworldly' orientation called for radically different actions:

The world and what St. Paul called "the flesh" were counterpoised to heaven and the spirit. As most early Christians saw it, a sphere of life outside ordinary, visible life was much more important and valuable. To attain the rewards of that sphere, one had to reject the rewards, temptations, and standards of earthly, material existence (Hart, 1996: 56).

The behaviours that follow from a belief in a just universe are variable among religious believers, and they are dependent on what specific religious believers believe about the attainment of their eternal salvation. Thus, some believers may strive for change, pursuing the ideals of justice on earth, which may be important for their salvation. Others may believe it unnecessary to rectify injustices, as these will be rectified in the afterlife. These people may endeavour to focus their attention on their own personal morality, upon which they believe their salvation is conditional.<sup>11</sup>

Secondly, the distinction between conceptions of a just world and a just universe relates to the ability to validate the different beliefs by experience.<sup>12</sup> An

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<sup>11</sup> Behaviour resulting from beliefs in a just universe do not have to be as selfishly motivated as the individual's own eternal salvation. It is conceivable that a desire may develop in the individual to attempt to model this world on principles of justice in the universal sense and so make the world a better place. This may be expressed as a concern for the eternal *and* temporal welfare of other human beings.

<sup>12</sup> Related to the subject of the relationship between people's experiences and just world beliefs, it may be potentially fruitful to examine the differing experiences of various religious groups, such as the Quakers, who will be considered in the next section, as this will be one source of why their just world beliefs differ. This can be seen reflected in the biblical story of Job. Job's friends, who were religious believers, emphasised the justness of the world and tended to blame Job for his suffering. Job, who experienced great suffering, rejected notions of a just world, knowing that his suffering was undeserved.

individual's experiences, and the experiences of people they observe and interact with, impact on their belief in a just universe to a lesser extent than their belief in a just world. Children's awareness and experience of unjust punishment from adults dissolves their belief in immanent justice (Piaget, 1968: 261). Similarly, if people's actions are continually met with undeserved outcomes, they may alter their belief in the justness of the world.<sup>13</sup> Undeserved outcomes resulting from people's actions will not, however, tend to challenge people's belief in the justness of the universe directly<sup>14</sup>.

A distinction between the conceptions of justice on earth and justice in the afterlife is also helpful in differentiating between the functions that these beliefs do and do not share. The belief that the world is just is argued to allow meaningful and predictable action in our physical and social environment. This is not a function it shares with the belief that the universe is just. However, just universe beliefs may make injustice on earth less important, as a 'right' result will be restored in the afterlife. Both beliefs do share important functions in explaining and coping with suffering. This will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter. It will be interesting to see whether the belief in a just universe may lessen the need to believe that the world is just. It may be that the belief in the ultimate justness of the universe may allow religious people to hold beliefs about the non-justness of the world in greater proportions. The functionality of just universe beliefs for individual believers in explaining and coping with suffering may mean that just world beliefs are not as necessary for some religious believers. Just universe beliefs may be 'more' functional for them in finding meaning in suffering.

This discussion raises several valid questions for research. Most importantly, in this thesis two questions will be explored:

1. How are beliefs about the justness of the universe related to religiosity?
2. How are beliefs about the justness of the universe related to the belief in a just

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<sup>13</sup> People may preserve their belief in a just world by blaming the victim. In this case, this would mean blaming themselves.

<sup>14</sup> Perhaps continued negative life experiences may result in a loss of faith and a loss of belief in a just universe which may be a component of this greater faith.

world?

A number of political implications of just world beliefs have been identified. An exploratory question to be included in this research is the nature of the relationship between just universe beliefs and political ideology.

### ***The Nature of Religiosity***

The degree of religiosity is not the only important factor in relating religious beliefs to just world beliefs. We must consider not only whether someone is religious, but also *how* they are religious (Zweigenhaft et. al., 1985). For example, two people who identify as Christians may have different conceptions of how important religion is to them, and may differ greatly in how they engage in religious behaviour - such as attendance of religious services. Similarly, two people who identify as Christians, who both view religion as important in their lives and attend religious services equally frequently, may have completely different views about the existence of God, heaven and hell. Even those who do not differ on these major religious beliefs may differ on specific doctrines, such as those relating to the nature of God and who goes to heaven and hell, which may be the source of important individual differences in other beliefs and behaviour. The important point to emphasise is that a religion is not unidimensional as it is often treated (Crozier and Joseph, 1997). Past research has tended to focus on a limited range of measurement instruments, such as religious affiliation, church attendance, belief in God, or importance of religion. Analysed in isolation these measures provide little insight into the nature of participants' religiosity. Recognition of the multidimensionality of religion: (a) leads to multiple different forms of measurement that account for differences in religious belief, religious practice and religious identification; and (b) provides an explanation for important differences between religious believers that may relate to the belief that the world is just and other important beliefs.

It is not merely religious identification that just world beliefs derive from. In other words, it is not because a person identifies as a Christian that they will believe the world is just. Mediating between religious identification and the belief in a just

world are specific religious beliefs concerning and related to beliefs about the justness of the world. The strength of religiosity, reflected by specific religious practices and the importance people place on religion in their lives, affects the degree to which the content of believers' religious beliefs are an influence on beliefs about the justness of the world. Furthermore the strength of just world beliefs is determined by matching our perception of how the world works with our theories of how the world ought to work.

Doctrines within western religious thought are diverse, as is the acceptance of particular doctrines. An understanding of which particular doctrines (individually or in combination) are related to conceptions of the justness of the world is necessary. These may include, among other things, doctrines on sin, God, the devil, heaven and hell, suffering, wealth and success. It is important to recognise that religion provides a ready explanation of the mechanisms by which the world is just. The world is not just because it simply is, or it should be. The world is just because there are supernatural laws and/or powers that make it so. This is not to say that all religious people accept this, that this is the reasoning that non-religious people use to explain the just world, or that this is the reason why the non-religious reject a just world. This is a mechanism for explaining why the world actually is just which is available to the religious believer.

The perceived nature of God is one important component of the content of religious belief that may relate to conceptions of justice held by the religious believer. Salient is not only belief in God, but also belief in the justness of God. Attributing to God the status of the most just or definer of justice means that whatever God does is just. If God is believed to be actively involved in human affairs, then an implication of this may be the belief that God rewards and punishes the good and bad respectively. Hence, suffering may be considered the result of God's just punishment. If we accept this belief, then we can expect to get what we deserve in life, and thus believe in a just world. This is perhaps the primary explanation given for the religious believer's acceptance of a just world; their perceived belief that God punishes bad deeds and rewards good deeds. This obviously makes an assumption about what believers

believe is the nature of God.

The main research question suggested from this discussion is: How are various religious beliefs related to beliefs about the justness of the world? The religious beliefs to be examined in this thesis include general beliefs about the existence of God, the devil, Heaven and Hell, and more specific beliefs about suffering that will be discussed in the next chapter.

### ***The Content of Beliefs***

Just as the strength of religiosity is not the only important dimension of religiosity, the extent to which one believes in a just world is not the only important dimension of an individual's just world belief. The content of these beliefs - what the individual considers is just and unjust - is also important. What is learned to be just and unjust in a particular society determines what ought to be changed or restored and what it ought to be changed to. Two people may subscribe to the belief that the world is just but may believe quite different things about what constitutes a just world. For example, people who strongly ascribe to the Protestant Work Ethic believe that work and reward are linked. They will not necessarily perceive poverty as unjust, but may instead think that paying those who do not work from the taxes of the workers is unjust. They may attempt to resolve this injustice by supporting those who are interested in reducing or removing social welfare transfers.

Lerner (1980) states: "Certainly the sense of justice varies greatly among people in both form and content, but there may be important constancies in the origins and functions of this virtually universal human process, 'justice,' the judgment of appropriateness" (9-10). Religion is one important origin of the sense of justness or appropriateness. According to Lerner, commonly in our society entitlement and deserving are based on behaviour and attributes (1980: 11). Religious doctrine has a lot to say about what is just and unjust; specifying the behaviours and attributes that are deserving of reward and those which deserve punishment. The concept of sin, which is central to notions of morality in the western religions (and moreover arguably western culture), is an important concept in relation to the deservedness of

certain outcomes. Sins are violations of the moral law and thus specify the behaviour and aspects of character which are deemed to be bad and hence which may deserve a negative outcome.

In 1970 Lerner commented that, “The task of integrating the evidence available concerning the desire for justice and the various and often contradictory norms in society which define what is ‘just’ must be the goal of future research and theory” (228). Almost thirty years after this was written, there still appears to be a lack of integration in the literature between research on the belief in a just world and research on what constitutes “justness”. This is as essential for understanding the relationship between just world beliefs and religion, as it is for understanding research on just world beliefs in general.

Related to the content of just world beliefs is the idea that there are various spheres of life, each of which may be perceived as just or not just. Furnham and Proctor (1989) discuss this in relation to personal, interpersonal, and political spheres derived from research on an individual’s locus of control. The Multidimensional Belief in a Just World Scale was developed by Furnham and Proctor (1988) to assess just world beliefs in these various spheres. As mentioned in the last chapter, this has proven to possess poor psychometric properties. The only study utilising this scale to look at just world beliefs and religiosity (Crozier and Joseph, 1997) found a weak positive correlation between attitudes to Christianity and the Personal Belief in a Just World Subscale. The correlations between attitudes to Christianity and the Interpersonal and Political Belief in a Just World Subscales were negligible (and non-significant). Research into this area is needed, but is dependent on finding research instruments capable of facilitating reliable and valid measurement.

### ***Just World Belief or Beliefs? Evaluative and Existential Elements***

The term ‘just world belief’ as used in the literature conceals a multitude of specific beliefs about the justness of the world. We have already discussed beliefs about the just universe and beliefs about an unjust and random world. Obscured in the

discussion of the 'belief in a just world' is a further possible distinction between two sets of beliefs about the justness of the world: firstly, there is a belief that the world *is* just, and, secondly, there is a belief that the world *ought* to be just. The distinction between the *is* and *ought* dimensions of the belief in a just world is analogous to concepts Geertz (1973) utilises in his discussion regarding the analysis of sacred symbols. Geertz makes a distinction between the terms "ethos" and "world view". *Ethos* is defined as "the moral (and aesthetic) aspects of a given culture, the evaluative elements", while *world view* refers to "the cognitive, existential aspects" (127). Like religious symbol systems, the beliefs about the justness of the world contain and convey both the *ethos* dimension, how the world ought to be, and the *world view* dimension, how the world is.

The distinction between the belief that the world ought to be just and the belief that the world is just has also been made by Pepitone and L'Armand (1997). They distinguish between the "value of justice" and perceptions of the justness of the world (89). They point out that it is unlikely that people would believe the world is just but not value justice. Mohiyeddini and Montada (1998) measured the belief that the world ought to be just by using their Hope for a Just World Scale. This included items like "I hope for a world in which more people get what they justly deserve" (44). Hope for a Just World was not related to just world beliefs. They found that it was moderately and positively correlated with the respondents' beliefs about whether they could contribute to bringing about just outcomes, and they found that it did predict sympathy for the unemployed.

The analytical distinction between the 'ought' and 'is' dimensions of just world beliefs may allow further insight into the relationship between the belief in a just world and religion. This thesis will not address this distinction further, but proposes it as a useful research task for the future. Religious people may differ from the non-religious in their degree of acceptance of the beliefs that the world ought to be or is in fact just.



## ***Research Questions***

This chapter has raised a number of questions for further research. Not all of these will be examined in this thesis. Questions relating to the content of just world beliefs and the distinction between notions that the world ought to be or is just will not be examined here. However, these arguments inform the interpretations of the final results. The main research questions to be developed in this thesis from the discussion in this chapter are:

1. How are beliefs about the justness of the universe related to religiosity?
2. How are beliefs about the justness of the universe related to the belief in a just world?
3. How are religious beliefs related to beliefs about the justness of the world?

As there has been found to be a relationship between just world beliefs and various political beliefs, it will also be interesting to examine how the belief in a just universe is related to political ideology. The inclusion of a variable to measure religious socialisation has also been indicated as necessary to properly examine previous propositions of the relationship between just world belief and religiosity. The next chapter will examine in more depth the relationship between just world beliefs, suffering and religion, and research questions derived from these beliefs.

## 3. Explaining Suffering

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Claudia had contracted Hodgkin's disease, cancer of the lymph glands, and had been given only a 50 percent chance to live. ...

At first Claudia had expected that Christian visitors would console and comfort her. But their voices were too confusing.

A deacon from her church solemnly told her to reflect on what God was trying to teach her. "Surely there's something in your life which is displeasing God," he said. "You must have stepped out of His will somewhere. These things don't just *happen*. What is God telling you?"

A lady came ... She brought flowers, sang hymns, and quoted happy psalms ... Whenever Claudia's illness was mentioned, this lady quickly change the subject.

Another lady dropped by ... She told Claudia that healing was the only escape. "Sickness is never God's will," she insisted. "The Bible says as much. The devil is at work, and God will wait until you can muster up enough faith to believe that you'll be healed. ... Truly believe that you'll be healed, and God will answer your prayers."

Perhaps the most spiritual lady in Claudia's church came ... "Claudia you need to come to the place where you can say, 'God, I *love* You for making me suffer like this. It is Your will. You know what is best for me. And I just praise You for loving me enough to allow me to experience this. In all things, including this, I give thanks.'"

Claudia's pastor ... told her, "You, Claudia, can participate in Christ's sufferings. You have been appointed to suffer for Him, and He will reward you. God chose you because of your great strength and integrity, just as He chose Job. And He is using you as an example. The faith of others may increase because of your response."

... when the aches crescendoed ... Claudia would call out, "God, why me? ..." (Yancey, 1977: 12-14)

This quote illustrates a variety of religious beliefs about suffering. When faced with a situation of suffering there are various ways the religious believer may come to understand it. The experiences of Claudia, described above, illustrate firstly that more often than not people do search for the reasons for suffering. This example also illustrates various responses to suffering: the first believer assumes wrongdoing must be the cause of suffering, the second avoids even recognising the existence of suffering, the third blames the devil and presumably a lack of faith, the fourth says trust God as God knows best, and the fifth believer draws analogies to the suffering of Christ and points out that through suffering others may increase in faith. These responses are by no means exhaustive of the religious responses to suffering. How do these explanations relate to just world beliefs? Some religious explanations for suffering fit well with the victim blaming characteristic of just world beliefs, while other explanations do not sit so comfortably.

The basic premise of this chapter is that any discussion of religiosity and just world beliefs should not neglect explanations for suffering<sup>15</sup>. As argued previously, the belief in a just world has much to do with human suffering. The last chapters have described the contention, common in the literature on just world beliefs, that the belief in a just world is promoted by the belief that God punishes and rewards people in order to preserve a just world. This chapter points out that there are a variety of religious explanations for suffering, and it attempts to examine the relationships between religiosity, explanations for suffering and the belief in a just world.

Although Deconchy (1991) and Lerner (1991) argue that the belief in a just world may be a constant among various religious beliefs, additional insight into our topic may be gained when the belief that people get what they deserve in this world is viewed more appropriately in relation to various explanations for suffering. What is perhaps invariant between religions is humankind's confrontation of the problem of suffering. As mentioned in the last chapter, one important aspect of just world beliefs

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<sup>15</sup> This chapter will talk about explanations for suffering but will also discuss specific beliefs about suffering that are more correctly termed coping mechanisms (beliefs relating to the suffering of Jesus and the belief in a just universe).

is how they function in relation to coping with and explaining the existence of suffering. In a just world, suffering is the result of behaviour or attributes that are deemed to be bad. If the world is a just place, suffering can be avoided by not behaving 'badly'. This is both reassuring and esteem-giving for the non-suffering observer and prescriptive in relation to suffering-avoiding behaviour.

The basic human response to observed suffering is to simply ask "why?". There are a number of "why"-type questions that may be asked regarding suffering, among them: "Why is there suffering?" and "Why does person X suffer?". "Meaning is", as Morris (1999) puts it, "intrinsic to human pain"<sup>16</sup> (118). Shweder, Much, Mahapatra and Park (1997) state that: "One way to render suffering meaningful is to trace its genesis to some 'order of reality' where one may point the finger at events and processes that can be held responsible as suffering's cause" (121). The belief in a just world is one such 'order of reality' by which people come to understand their own and others' suffering. There are other explanations for suffering and, importantly for our analysis, there are a variety of 'religious' explanations for suffering. Zweigenhaft et. al. (1985) comment on how, in general, religious beliefs may provide an alternative source of meaning for religious believers:

In general, people tend to believe in a just world because their belief helps bring conceptual order to complex existence. This pattern, however, does not hold up for many of those with strong religious convictions because their particular religion provides such conceptual order. ... For Quakers and Baptists, and possibly for others, religious beliefs overrode the more general need to believe in a just world by providing alternative means of ordering life's experiences (342).

More specifically, Lerner (1980), in reviewing the findings of Sorrentino and Hardy (1974), has also suggested that "the religious perspective"<sup>17</sup> may be considered "a functional alternative [to just world beliefs] with its own particular way of finding

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<sup>16</sup> Morris' concern is chiefly with the concept of pain, but he points out that it should be recognised that suffering and pain are related. He states: "Suffering and pain are of course conceptually distinct - we can suffer without pain, or be in pain without suffering - but in practice they often overlap and prove inseparable" (1999: 123).

<sup>17</sup> Discussion of "the religious perspective" still falls into the trap of conceiving of religion as monolithic. Rather, recognising the diversity within various religious traditions and the variety of expressions of religiosity, we should speak of "religious *perspectives*" and "functional *alternatives*".

justice in suffering” (164). An examination of the problem of suffering and the ways of coping with and explaining suffering, of which the belief in a just world is only one such response, is one way of further understanding the religious believer’s beliefs regarding the justness of the world.

One initial distinction that may be made between just world beliefs and explanations for suffering is that just world beliefs are not merely concerned with negative outcomes which, by definition, are the concern of explanations for suffering. Just world beliefs denote that success, wealth and privilege, as well as suffering, are deserved. However, just world beliefs are often characterised in the literature as originating as a defensive response to observed suffering; just world beliefs help people minimise the distress caused by seeing people suffer (Lerner, 1980; Lerner and Miller, 1978). It is the defensive function of just world beliefs, in explaining suffering, that is most important for the individual. It is more dangerous for the individual to suffer than to succeed. Undeserved success may be perceived as unfair but most people will not attempt to escape from it. Additionally, explanations for suffering, although not directly concerned with wealth, success and privilege, often also imply who does not suffer and the conditions by which suffering may be avoided. For example, if it is believed that suffering is a mechanism designed to allow the individual to grow, this has implications for those who suffer and those who do not suffer: suffering is not something to be avoided, it is something to be overcome. Those who suffer may actually be perceived to be more holy or of better character than those who have had an easy life.

## ***Religion and Suffering***

According to Geertz (1973), religion must respond to or confront the problems of suffering and evil. Humans need a world free of chaos, although chaos threatens the individual in the intellectual, physical and moral domains (99). According to Geertz, any religion must cope with these threats. Most relevant of these threats to the discussion are those in the physical and moral domains: the problems of suffering and evil. The problem of suffering is not “... how to avoid suffering but how to suffer,

how to make of physical pain, personal loss, worldly defeat, or the helpless contemplation of others' agony something bearable, supportable ... sufferable" (104). Furthermore, the problem of evil is "concerned with threats to our ability to make sound moral judgements" (106)<sup>18</sup>. According to Geertz, religion must confront these problems, and he states that "there are few if any religious traditions, 'great' or 'little,' in which the proposition that life hurts is not strenuously affirmed, and in some cases glorified" (103).

Belief in a deity often raises additional "why"-type questions relating to the existence of suffering. Firstly, why does God allow suffering? This question will inevitably be personalised for the religious believer, as they or someone close to them will experience suffering. Answering this question has implications for the perceived character of God<sup>19</sup> and the meanings people give to suffering. The existence of suffering and evil are crucial philosophical problems in religious traditions where the deity is viewed as primarily good and just, which is the common viewpoint in Christian, Jewish and Islamic thought. The question is raised: why does a good and powerful God allow suffering to exist and persist? This is the concern of one branch of religious philosophy, theodicy, which asks "how the presence of evil in the world is to be explained. The presupposition of such an inquiry is that evil exists in the world, that is distinguishable from good, and that the fact of its existence presents us with a problem" (Shweder et. al, 1997: 159).

A second question raised by belief in the existence of a deity is: why does God allow person X to suffer? This question has implications for religious believers' evaluations of the sufferer. Since explanations for suffering ultimately imply *who* suffers, they consequently affect believers' evaluations of the sufferer. The sinner will be evaluated quite differently from the tested faithful.

Religious explanations for suffering develop within specific religious traditions and in particular cultural, temporal, social, and physical contexts.

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<sup>18</sup> Evil and suffering are related but separate concepts. 'Evil' implies something that is morally wrong. Suffering focuses on physical and mental pain. Suffering may be perceived by the religious believer to be evil. This will probably be dependent on the perceived cause of the suffering.

<sup>19</sup> The problem of suffering is an obstacle to belief in God for many people.

Explanations for suffering are learnt by religious believers along with 'secular' explanations. Religious explanations for suffering and dominant cultural explanations for suffering (such as those relating to the belief in a just world) may reinforce or contradict one another.

Morris (1999) states that, "Almost all major religions address human suffering ... The crucial point is that even within a single religion sharp variations exist, both across time and across doctrinal divisions (121)". By way of example, two distinct traditions or 'discourses' within Christianity on suffering will be briefly described: Liberation Theology and the 'Prosperity Gospel'. The way suffering is explained and coped with in each of these traditions is different, as is the perception of the sufferer. The religious beliefs about suffering promoted by each of these traditions has definite implications for the relationship between religiosity and believing in a just world.

## ***Liberation Theology***

Liberation Theology emerged primarily in the Latin American Catholic Church in the late 1960s (Boff & Boff, 1987). In the west, due to secularisation, the central concern of Christianity was the existence of God. In Latin America the central concerns for Christianity were the existence of poverty and suffering (Smith, 1991: 32). The world, according to Liberation Theology, is unjust due to poverty and suffering. The teachings of Jesus and the rest of the Bible that emphasise active responses to injustice and God's 'preference for the poor' are fundamental to Liberation Theology (Smith, 1991: 33). 'Liberation' refers to liberation from oppression, poverty and suffering.

Liberation Theology preaches that Jesus was not just God become human, but that he was God become poor (Smith, 1991: 37). There is much importance given to the life of Jesus as a poor man in an occupied territory. Just as Jesus lived in a country occupied by an unjust Roman system so the poor of Latin America are seen to be suffering as a result of unjust economic and political systems (Boff, 1979). In death Jesus also opposed the socio-political system. The symbol of the cross takes on special significance as Jesus (God incarnate) was caused to suffer and was ultimately

put to death by the political rulers of his day (Ford, 1997). The poor suffer as Jesus, their saviour, did.

Rather than a focus on the promise of an eventual happy afterlife, Liberation Theology is concerned with justice on earth. This tradition within Christianity definitely does not embrace or inculcate just world type beliefs. There is an emphasis on systemic factors in causing suffering and the injustice of suffering (and poverty in particular) rather than blaming sufferers for their condition (Smith, 1991: 29). The recognition of systemic factors in causing suffering is an important part of Liberation Theology: structures, as well as humans, may be sinful. Change of unjust structures is actively sought by believers (Smith, 1991:43-45).

### ***The 'Prosperity Gospel'***

In stark contrast to Liberation Theology is a belief system, originating in the United States, commonly referred to as the 'Prosperity gospel'. Central personalities include television evangelists and faith healers like Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn, Paul and Jan Crouch, and Oral Roberts. The good news of these preachers is that "prosperity is the divine right of every believer" (Hanergraaff, 1993: 185).

The Prosperity gospel is supported by the concept of "name it and claim it": if the believer wants something and asks God for it, they will receive it (Hanergraaff, 1993: 37). The concept of sowing and reaping is also key. What you give to God's work will be rewarded by your increased prosperity. For example, Gloria Copeland states: "You give \$1 for the Gospel's sake and \$100 belongs to you... Give one car and the return would furnish you a lifetime of cars. In short, Mark 10:30 is a very good deal." (Gifford, 1991:20).

Preachers who espouse these beliefs reject the notion that Jesus was poor. According to one preacher, John Anzanzini: "one of the goofiest ones [beliefs] is that Jesus and His disciples were poor. Now there's no Bible to substantiate that" (Hanergraaff, 1993: 187). Another, Frederick Price, states: "The Bible says that He [Jesus] has left us an example that we should follow His steps. That's the reason why I



drive a Rolls Royce. I'm following Jesus' steps" (Hanergraaff, 1993: 187).

The Prosperity gospel contends that suffering is in effect a choice. Kenneth Copeland states: "God intends for every believer to live completely free from sickness and disease. It is up to you to decide whether or not you will" (Hanergraaff, 1993: 268). Poverty is seen as a problem with the believer. Television evangelist, Robert Tilton has said on his show that, "Not only is worrying a sin, but being poor is a sin when God promises prosperity!" (Hanergraaff, 1993: 186). In this example, suffering is not merely a result of sin, suffering is a sin. In general, suffering in this system of belief is the result of either unconfessed or unrepented sin or, alternately, a lack of faith. Through these shortcomings the devil is given the opportunity to inflict the individual with suffering (Hanergraaff, 1993: 258).

In contrast to Liberation Theology, the Prosperity gospel is consistent with the belief that the world is just, and is, consequently, a victim blaming orientation. Explanations for suffering in this religious belief system are consistent with and reinforce wider beliefs that are dominant in American culture: suffering is your own fault, and only you can change it. (Ryan, 1971; Feagin, 1975)

### ***Connecting Religiosity, Just World Beliefs and Suffering***

Rather than viewing a simple causal path from religiosity to just world beliefs it is constructive to examine just world beliefs in the context of explanations for suffering. It is when just world beliefs are related to religious explanations for suffering in particular that the relationship between the belief in a just world and religion becomes apparent. The last chapter, in part, argued that specific religious beliefs mediate between religious identification and religiosity and the belief in a just world. It is not simply being a devout and active Christian that predisposes someone to believe in the just world: the extent that an active and devout Christian believes in a just world is related to specific religious beliefs. This is where religious explanations for suffering fit in. Religious explanations for suffering are what is arguably most closely related to the belief in a just world.

The following question must therefore be raised: How is the belief in a just

world related to religious explanations for suffering? The belief in a just world is more than an explanation for suffering. Although the belief in a just world may exist at a more basic and general level of belief than explanations for suffering, just world beliefs are intrinsically related to the desire to understand suffering. They are related to specific religious explanations for suffering: most obviously the idea that God punishes bad people. Just world beliefs may also be inconsistent with certain other religious explanations for suffering that fulfill the same functions of explaining and coping with suffering. It may also be possible that just world beliefs may be believed independently of some religious explanations for suffering; they neither relate to nor contradict one another. This may also be possible if just world beliefs and religious explanations are cued in separate contexts. Attributions for suffering may be general, specific to particular types of suffering, or specific to suffering in particular contexts. Religious believers do not always use religious explanations for suffering, but it is likely that the secular and religious explanations that believers use will be non-contradictory and perhaps even consistent and supporting.

There are two implications arising from these statements. Firstly, there is a question of the extent to which specific religious explanations for suffering are held by religious believers. The question of why people suffer may be answered in a number of ways. One explanation is that there is a God who punishes people's negative actions. This idea is consistent to a large degree with the belief in a just world. There are however other explanations offered by religion. Secondly, the existence of various religious explanations implies that there may be relationships between religious beliefs about suffering and just world beliefs. The next section will examine various religious explanations for suffering and posit the nature of the relationships between these explanations and the belief in a just world.

### ***Specific Religious Explanations for Suffering***

There are a number of ways in which religions have explained the existence of evil and suffering. These explanations each have implications for the religious devotees' conception of the necessary justness of the world. While some of these

explanations are consistent with just world beliefs, other explanations are not. In fact some of the explanations utilised by different religious believers are almost contradictory. For example, Morris (1999) illustrates this with two examples from the Christian tradition stating: “Wierix sees pain as an instrument of the devil to turn the soul from God; Wordsworth sees it as an instrument of God to turn the soul from wayward thoughts” (122).

Of the explanations for suffering and evil which Hebblethwaite (1976) identifies, the most common in the Western religious tradition are (in no particular order): (a) the work of the Devil; (b) a result of the fallen state of humankind; (c) the punishment of sinful actions by God; (d) the testing of the faithful; (e) the disciplining of the religious believer to build character; (f) the actions of humans who were created free to choose to perform good or evil actions; and (g) the nature of the created world (42-54).

Hebblethwaite’s categories correspond loosely with those of Foley (1988), who presents a typology of eleven different interpretations of suffering. These interpretations were derived from patients’ reports about suffering, therapists’ views of their patients’ suffering, and by “analyzing the literature on suffering by writers, philosophers, theologians, psychiatrists, psychologists, and even the persons actually experiencing suffering” (322). Foley’s analysis is restricted to personal suffering but the attitudes are arguably generalisable to the suffering of others. The attitudes are (with an example):

1. *The punitive attitude*: “... God is punishing me for the sins I have committed in my life” (322).
2. *The testing attitude*: “I am inclined to exclaim, ‘God is testing my loyalty to him’ in sending suffering into my life” (322).
3. *The bad-luck attitude*: “Some things like suffering happen by chance ...” (323).
4. *The submission-to-the-laws-of-nature attitude*: “I must passively submit to the laws of nature, since suffering is the automatic result of germs invading

my body, of getting sick, or being injured in an automobile accident” (323).

5. *The resignation-to-the-will-of-God attitude*: “Since everything that happens is willed by God, suffering in my life is the will of God” (324).
6. *The acceptance-of-the-human-condition attitude*: “In accepting suffering as part of the human condition, I firmly believe that I should keep working despite the limitations suffering has imposed on what I can accomplish” (324).
7. *The personal-growth attitude*: “I am convinced that I will grow into a better person through this suffering in my life” (325).
8. *The defensive attitude*: “I withdraw from my suffering by not looking for its causes, nor seeking help to get rid of it, nor planning how to avoid it in the future” (325).
9. *The minimizing attitude*: “It could have been much worse” (326).
10. *Divine-perspective attitude*: “when I turn it [suffering] over to see it from God’s perspective, I get a glimpse of its meaning” (326).
11. *The redemptive attitude*: “I know I can join my suffering to the sufferings of Christ” (327).

Foley suggests, but does not pursue, quantitative research following from this classification of eleven attitudes, although, as mentioned, the typology itself is derived from qualitative research and secondary sources.

Research by Furnham and Brown (1992) has explored various explanations for ‘evil’.<sup>20</sup> Fifteen explanations for human suffering, derived from interviews with lay people, were grouped through the use of factor analysis and Q sorts and were classified as follows (adapted from Table 1 in Furnham and Brown, 1992: 41):

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<sup>20</sup> Although frequently referring to ‘evil’, Furnham examines explanations for human suffering. He describes first how participants were asked to rate “‘explanations’ for the existence of suffering (in general) in the world” (40). People were then asked to respond to specific examples of human suffering, including: “a child born blind, a child blinded by a madman, 30 people killed in a mining accident, and 30 people killed in an earthquake” (40).

I. <i>Ignorance</i> <sup>21</sup>	Human Ignorance
	The moral decay of people
	Injustice
	Man's inhumanity to man
II. <i>God (or Theology)</i> <sup>22</sup>	A punishment sent from God
	That good may come from evil
	It shows the reality of evil
	To test our faith in God
	Part of God's plan
III. <i>Nature</i>	The nature of the physical world
	Just bad luck
	We cannot control what happens
	A random event
	Because of genetic effects
	A natural part of life

Many of the explanations which Furnham and Brown found that people use to explain suffering are clearly consistent with the explanations identified by Hebblethwaite and Foley (these can be compared in table 3.1 to follow). The research did not examine the 15 explanations separately, examining instead the relationships between the three types of explanation and measures of religiosity. Furnham and Brown found that natural explanations for suffering were not significantly related to religious denominations, importance of religion or other measures of religiosity. Explanations

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<sup>21</sup> This label of Furnham and Brown does not tend to do justice to this category. Injustice and Human Ignorance are quite different concepts. Perhaps this category could be better labelled as 'Human Nature' or 'Human Agency'.

<sup>22</sup> The label "Theology" for this grouping, given by Furnham and Brown, may obscure the fact that many of the explanations within the 'Ignorance' and 'Nature' groupings may also be considered theological explanations or, in other words, explanations that are endorsed within specific religious traditions. In fact Furnham and Brown discuss how 'ignorance' and 'nature' may be thought of as theological explanations (43-44).

for suffering which stress human ignorance were not found to differ significantly across religious denominations, but it was found that these explanations were more likely to be endorsed the more subjects considered religion as important. Explanations which involved God were more strongly endorsed by Jews and Muslims over Catholics and Protestants, who in turn endorsed them more than agnostics and atheists. Those who considered religion as more important were also more likely to endorse explanations for suffering which involved God. This study illustrates that religious people *do* explain suffering in ways that are different to non-religious people. Although not measuring the extent to which specific beliefs were held, it can be seen that suffering is not just explained as punishment of sinners by God: a variety of explanations are utilised.

One way to distinguish the various explanations for suffering already listed is by the agent attributed to be causing the suffering. There is a logical distinction that can be made between attributions for causality and attributions for responsibility, however these are intrinsically linked in human reasoning. Attributions for responsibility are important for people to feel control. People will tend to focus on the reasons for an event that they have at least some control over. Shweder et. al. (1997) state that: “the idea of causation in folk psychology is deeply shaped by human interests in assessing ‘normality,’ attributing responsibility or blame, and exercising control over future events” (123). By finding someone to blame for their situation, people can find strategies to avoid being put in the same situation again.

A number of the religious explanations for suffering attribute causation to supernatural actors: God and the devil. Despite research by Lupfer et.al. (1992) that found the tendency to attribute positive events to God and negative events to the devil, religious believers do make attributions about why God may cause suffering, for example: that God punishes people, that God is testing people, and that God is disciplining to improve character. Pargament and Hahn (1986), examining causal and coping attributions in a variety of health-related situations, found that:

Across the different health situations, a rich and varied set of causal attributions was made to God, ranging from a loving God who rewards good behavior, to a benevolent God whose will accounts for less easily understood situations, to an angry God who provides just punishment

for personal sins. While diverse, each of these attributions could be seen as an attempt to establish a meaningful world view (205).

A variety of studies have explored the importance of supernatural causal agents more generally (Ritzema, 1979; Spilka & Schmidt, 1983; Gorsuch & Smith, 1983; Lupfer, Brock & De Paola, 1992; Lupfer, De Paola, Brock & Clement, 1994; Lupfer & Layman, 1996; Lupfer, Tolliver, & Jackson, 1996; Hovemyr, 1998). For instance, Lupfer et. al. (1992) found that people not only attribute causation to chance, situational and dispositional causes, but also in certain situations to God and Satan. Attributions to supernatural actors were more common when the attributor was a “conservative Christian” and when “conservative religious values” were evoked. Although their study applies to “everyday behaviour” and not specific examples of suffering and evil, Lupfer et. al. (1992) posit that attributions to supernatural agents are less likely in “everyday” situations than with regard to “uncommon behaviors or outcomes ... when the behavior or outcome is highly relevant to the perceiver and arouses intense or unfamiliar emotions” where secular attributions are not seen as sufficient (501). This is related to the “God of the gaps” hypothesis: “people make attributions to God only when no other causal agent will suffice” (501). Attributions to Satan were made less frequently than attributions to God. This was explained simply by the fact that belief in God is more widespread than the belief in the devil (499).

Ritzema (1979) also found that God was invoked as a causal explanation for negative (and positive) outcomes in medical, interpersonal, emotional, and financial events. The tendency to attribute causality to God was found to be unrelated to the tendency to attribute to secular causes. Furthermore, invocation of God as a cause was correlated with invocation of the Devil as a cause.

Besides the agency of supernatural actors, there are religious explanations that emphasise human agency. This is related to Hebblethwaite’s discussion of explanations that emphasise the fall and free will, and Foley’s “acceptance-of-the-human-condition” attitude. In the Christian tradition, there is a major emphasis on the fallenness of humankind, which, as Hebblethwaite points out, owes much debt to the theology of Augustine (1976: 46). Hebblethwaite (1976) discusses the relevance of

the doctrine of the fall, stating that:

the state of the world, from which Christ came to rescue men, was caused by the fall of man in the Garden of Eden through temptation by the devil. The result of this first sin was expulsion from the garden, the necessity of pain and toil, and the fact of death. The state of original sin was thenceforth the common state of man, and the world was permitted to fall under Satan's influence. Satan's power was broken through the sacrificial death of Christ on the Cross; from then on men were to be drawn into the sphere of redemption by being united with Christ by the Spirit, and either in time or eternity this new kingdom of God would be universally established, and once again God would be all in all. This picture dominated the Christian mind for many centuries, and had powerful explanatory force in enabling men to understand the present facts of evil and suffering (46).

So the argument states that humans were created with a free will and chose (and continue to choose) to disobey God and hence rebelled against God's commands. Consequently humans have fallen from the state in which they were created and now humans are separated from God by sin. The sinful nature of humans results in humans committing acts that cause others to suffer. The sinfulness of humankind thus leads directly to the suffering of humankind. C. S. Lewis (1940) has stated that due to the fall: "man is now a horror to God and to himself and a creature ill-adapted to the universe not because God made him so but because he has made himself so by the abuse of his free will" (57).

Attributions to human causes are the most common type of explanations for human suffering, particularly when people are thinking about the causes of a specific case of suffering. There are of course non-religious explanations that attribute responsibility to humans. There is a large body of literature in psychology on attributions to human dispositions. Augoustinos and Walker (1995) point to the importance of two specific tendencies demonstrating the importance generally of human causes in the literature on attribution theory. The "fundamental attribution" error is that people tend to favour attributing behaviour to disposition rather than situation (68). The "actor-observer effect" is that while people tend to attribute their own actions to the situation in which they find themselves, they attribute the actions of others to their dispositions (72).



**Table 3.1: Comparing specific explanations for suffering**

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Hebblethwaite (1976)</b>	<b>Foley (1988)</b>	<b>Furnham and Brown (1992)</b>
God	the punishment of sinful actions by God the testing of the faithful the disciplining of the religious believer to build character	The punitive attitude The testing attitude  The resignation-to-the-will-of-God attitude Divine-perspective attitude The redemptive attitude	A punishment sent from God To test our faith in God  Part of God's plan
the Devil	the work of the Devil		
People	a result of the fallen state of humankind the actions of humans who were created free to choose to perform good or evil actions	The acceptance-of-the-human-condition attitude	Human Ignorance The moral decay of people Injustice Man's inhumanity to man
Nature	the nature of the created world	The submission-to-the-laws-of-nature attitude	The nature of the physical world A natural part of life Because of genetic effects
Luck		The bad-luck attitude	Just bad luck We cannot control what happens A random event

Of “the big three” explanations of suffering discussed by Shweder et. al. (1997) two of these are focused on human causation. The “interpersonal mode of causal explanation”, holds others to be responsible for one’s misery (127). Shweder et. al. (1997) explain that the ethnographic research of Park (1992) reveals this to be the most common explanation for suffering among sixty-eight different cultures. A less common explanation in a global sense is the “moral mode of causal explanation” which holds people personally responsible for their own suffering (Shweder et. al., 1997: 127). This is equivalent to the victim blaming tendency of just world believers.

There are also explanations for suffering that attribute cause to non-agents, more specifically luck and nature. In the case of these explanations, suffering is perceived as independent of any particular causal actor. Although God may have been initially responsible for the creation of the natural world or the devil may have been responsible at some time for the corruption of the natural world, there is no God to pray to or devil to rebuke in the here and now. Regardless of whether or not the luck and nature explanations are reinforced with religious overtones, suffering is seen as something that just happens to people. Suffering is not something to be predicted: suffering is something to react to.

The typologies and causal agents already discussed (Hebblethwaite, 1976; Foley, 1988; Furnham & Brown, 1992) are summarised and related in table 3.1. This table shows the consistency of a number of the explanations put forward by the different authors. The specific religious explanations for suffering that will be examined in this thesis will be discussed briefly in turn, drawing on relevant research, scholarly writings, and comments from Christian writers, and then tentatively related to the belief in a just world.

## **1. Suffering as a punishment from God**

The idea that suffering is punishment from God is presented in the literature on just world beliefs as a possible reason for the relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs (Furnham and Proctor, 1989; Wagner and Hunsberger, 1984). There

are two points of relevance here. Firstly, it has not been determined whether this belief is very widespread among religious believers. One Christian writer, for instance, argues that from the Old Testament accounts, God can be conceptualised as an infrequent intervenor, and, in the New Testament there does not appear to be much support for the concept of a God who rewards and punishes (Yancey, 1977: 65). Pargament and Hahn (1986) point out that the idea that God punishes people will not be as functional for the religious believer as other beliefs about suffering:

in the case of Responsible Behavior - Negative Outcome situations, it seems logical to expect that an explanation which stresses God's purpose would be more functional to the individual than one which assumes the person must have sinned and is receiving a deserved punishment from an angry God (205).

Although functions are not causes, functions may be indicative of the frequency with which a belief will be held. Consequently we could expect the idea that suffering is a punishment from God to be a less frequently held belief than other explanations for suffering for religious believers<sup>23</sup>.

Subjects' responses to various open-ended questions in Pargament and Hahn (1986) illustrate that this type of explanation is used by religious believers. In one case, a scenario was described in which responsible behaviour was followed by a negative outcome. Some subjects attempted to attribute God's anger to something that they themselves had done. One stated:

I'm sorry if I did anything to offend you. Please forgive me and I'll try and do better (202).

Another stated that:

God never punishes when there is no reason. Did I act wrong? (202).

The implication of these statements is that at least some religious believers do reason backwards from a case of suffering to infer that God is punishing people.

The second point of relevance here is that, if someone does accept this belief, then it seems reasonable that they will tend to emphasise 'just world'-type beliefs. The

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<sup>23</sup> Perhaps there is a difference whereby religious believers may be willing to see others' suffering as a punishment from God, while the religious believer's own suffering may be believed to be due to some other reason. This would side-step the issue of functionality.

belief that God is believed to enforce justice underlies arguments concerning why religiosity and the belief in the just world are related.

## **2. Suffering as a test of faith**

Suffering as a test of faith probably has more relevance for religious believers' evaluations of themselves and other religious believers than evaluations of people (particularly non-believers) in general. Failure to overcome suffering may indicate to the religious believer that the religious sufferer had an inferior faith. Suffering is not, however, the result of "bad" behaviour or attributes. In fact this explanation would tend to support positive evaluations of those who are suffering as only the most good or holy are worthy of testing. The intention of testing the believer is to improve them. Overcoming testing has real implications for the believer, as one respondent to Bulman and Wortman (1977) illustrates:

And it's sort of like the story of Job, you know. He puts things in front of you and shows that you can overcome (358).

Given the positive evaluations of suffering inherent in this explanation, it seems unlikely that these explanations would be positively related to the belief in a just world.

## **3. Suffering as a blessing in disguise**

Linked closely to the explanations for suffering that emphasise testing are a number of explanations which make the assertion that: "suffering, although painful, is not really or ultimately evil because it results in an end state that is good" (Shweder, 123). This includes the ideas that suffering is God's higher purpose for people, that suffering has a greater meaning known to God and, more specifically, that suffering is a mechanism by which people grow. Although these beliefs emphasise the functions that suffering serves for the individual, in the minds of people the function or result of the suffering becomes explanatory or meaning giving. The good outcome, in the end, is seen to explain in people's minds why they suffered. These ideas are illustrated by one respondent in Pargament and Hahn's (1986) study:

I would wonder if it happened to prevent something worse from happening. Maybe the broken

hip would prevent me from doing something that would have hurt me more (Pargament and Hahn, 1986: 201).

A study by Bulman and Wortman (1977), in which victims of crippling injuries were asked to explain how they had answered the question of "Why me?", found that "God's plan" was the most common explanation. One respondent stated:

It's a learning experience; I see God's trying to put me in situations to learn about Him and myself and also how I can help other people. As far as I'm concerned, everybody's whole life is planned by the Creator. So, I guess, given that fact, that I was bound to come into circumstances like this, whether one way or the other (359).

Associated with these explanations for suffering is the idea that suffering is the result of the actions of a God whose purposes are beyond human understanding or comprehension. This point is echoed by Weber (1963), who argued that religious believers' confrontation of the problem of reconciling suffering and evil with the concept of a good and powerful God:

... led to the ultimate theoretical conclusion, apparently assumed in the Book of Job, that the omnipotent creator God must be envisaged as beyond all the ethical claims of his creatures, his counsels impervious to human comprehension. Another facet of this emerging view was that God's absolute power over his creatures is unlimited, and therefore that the criteria of human justice are utterly inapplicable to his behavior (142-143).

These types of explanations focus on the positive aspects of suffering and are hence unlikely to be positively related to the belief in a just world. People deserve their suffering only in that they may become a better person as a result of suffering, hence deserving to be better people. Rather than something to be avoided, suffering may in some instances be a condition that is worthwhile as ultimately the individual may be improved.

#### **4. Suffering as a result of the fall of humankind**

Explanations relating to sin and the fall have already been discussed.<sup>24</sup> There are two points following from this that should be considered further. Firstly, the belief

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<sup>24</sup> It will also be interesting to see whether religious believers differ from non-believers over the idea that suffering is in general caused by people.

that suffering is the result of the fall implies an acceptance of suffering as a fact of life on earth. The second point is that belief in the fallen state of people may result in a tendency to have a negative evaluation of people in general - whether good or bad (as all are sinful).

This is reflected in the results of research by Sorrentino and Hardy (1974). Sorrentino and Hardy found that highly religious people, rather than tending to derogate the victims of suffering more than less religious people, tended to evaluate the sufferer and the non-sufferer in the same way. The less religious, on the other hand, tended to derogate the sufferer. Sorrentino and Hardy still interpreted this in the context of just world beliefs, arguing that the result was due to the highly religious not taking note of situational cues. Lerner (1980), on the other hand, interpreted the low evaluation of the non-sufferer as coming “from the religious view of people as at least partially ‘bad,’ continually struggling with the evil temptations to their soul” (164).<sup>25</sup>

If religious believers tend to view all humans as sinful, then it follows that people will be considered generally bad (or sinful), not just specifically bad (or sinful). Suffering will be seen as something that must be accepted. In relation to just world beliefs, it may be that just world beliefs will be independent of this type of belief as there are no truly good people who deserve wholly good outcomes: the fact of human sinfulness implies that anyone can suffer.

## **5. Suffering due to the work of the devil**

The belief that the devil is the cause of suffering may be related to just world and victim blaming beliefs if it is believed that only the wicked are susceptible to demonic attack. It is unlikely that religious believers would believe that the devil, who is portrayed as evil and malicious, is an agent acting to preserve justice and ensure people get what they deserve. Like explanations invoking the fall of humankind, the

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<sup>25</sup> The results of Sorrentino and Hardy were not replicated in a similar study by Wagner and Hunsberger (1984), which found that highly religious people did derogate victims of suffering, however no more than the less religious. A study by Lea and Hunsberger (1990) also demonstrated contradictory findings. Highly orthodox Christians tended to derogate victims of illness when religious beliefs were salient in this study. When religion was not salient highly religious individuals showed similar evaluations of the healthy and sick. They argued that the result in Sorrentino and Hardy may have been a result of the lack of salience of religion in the minds of participants.

belief in a devil who causes suffering may imply that suffering is independent of merit.

## **6. Suffering due to the nature of the physical world and bad luck**

As already discussed, explanations for suffering that emphasise luck and nature as causes point to the randomness of suffering. People who accept these explanations are likely to reject the belief that the world is a just place.

### ***Relating Suffering to Jesus***

Embracing a just world requires the rejection of innocent suffering. The suffering of innocents is a central concept in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. In Christian doctrine, the death of the most innocent, Jesus (often portrayed as the lamb of God) is central and the end to all suffering and evil and is connected to his death. Hebblethwaite (1976) discusses how, due to the crucifixion of Jesus, suffering is effectively enshrined in Christian thought, stating that:

Christianity draws much of its power to enable men and women to cope with the world's evil from its central focus, the Cross of Christ. ... its distinctive belief and resource over against evil and suffering is its conviction that God has himself, without ceasing to be God, entered into the depths of human suffering and taken it upon himself. Thus Christian devotion is devotion to Christ crucified, and the strength Christianity claims to provide for coping with evil is drawn from communion with the one whom the philosopher A. N. Whitehead (A.D. 1861-1947) called 'the fellow-sufferer who understands'. Christians have been taught to regard this communion as sometimes involving a share in the sufferings of Christ. By such spiritual identification they are held to be enabled to bear pain and suffering creatively (31-32).

Although not an explanation for why people suffer, this is a consistent Christian belief regarding suffering, and it may replace religious believers' need to explain suffering.

Comments from Christian writer, Philip Yancey (1997) give support for the importance of Jesus' suffering: "The image Jesus left with the world, the cross, the most common image in the Christian religion, is proof that God cares about our suffering and pain. He died of it" (161). He further states: "By taking it on Himself,

Jesus in a sense dignified pain. Of all the kinds of lives He could have lived, He chose a suffering one. Because of Jesus, I can never say about a person, ‘He must be suffering because of some sin he committed’” (162). Yancey argues that the Bible supports the view that “suffering can be, not a horror to be shed at all costs, but a means of grace to make us more like God” (163). He quotes a passage from the New Testament: “But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps” (1 Peter 2 v 20-21).

The importance of Jesus’ suffering to one respondent in the study by Pargament and Hahn (1986) is clear and illustrates this approach to suffering:

I would thank God for the situation although I didn’t understand it, knowing that God is motivated out of Love for me, and that he allows me to experience suffering even as His son did, so that I can grow (202).

This example also illustrates the fact that the religious believers (and non-believers) may use a variety of approaches to explain and cope with suffering. The explanations for suffering utilised by different religious believers and religious groups will consist of a complex integration of the multiple explanations available and is likely to vary across a variety of contexts. The specific explanations used will also be influenced by the specific kind of suffering.

Beliefs about the suffering of Jesus may be important to influence religious believers’ negative evaluations of suffering and the sufferer. Consequently, we could expect these beliefs about suffering not to be positively related to the belief in a just world.

### ***Relating Explanations for Suffering and the Belief in a Just Universe***

The writer of most of the New Testament, Paul, stated: “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8 v 18). This suggests a possible association between temporal suffering and



justice in the afterlife. Rubin and Peplau (1975) describe an unpublished study by Lerner and Elkington (1970) where the respondents' lack of a perception of injustice in the study "may have stemmed from their fundamentalist religious ideology, which teaches that 'what may appear inequity on the surface is really the result of sin or it will be corrected in the future - Heaven or Hell'" (81). The future correction of suffering in the afterlife does not contradict the religious explanations for suffering already discussed. It may however function to remove the need to make suffering meaningful for the religious believer. If suffering is perceived as only temporary, or more correctly temporal, then suffering may become less of a problem. Although suffering may be perceived as a negative experience that God allows people to go through, the belief that an afterlife of bliss is coming if the believer is patient may remove the need to explain suffering.

The belief in a just universe may be considered a mechanism for coping with suffering distinct from the explanations discussed above. The idea is that people should put up with their lot now because eventually they will be rewarded in the afterlife or paradise. This is what some people have called the 'pie in the sky'. Yancey (1977) points out that pain is ultimately temporary for the Christian, as there is a painless afterlife to look forward to. It will be interesting to explore the relationship between the various explanations for suffering and the belief in a just universe.

Wagner and Hunsberger (1984) found a high and significant correlation between the belief that "Those presently suffering can take heart because they will be rewarded in heaven" and the Christian Orthodoxy scale ( $r=0.52$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) (29). While this is not surprising due to the use of religious language in the item, this does support the contention that this is an important belief for at least some Christians.

## **Conclusion**

The research conducted already on explanations for suffering reveals that there is a lot more to religious explanations of suffering than simply the reward and punishment of good and bad actions and individuals by God, which is what the majority of discussions of religiosity and just world beliefs have focused on. This is a

crucial point that may explain the inconsistent findings regarding religiosity and just world beliefs.

There are two basic research tasks following from the discussion so far. Loewenthal (1997) point out one deficiency of Furnham and Brown (1992). This is that they did not examine the extent to which various different explanations were accepted (175-6). If the explanations are not equally accepted, there is value, argued Loewenthal, in examining their variation. So, the first task of research is to explore and describe the extent to which various explanations for suffering are held by religious believers. Linked to this is the question of how religious believers differ from non-believers in the ways in which they explain suffering.

The second research task is to attempt to understand the relationships between explanations for suffering and measures of religiosity, between the explanations for suffering and the belief in a just universe, and between the explanations for suffering and the belief in a just world.

Since it is claimed in the literature that the belief that God rewards and punishes the good and the bad is what the belief in a just world is most related to for religious believers, we may firstly examine the extent to which this specific belief is held by religious believers. Secondly, we may examine whether this explanation is related to religious believers' perception of the justness of the world.

## 4. Methodological Issues and Introduction to Studies

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The task of this chapter is threefold. First, the traditional techniques utilised in research of just world beliefs and religiosity will be discussed. The second focus of this chapter is to discuss more general theoretical issues relating to methodology. Thirdly, the specific research questions will be outlined, and the operationalisation of variables and the statistical techniques used to examine them will be discussed.

### ***The Tradition of Research Methodology in Just World Belief Research***

The empirical work on just world beliefs can be divided into two distinct approaches. Lerner, who first presented the idea of just world beliefs, and his associates have tested their hypotheses about the belief in the just world by experimental and quasi-experimental methods. These mostly involved participants observing another person they believed was a volunteer being punished in some way (for example electric shock) as part of an experiment in learning. The 'victim' tended to be evaluated more negatively if the participant was not given the opportunity to reward the victim (Lerner & Miller, 1978: 1031). These experiments most commonly involved asking people to evaluate innocent victims of suffering (for example: Lerner

and Simmons, 1966; Lerner, 1970; Simons and Pilavin, 1972). These important early experimental studies, while lending support to the existence of just world beliefs and victim blaming behaviour, ignored religion as a topic for research. Lerner, however, clearly emphasised that religion is an important source of these beliefs (Lerner, 1980: 13).

Beginning with Rubin and Peplau (1973), and dominating subsequent investigations of the belief in a just world, has been the treatment of just world beliefs as a trait that can be measured utilising attitude scales. The attitude approach has been the favoured approach with which to investigate the relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs. In most cases a measure of just world beliefs and measures of religious belief, religious identification or strength of religious commitment are chosen, administered to a group (usually students), and then subjected to tests of significance designed to validate the presence or absence of a statistical relationship.

The attitude approach obviously has some legitimacy within the study of just world beliefs and religiosity. However, in some ways it constrains the techniques used to examine the research questions presented in this thesis. The replication of past research necessarily requires the imitation of aspects of the research design of this past research. While the studies in this thesis use attitude surveys, as used consistently in past research on just world beliefs and religiosity, there are some reservations about this approach. The more general of these reservations are discussed in the next section, but one initial reservation is that the traditional statistical techniques utilised in attitude research focus on individual differences, not the patterns of commonality in responses. Relationships between variables are described while the actual degree of acceptance of these beliefs are not. Although it should be clear that there will be idiosyncratic differences in how thoroughly religious or other beliefs have been internalised (D'Andrade, 1992), it is the shared nature of religious beliefs (including those about suffering) that often have important effects on other thought and behaviour. Groups who share similar beliefs tend to have more influence in society than lone believers. Finding common responses requires adequate description of the data in question.

Although this research will utilise the techniques of attitude research, the researcher does not devalue experimental and qualitative modes of investigation. The field of just world beliefs and religiosity could benefit greatly from experimental, quasi-experimental and qualitative research.

## ***Methodological Issues***

The prevailing approach to social scientific research is the hypothetico-deductive method, where “the researcher takes a hypothesis or theory and tests it indirectly by deducing from it consequences that are themselves amenable to direct empirical test” (Haig, 1992: 3). This is also the prevailing approach to research on just world beliefs and religion. Haig (1992) argues that the hypothetico-deductive approach leaves out theory generation. An “adequate methodology”, according to Haig, must include both “consequentialist and generative methodologies” (3). Theory testing is generally emphasised at the expense of the reporting of exploratory research.

Another criticism of the hypothetico-deductive approach is its emphasis on Null Hypothesis Significance Testing, which has itself been strongly criticised (Meehl, 1990; Carver, 1978; Oakes, 1986; Morrison & Henkel, 1970). One major limitation of tests of significance is that, in the social sciences, the null hypothesis, that is the hypothesis that the difference or size of association is zero, is almost always false. Meehl suggests that: “in social science everything correlates with everything to some extent” and that this “crud factor” is the result of “complex and obscure causal influences” (1990: 207-8). Thus statistical significance is practically guaranteed if the sample size is large enough: even if the actual size of the difference or association is very small (Haig, 1996: 202; Meehl, 1990).

Statistical significance tests often become the decision rule on which to judge the validity of the evidence. A statistical significance test does not rule out other explanations for the data. Tests of significance in the social sciences can rule out the alternative hypothesis that two means are equal or that the size of a relationship is zero. As argued by Meehl (1990), this is probably the most unlikely alternative hypothesis to explain phenomena in the social world. As Carver (1978) points out, the

evidence is not a flawed test on the data: the evidence is the data itself. What, then, are the alternatives to null hypothesis significance testing? Carver (1978) suggests one basic alternative to the use of Null Hypothesis Significance Testing: “the research hypothesis ordinarily predicts the direction of the mean difference, and the data can initially be interpreted with respect to this prediction” (Carver, 1978: 394). Meehl (1990) goes further than Carver and suggests that researchers should attempt to predict “an expected *amount* of effect” (231). Since the goal of research is most often to find a relationship or difference, there have been suggestions made regarding the ways in which the effect size may be measured. These include the absolute difference between two means (Carver, 1978: 394). A more relative measure of effect size is Cohen’s *d*. Cohen’s *d* is the difference between two means divided by the common standard deviation (Cohen, 1969: 18). This measure is cited by both Carver (1978: 394) and Oakes (1986: 52) as a useful measure of the effect size. A third measure of effect size is  $r^2$ , which is “the proportion of variance in one variable that is statistically explained by variance in the other variable” (Oakes, 1986: 55).

Statistical significance has often been confused with what Gold (1970) calls “substantive significance”. Gold repeats the call of others to examine the degree of the relationship. Examination of the degree of the relationship is frequently absent where the research involves qualitative variables. Most frequently a Chi square or F statistic is calculated and statistical significance is derived. The decision of whether this is of substantive significance is effectively made in the researcher’s eyes by the statistically significant result. In response to this Gold offers some suggestions for the researcher, two of which will be outlined here. Firstly, in the case of a measure made up of several items, he recommends examining the component items of the scale on their own and taking as less convincing the case where only a few of the component items exhibit the relationship hypothesised. Secondly, Gold suggests that particular scale scores do have meanings attached to them. Often, respondents are asked whether they agree, disagree or are neutral with regard to a proposition or idea. This is reflected in the scale. Gold argues that the difference between two means that are in the agree and disagree regions is more easily interpreted than “mean scores that differ by the same amount on the same side of (or within) the neutral neighborhood” (179).

In light of this discussion, a re-examination of some of the studies described in the second chapter provides an indication that the results of these studies may be less than 'substantively significant'. For instance, Furnham and Gunter (1984) stated that statistically significant differences between different religious affiliations supported the contention that: "believers rather than non-believers have higher just world beliefs, presumably because they recognize the presence of a just, omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent deity" (268). On a closer examination of the mean scores on the just world scale, only Church of England subjects had a mean score above the neutral middle of the scale. This meant, for example, that although there were significant differences between Jewish subjects and the 'other Protestant' categories, both the mean scores on the just world scale for Jewish and 'other Protestants' were in the region of not believing in a just world. The substantive significance of this result is limited. The difference found was in the degree to which just world beliefs on average were *not* accepted, rather than religious subjects believing on average that the world is just and non-religious subjects on average rejecting the belief in a just world. A similar result was found in the Szmajke (1991) study. Although a significant difference was reported between 'highly religious' subjects and the control group, both means were in the region of the scale that would indicate disbelief in the just world. Wagner and Hunsberger (1984) and Crozier and Joseph (1997) both reported statistically significant correlation coefficients ( $r = .15$  and  $r = .14$  respectively). Although both studies found statistically significant results, neither placed much importance on the result. Given the small absolute size of these correlations they are arguably correct. This re-examination of the literature in light of the discussion so far, points to the absence of consistent demonstrations of a substantively significant effect size between religiosity and just world beliefs.

It has been argued that the emphasis on Null Hypothesis Significance Testing (and the hypothetico-deductive approach) has contributed to the under-representation of studies that have not achieved statistically significant results in the academic literature (Carver, 1978). This is especially relevant to the study of just world beliefs and religion due to some of the reported marginal findings in past research. The absence of a relationship or difference is an important result for any field of research.

The reliance on the convention of statistical significance tests as the decision rule for important results may have led to the non-reporting of studies that found no relationship between just world beliefs and religiosity (Carver, 1978: 396).

Although often perceived of as mundane or second-rate research, replication is essential to establish the robustness of findings and the expansion of scientific knowledge (Haig, 1996: 217-218). The importance of replication is that it is the mechanism by which external validity, “the approximate validity with which we can infer that the presumed causal relationship can be generalized to and across alternate measures of the cause and effect and across different types of persons, settings, and times” (Cook and Campbell, 1979: 37), may be extended. It is especially important to replicate past research as part of this study, due to the marginal findings described in the first chapter and due to the geographic and cultural context of this study, that is New Zealand.

Following from this discussion, it should then be emphasised that the methodological approach taken in this thesis rests on several ideas. First, exploratory research has a valid and important role in any research process and is vital for the construction of good theory. At the heart of exploratory research is the analysis of data to reveal important patterns in the data (Haig, 1996: 192-193). Following from this is the second idea, that description of the data is both necessary and desirable to: (a) understand the phenomena in question; (b) aid and guide other researchers; and (c) draw attention to possible problems and sources of confusion in the data. Description of the data involves examination of the distribution in addition to measures of central tendency. Thirdly, it should be emphasised that replication is an important and necessary part of the detection and validation of phenomena in the social world. Fourthly, null hypothesis significance testing suffers from major flaws and hence has limited value apart from the following of uninformed convention. Rather than a test of statistical significance, that is disconfirmation of the null hypothesis, being the criterion for substantive significance, the researcher’s hypothesis should be examined with regard to the data collected. In this thesis precise p values will be quoted and, due to convention, mention will be made of the rejection of or failure to reject the null hypothesis of no difference or relationship. More importance, however, will be placed



on the size of actual effects.

## ***Research Design***

In light of the above discussion of the tradition of research that this study adds to and the identification of some problems with existing research practice, this section will address the research design of this thesis. The research questions presented in the second and third chapters will be re-iterated and the operationalisation of them discussed.

This thesis has used the term Judaeo-Christian to refer to both the Jewish and Christian faiths and to acknowledge their shared nature and origins. While most of the discussion and examples have focussed on the Christian faith, many of these arguments are equally applicable to the Jewish faith. The empirical part of this thesis will, however, only examine the Christian religion due to the comparatively small Jewish community in New Zealand.

## ***Operationalisation of Dependent and Independent Variables***

To recap, the specific research questions that will be explored, in examining the more general question of the relationship between just world beliefs and religiosity, in the empirical part of this thesis are:

1. How are beliefs about the justness of the universe related to religiosity?
2. How are beliefs about the justness of the universe related to the belief in a just world?
3. How are religious beliefs related to beliefs about the justness of the world?

The nature of the relationship between just universe beliefs and political ideology will also be explored. Chapter three introduced a number of explanations and beliefs about suffering. It also outlined several questions relating to these beliefs including:

1. To what extent are various explanations for suffering held by religious believers?

2. How do religious believers differ from non-believers in what they believe about suffering?
3. How do the various beliefs about suffering relate to more general religious beliefs?
4. How do the various beliefs about suffering relate to religiosity ?
5. How do the various beliefs about suffering relate to the belief in a just universe?
6. How do the various beliefs about suffering relate to the belief in a just world?

The literature on just world beliefs and religiosity uses as evidence for a positive relationship between just world beliefs and religiosity, the belief that God punishes wrongdoers. Two research questions directly flow on from this:

1. How common is the belief that God punishes the bad?; and
2. Is this belief positively related to believers' beliefs about the justness of the world?

As well as these new or under-researched questions on just world beliefs and religion, one additional and important aim of this thesis is to replicate, in the New Zealand context, the research of others regarding the hypothesis that just world beliefs are positively related to religiosity. Although using a different measure of the belief in a just world (i.e. the Global Belief in a Just World Scale which will be discussed next), the same or similar measures of religiosity and religious beliefs used in previous studies were used in the studies reported here, including measures of: belief in an active God (used by Rubin & Peplau, 1973), frequency of attendance at religious services (used by Rubin & Peplau, 1973; and Zweigenhaft et. al., 1985), self-rated importance of religion (used by Sorrentino & Hardy, 1974; Zweigenhaft et. al., 1985; and Benson, 1992), and religious identification (used by Furnham & Gunter, 1984; Zweigenhaft et. al., 1985; and Ma & Smith, 1985). As argued in chapter two, to examine the question of whether just world beliefs may derive from religious socialisation, a measure of religious upbringing will be included.

To explore and go some way towards answering all of these questions the measurement of a number of variables were required, including: religiosity, religious beliefs, the belief in a just world, the belief in a just universe, and beliefs about

suffering. Where possible items were borrowed and adapted from other studies. However, as these areas are under-researched, it was unavoidable that new and untested items were also developed. These were pretested with acquaintances and associates.

The next section will discuss the measurement of the belief in a just world. Following this, the remainder of the measures used will be discussed, in the context of the study in which it was used, in the chapter concerning the specific study.

### ***Measurement of the Belief in a Just World***

The most common scale used to measure just world beliefs in past research has been Rubin and Peplau's (1973) Belief in a Just World Scale. This scale has been criticised for its poor psychometric properties. Firstly, the Belief in a Just World Scale has been demonstrated to have low internal consistency (Furnham, 1998; Maes, 1998; Couch, 1998). Secondly, a number of studies have reported that the Belief in a Just World Scale is multidimensional (Furnham, 1998; Maes, 1998; Couch, 1998). The Global Belief in a Just World Scale has, however, proven to be both internally consistent and unidimensional in past studies (Lipkus, 1991; Hirshberg and Ford, 1998). O'Connor, Morrison, and Morrison (1996) found that the Global Belief in a Just World Scale yielded two factors for males, but that when the second item was removed, the 6-item scale was internally consistent and unidimensional. The second item that they report ("I feel that a person's efforts are often noticed and rewarded") differs from Lipkus' (1991) original item ("I feel that a person's efforts are noticed and rewarded"). Whether the slight difference in wording is the source of the difference in factor structures is unclear; the Hirshberg and Ford (1998) study was conducted in the same city (and with similar groups) as this thesis and found that the Global Belief in a Just World Scale had good psychometric properties. Another important advantage of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale is that it is a shorter scale, containing only seven items, as opposed to the Belief in a Just World Scale's twenty items. This is advantageous as an aid in minimising the total number of items administered. The more items participants need to respond to, the more likely that

participants will get tired and not answer the questions as well.

The Global Belief in a Just World Scale consists of seven items which attempt to measure the general belief that people get what they deserve. Agreement with items on the scale was indicated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”. Lipkus (1991) used a 6-point Likert-type scale to gauge respondents’ beliefs. A 5-point scale was used in this survey as it allowed a midpoint of neither agreement nor disagreement. This was also done in order to be consistent with the way the other attitude questions were asked and hence avoid confusing respondents. The maximum score possible for the scale was thus 35 and the minimum was 7. The items for the Global Belief in a Just World Scale are as follows:

- a) I feel that people get what they are entitled to have.
- b) I feel that a person’s efforts are noticed and rewarded.
- c) I feel that people earn the rewards and punishments they get.
- d) I feel that people who meet with misfortune have brought it on themselves.
- e) I feel that people get what they deserve.
- f) I feel that rewards and punishments are fairly given.
- g) I basically feel that the world is a fair place

## ***Statistics Used***

The measure of association that will be used in this thesis is the Pearson product moment correlation,  $r$ . After a Monte Carlo study where a comparison was made between the calculated and actual  $r$ , for a large number of samples with varying distributions and scales of measurement, Havlicek and Peterson (1976) concluded: “It appears that the Pearson  $r$  can be used in nearly all situations in which there is need for a measure of the relationship between two variables regardless of the shape of the distributions of scores or the type of scales used” (1333-1334). Ordinal scales are often used in the measurement of attitudes and beliefs. Abdel-Megeed (1984) found,

again using Monte Carlo techniques, that five or more points on a scale yielded precise values of  $r$ , compared to the true  $r$  for a 'continuous' scale.

This study will use  $r$ , as opposed to other measures of association for ordinal variables such as Kendall's tau. The validity of this is supported by the discussion above, and allows comparison with the other studies performed on just world beliefs and religiosity. Where a measure of association is calculated between measures of religiosity and just world beliefs in the literature, the statistic used is  $r$ .

While  $r$  is a useful measure of effect size in itself, the use of  $r$  is also beneficial in terms of the interpretability of the result. Previously in this chapter,  $r^2$  was presented as a measure of effect size. Cohen states: "The square of the correlation coefficient is the proportion of variance (PV) in either of the two variables which may be predicted by (or accounted for, or attributed to) the variance of the other, using a straight line relationship" (1969: 75). Cohen also adds that: "the descriptive use of  $r^2$  (as that of  $r$ ) is not dependent on assumptions of normality or homoscedasticity" (75). Cohen provided some tentative guidelines for the interpretation of effect size, based on his discussion of  $r^2$ . A small effect size is  $r = .1$ , medium  $r = .3$ , and larger  $r = .5$  (76-77).

For the difference between means, Cohen's  $d$  will be used as a measure of effect size. This has been discussed previously in this chapter. Cohen's  $d$  expresses "score distance in units of variability" (Cohen, 1969: 10). Cohen presents three  $d$  values which are tentative guidelines to indicate small, medium, and large effect sizes. These values of  $d$  are .2, .5 and .8 respectively (23-24).

## ***Summary of Studies***

Three studies form the basis for the empirical part of this thesis. In brief, the first study was designed to replicate past studies and to test new items for later studies. The discussion, however, only focuses on the former. Following from the discussion in the second chapter, religious upbringing was measured. This allowed the examination of the question of whether people with a religious upbringing are more likely to believe in a just world. The second study again replicated past research and

also explored some of the original ideas presented in this thesis. These include those questions relating to the belief in a just universe, the importance of various religious beliefs, and beliefs about suffering. This study will provide the opportunity to compare the beliefs of the religious and non-religious about suffering. The last study was designed to further explore the beliefs of highly religious people about suffering and the just world and just universe. Past research has revealed that there is at least some variation in highly religious people's tendency to believe the world is just. Therefore, by only surveying the highly religious, we effectively control for religiosity and have the opportunity to examine which particular religious beliefs are related to just world beliefs. A chapter is dedicated to each of the studies, giving further information on what variables were measured.

There are problems with surveying undergraduate subjects, particularly with regard to the external validity of the findings. Students tend to be younger, more idealistic, and come from higher socio-economic backgrounds than the population as a whole. A student's life experience does not often include a substantial length of time in the workforce. Their entry to University indicates that they have had a reasonably positive experience in their previous education. These characteristics may differentiate them from the wider population. However, students are an accessible group to survey and are most often conscientious in the way they fill in a survey. University undergraduates were not the only group surveyed as part of this thesis. The survey of those attending the Bible College of New Zealand course provides a means of examining the content of the beliefs of a highly religious group about just world beliefs and suffering in detail. It also complements the other studies which have the advantage of a large sample size (and hence higher power).

## 5. Replicating Past Research on Just World Beliefs and Religiosity

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Some previous studies on just world beliefs and religiosity found strong associations between measures of just world beliefs and: 1) measures of belief in God (Rubin and Peplau, 1973); 2) measures of frequency of attendance at a place of worship (Rubin and Peplau, 1973; Zweigenhaft et. al., 1985); and 3) self-ratings of religiosity (including how important people felt religion was to themselves) (Rubin and Peplau, 1973; Sorrentino and Hardy, 1974; Zweigenhaft et. al., 1985). Other studies that used similar measures did not find large associations. These studies included Ma and Smith (1985) (belief in God) and Benson (1992) (importance of religion). Furnham and Gunter (1984), Zweigenhaft et. al. (1985), and Ma and Smith (1985) also used measures of religious identification. The first two of these three studies concluded that there were important differences based on religious identification.

The main goal of the first study was to replicate previous studies of just world beliefs and religiosity with a large group of New Zealand undergraduate students.<sup>26</sup> The main research question to answer is: How is religiosity related to just world beliefs? To answer this question measures of importance of religion, frequency of attendance, belief in an active God, and religious identification were chosen so that

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<sup>26</sup> A minor goal of this study was to test several items that related to subjects' beliefs about suffering that would be explored in the later studies. These results will not be discussed here as the items were improved on for the later studies.

comparisons could be made with the results of previous studies on just world beliefs and religiosity outside the New Zealand context. As argued previously in this thesis, one element that is neglected in the literature is the measurement of religious upbringing. This will also be measured in this study and the results of any differences based on religious upbringing will be reported.

As already discussed, it is the contention of most scholars in this area that religiosity is positively related to just world beliefs. Much of the published research has reinforced this idea. However, Zweigenhaft et. al. (1985) argued and found that for some religious groups, religiosity may be negatively related to the belief in a just world. For this study, analysis of the data will rely on a variety of approaches to examine the nature of the relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs for different religious groups within the New Zealand context.

## **Method**

In the first week of lectures in March 1999 a questionnaire was administered to 161 students enrolled in a first year international relations course at the University of Canterbury. Females made up over half the class (55%). The mean age of the students surveyed was 21, and the median age was 19. Almost 90% of students were younger than 23, and ages ranged from 17 to 50.

Relevant to this thesis were measures for religiosity and belief in a just world (Lipkus' (1991) Global Belief in a Just World Scale).<sup>27</sup> The measures of religiosity included questions regarding participants' religious upbringing, current religious identification, frequency of attendance at a place of worship, importance of religion in everyday life, and belief in an active God. The item measuring religious upbringing asked respondents: "What religion, if any, were you raised in?". Respondents could choose between major Christian denominations (Anglican, Presbyterian, Catholic, Methodist and Baptist), specify another denomination or religion, or choose no religion. This item was important to assess the argument, as discussed in chapter 3, that socialisation into the Christian religion is related to the belief in a just world. This

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<sup>27</sup> The survey is reproduced in full in Appendix One.



specific issue has not been examined by previous studies. Respondents' current religious identifications were measured by asking: "What is your current religion?". The same choices were offered as in the question on religious upbringing. Frequency of attendance was measured by the question: "How often do you attend a religious service?". There were six levels of response offered ranging from "Never" to "Several times a week". Students were also asked, "To what extent do you feel religion is important in your everyday life?". Participants could choose between "extremely important", "very important", "somewhat important" and "not important at all". Belief in an active God was measured by the item: "There is a God who takes an active part in the affairs of people". This item was administered using a 5-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree).

In addition to the items measuring religiosity and just world beliefs, respondents were asked their age, sex, level of education, current and past financial situation, and also to indicate which political party they most supported and to place themselves on the ideological spectrum (from extreme right to extreme left). The Australian Work Ethic Scale (Ho, 1984) was administered to measure Protestant work ethic-type beliefs. The scale contained seven items including "If you work hard you will succeed" and "Hard work is fulfilling in itself". Participants were also administered several items to assess their beliefs about suffering. The goal of including items on suffering was to test questions for the later studies. As well as the items described here there were a number of other questions related to poverty in New Zealand and Africa which were part of a different study.

## **Results**

The remainder of this chapter discusses the results of the first study. The main discussion and description of results will focus on the replication of past research on just world beliefs and religiosity. A preliminary section will assess the Global Belief in a Just World Scale as this was the central research instrument chosen to measure the just world construct.

## Assessing the Global Belief in a Just World Scale

The items making up the Global Belief in a Just World Scale were factor analysed (principle components, varimax rotation). This is an indicator of whether the scale is measuring one dimension or more than one dimension of beliefs. Cronbach's Alpha, a measure of internal consistency, was also calculated. The mean, standard deviation and median of the scale, and the percentage of people who were below the scale midpoint of 21 were calculated next. This was an indication of the proportion of those completing the survey who do not believe in a just world. The results of these analyses are reported in table 5.1 below.

**Table 5.1: Assessment of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale**

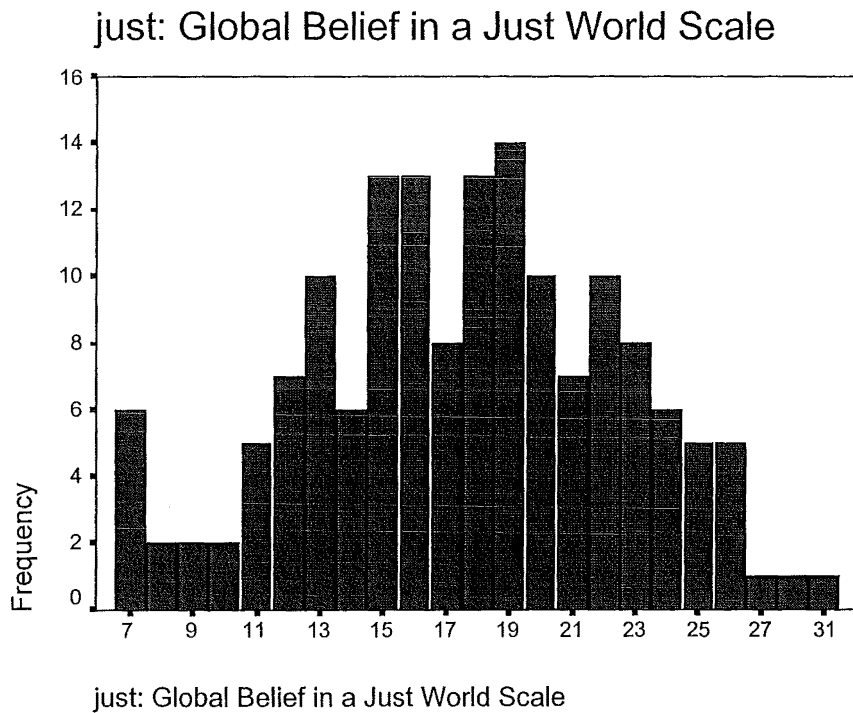
<b>Scale Mean</b>	17.6
<b>Scale Median</b>	18.0
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	5.01
<b>% below scale midpoint</b>	70%
<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	0.83
<b>Factor Analysis</b>	One factor

The mean and median were both below the scale midpoint of 21. Most people (70%) were below the scale midpoint. This indicates that most people surveyed tended to disagree that the world was a just place. Figure 5.1 shows the distribution of respondents' scores on the Global Belief in a Just World Scale. The average distance of scores from the mean (i.e. the standard deviation) was five scale points. Responses ranged from the lowest possible score on the scale (seven), indicating complete rejection to a score of thirty-one, indicating near complete acceptance.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The largest possible score was thirty-five.

**Figure 5.1: Distribution of respondents' scores on the Global Belief in a Just World Scale**



Cronbach's Alpha for this study was 0.83, which indicated that the Global Belief in a Just World Scale had a good level of internal consistency. This was not improved by the removal of any of the items. Factor analysis of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale yielded one factor. This supports the argument that the Global Belief in a Just World Scale is measuring one set of beliefs.

Previous research has presented a number of constructs theoretically and statistically related to the Belief in a Just World. Among those related constructs are political ideology and the Protestant work ethic, both of which were measured in this survey. Previous research which used Rubin and Peplau's Belief in a Just World Scale (1973) found positive associations between just world beliefs and conservative political ideas and Protestant work ethic beliefs. One further assessment of the validity of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale was, therefore, to measure the relationship between this scale and the measures of political ideology and the Protestant work ethic to see whether the same associations were found. The results of correlational analysis support this. The Global Belief in a Just World Scale was strongly related to the

measure of ideology ( $r = -.358, p = .000$ ) which meant that left-wing participants tended to accept the belief in a just world to a lesser degree than right-wing participants. The measure of Protestant work ethic beliefs was also strongly and positively related to the Global Belief in a Just World Scale ( $r = .654, p = .000$ ).

The Global Belief in a Just World Scale showed good psychometric properties. The Global Belief in a Just World Scale is therefore an appropriate measure for the rest of the analysis of relationships with measures of religiosity and suffering. The use of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale is a departure from previous research. Most of the past research has used Rubin and Peplau's (1973) Belief in a Just World Scale, which, as discussed, has been found to have poor psychometric properties.

## **Religiosity and just world beliefs**

A number of the items included in the survey instrument purposefully relate to past research in this field. An important part in researching this thesis was the replication of research on just world beliefs and religiosity in the New Zealand context.

The relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs was assessed in a variety of ways. Firstly, bivariate correlations were calculated between the Global Belief in a Just World Scale and measures of religiosity similar to or the same as those used in past studies: religious identification, importance of religion, and frequency of attendance. Secondly the means and distributions of different religious groups were compared.

### **1. Bivariate Correlations**

Bivariate correlations were calculated between the Global belief in a Just World Scale and measures of religiosity: importance of religion and frequency of attendance at a place of worship. Items measuring importance of religion were used by Rubin and Peplau (1973), Sorrentino and Hardy (1974), Zweigenhaft et al. (1985) and Benson (1992). The first two studies found positive correlations between importance of religion and just world beliefs. Zweigenhaft et al. (1985) found positive

correlations between importance of religion and just world beliefs for Catholics and negative correlations for Baptists and Quakers. Benson (1992) found no association. Items measuring frequency of attendance were used by Rubin and Peplau (1973) and Zweigenhaft et.al. (1985). The first study found a positive relationship. Zweigenhaft et. al. found that frequency of attendance was positively related to just world beliefs for Catholics, but found small negative correlations for Quakers. Bivariate correlations were also calculated between the Global Belief in a Just World Scale and belief in an active God. An item like this was used by Rubin and Peplau (1973) and correlated highly ( $r = 0.31$ ) with their Belief in a Just World Scale. Importance of religion, frequency of attendance and belief in an active God were all highly positively correlated with one another in this study.<sup>29</sup> The results of the correlational analysis are shown in the correlation matrix in table 5.2 below.

**Table 5.2: Correlations between Just World Beliefs and Religiosity**

	<b>Belief in an Active God</b>	<b>Importance of Religion</b>	<b>Frequency of Attendance</b>
<b>Global Belief in a Just World Scale</b>	.072 (.373)	.097 (.252)	.099 (.225)
<b>Belief in an Active God</b>		.650 (.000)	.599 (.000)
<b>Importance of Religion</b>			.590 (.000)

The results of this analysis provide little support for a relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs. Less than 1% of the variance in the Global Belief in a Just World Scale could be accounted for by variance in any of the three measures of religiosity. Many of the studies on religiosity and just world beliefs (Rubin and

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<sup>29</sup> To aid in the interpretability of results, the original coding of responses to importance of religion was reversed. This means that the higher a person scores on importance of religion, the more they indicated religion was important to them.

Peplau, 1973; Sorrentino and Hardy, 1974; Ma and Smith, 1985; Benson, 1992) did not factor out religious identification differences in their correlational analysis. In the Zweigenhaft et. al. (1985) study, correlations were calculated between the Belief in a Just World Scale and measures of importance of religion and frequency of attendance for individual religious groups. They found positive *and* negative relationships between these variables, depending on which religious groups were analysed. It was argued that the effect of religiosity is tempered by the manner in which a person is religious. Neglecting religious differences could decrease any statistical relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs for specific religious groups. This provides an insight into the importance of the nature of religiosity and provides a possible explanation for the small effects found in Ma and Smith (1985) and Benson (1992). Analysing religious groupings on their own may have revealed stronger effects in these cases.

Twenty people identified themselves as currently Anglican and twenty-nine identified themselves as currently Catholic. Within these religious groupings there were slightly higher positive correlations. For Anglicans, Global Belief in a Just World was positively related to importance of religion ( $r = .208, p = .378$ ) and belief in an active God ( $r = .245, p = .298$ ). For those who indicated that they were currently Catholic, Global Belief in a Just World was positively related to frequency of attendance ( $r = .246, p = .199$ ) and belief in an active God ( $r = .274, p = .151$ ). This does not approach what would normally be considered an acceptable level of statistical significance. While small in absolute terms, the nature of the relationship matches what would be expected from the theoretical perspective that says that there is a positive relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs. Still, from these findings there was little support for a large positive relationship between these measures of just world beliefs and religiosity. It would be useful to repeat this with a larger number of respondents who identified as Anglican, Catholic, or another religious denomination to confirm these findings.

Bivariate correlations were also calculated between importance of religion, frequency of attendance, belief in an active God and the measure of global just world beliefs for respondents who currently identified themselves with one of the Christian

denominations. Respondents were asked what their current religion was. Christian denominations were categorised in a single grouping. This method of grouping was also repeated in the next section for the religious identification question and the religious upbringing question. Apart from Anglicans and Catholics, the other Christian denominations were numerically small. The results of correlations between the measures of religiosity and the Global Belief in a Just World Scale for those who were currently 'Christians', or for those who had had a 'Christian' upbringing and currently identified as 'Christian', did not differ substantially from the analysis of the group as a whole. Religiosity did not appear to be strongly related to just world beliefs for religious people or for the group as a whole.

## **2. Comparison of Groups**

A number of possible comparisons have been identified between groups in the first study. These comparisons include:

1. People who indicated they had no current religion compared with those who indicated they were currently Christian.
2. People who indicated they had no religious upbringing compared with those who indicated they were brought up as Christian.
3. People who indicated that they had had no religious upbringing and currently had no religion compared with those who indicated they had a Christian upbringing and were now Christian.

The previous literature on just world beliefs and religiosity suggests that those who had been brought up Christian or who currently identified as Christian were more likely to believe that the world was just than those who had had no religious upbringing or currently had 'no religion'. No one, to my knowledge, has examined differences based on religious upbringing up to this point. This is in spite of the argument in the literature, described in chapter two, that religious socialisation is the source of individual difference. One further prediction that might be made is that those who had been Christian all their life would be most likely to be different from those who had had no religion all their life. These comparisons provide an opportunity

to examine these questions.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, it would be expected that there be statistical differences between the responses of different groups. Whether these differences are of substantive significance is the major question to be considered. Cohen's *d* was used in this analysis as an indicator of effect size. Cohen's *d* is a measure of the size of an effect in terms of the population standard deviation. This measure summarises how many standard deviations the effect size is. Cohen classed a small effect size as .2, a medium effect size as .5, and a large effect size as .8 (Cohen, 1969: 22-25).

Comparison of groups revealed that there were differences. In all the comparisons shown in table 5.3, a larger proportion of non-religious than Christian groups scored below the midpoint of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale. This pattern was mirrored for the proportions in agreement, more Christian than non-Christian respondents were above the midpoint of the scale. The indication from this is that respondents who were currently Christian, had had a Christian upbringing, or both, were more likely than current or former non-religious respondents to agree that the world was a just place. Christians did not, however, tend to overwhelmingly believe in a just world. Around 30% of people who identified with one of the Christian denominations or had had some sort of Christian upbringing scored above the midpoint of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale and could be said to believe in a just world. The majority of Christians did not accept just world-type beliefs.

Mean differences were in line with the predictions of other studies: the scale mean for those who were Christian now or had had a Christian upbringing or both was higher than those who had had no religious upbringing or had no current religion or both. Effect sizes (measured by Cohen's *d*) would be classed in Cohen's terms as small. The largest of these differences was between those who had had a Christian upbringing and were Christian now and those who had had no religious upbringing and had no religion now (Cohen's *d* = 0.39). The hypothesis that the means were in fact equal would be rejected at the .05 level of significance ( $t(108) = 2.028, p = .045$ ). The null hypothesis of zero difference would also be rejected at the .05 level for those



who were currently Christian and those who currently had no religion ( $t(134) = 2.053, p = .042$ ). The smallest difference, as measured by Cohen's  $d$ , was between those who had had no religious upbringing and those who had had some form of Christian upbringing (Cohen's  $d = 0.28$ ). This difference did not reach a level of statistical significance that would normally be considered acceptable ( $t(145) = 1.590, p = .114$ ).

The relative differences in effect between these three comparisons were plausible. It should be noted however that the difference in effect sizes between the various comparisons were very small. It would be expected that those who had had a Christian upbringing and were also currently Christians would have had the most exposure to any just world affirming teaching inherent in Christianity. The smallest difference, between the groups compared only on religious upbringing, could be a result of the effects of the lack of exposure to religious teaching that affirmed the belief in a just world later in life. Any religious teachings which promote just world beliefs might also be tempered by unjust life experiences. Without the salience of a religious belief system this might contradict the effects of earlier religious socialisation. As mentioned the differences between effect sizes are very small. It will be interesting to see if this pattern is repeated in the second study.

**Table 5.3 Religious Group Comparisons of Global Belief in a Just World Scale**

	Number	% below midpoint	% above midpoint	Mean	t test	Cohen's d
Christian upbringing	100	70.0%	26.0%	18.0	t(145) = 1.590	d = 0.28
No religious upbringing	47	76.6%	17.0%	16.6	p = .114	
Christian now	69	68.1%	29.0%	18.4	t(134) = 2.053	d = 0.36
No religion now	67	74.6%	20.1%	16.6	p = .042	
Christian upbringing and now	67	70.1%	28.4%	18.4	t(108) = 2.028	d = 0.39
Nonreligious upbringing and now	43	77%	19%	16.4	p = .045	

Only brief attention was paid to differences between religious denominations. The power of such analysis was limited, but confirms that replication with a larger group would be useful. The largest religious groupings were Anglicans (N = 20), Catholics (N = 29) and those with no religious identification (N = 65). The mean scores on the Global Belief in a Just World Scale for Anglicans was 19.55, for Catholics was 17.83 and for those with no current religion was 16.92. Between Anglicans and those with no current religion Cohen's d was 0.53, which would be classed in Cohen's terms as a medium effect size. A statistical significance test would reject the null hypothesis of the equality of the means at the .1 level of significance ( $t(83) = 1.850, p = .068$ ). A t-test failed to reject the hypothesis that the group means were identical for comparisons between Anglicans and Catholics ( $t(47) = 1.182, p = .243$ ) and between Catholics and the non-religious ( $t(92) = .830, p = .409$ ). There

were small differences between Anglicans and Catholics (Cohen's  $d = 0.34$ ) and between Catholics and the non-religious (Cohen's  $d = 0.18$ ).

This provides only limited support for a difference between Catholics and Anglicans. The mean difference between Catholics and Anglicans was small. Why might there be a difference between Catholics and Anglicans? Research by Webster and Perry (1989) found that in New Zealand, Anglicans were more like the non-religious than Catholics in their beliefs about God, life after death, the soul, heaven, sin, the devil and hell. They also found that while Catholics and Anglicans were both on the right of the political spectrum, political activism was higher for Catholics. The argument is put forward by Webster (1989) that Vatican II has had an impact on the Catholic Church as a whole (12). Among other things, Vatican II emphasised the importance of applying Christian theology to relevant and current social issues. Fisher and Luyster (1990) describe the impact which liberal and pacifistic ideas, derived from Vatican II, have had on the Catholic Church.<sup>30</sup> While there are indications that identification with the Anglican Church is more nominal than an indication of active religiosity, the importance of religious beliefs and the emphasis of the Catholic Church in addressing current social issues may be the source of difference between these denominations.

## **Conclusion**

Overall there appeared to be some support for a small relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs. There were small positive correlations between some of the items measuring religiosity and the Global Belief in a Just World Scale when Anglicans and Catholics were examined in isolation. However, these were not close to what would normally be considered statistical significance.

It appears from this analysis that there were small but detectable differences between Christian and non-Christian religious groupings. A number of these small differences reached generally accepted levels of statistical significance. These

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<sup>30</sup> Vatican II is also given importance in the literature on the development of Liberation Theology (Smith, 1991).

differences were in line with the idea that Christians would accept the belief in a just world to a greater extent than non-Christians, which is the major contention of the literature on just world beliefs and religiosity. These differences, however, more accurately reflect a difference in the degree of rejection of the belief in a just world. Most people, religious or otherwise, rejected the belief in a just world. While less non-religious people accepted the belief in a just world than religious people, approximately 70% of people identifying with Christian denominations rejected the belief in a just world. Differences between denominations were smaller. There was a moderate difference between Anglicans and people with no religion.

The generalisability of the results of this research are questionable given the nature of a student sample. As mentioned in the previous chapter, students tend to be younger, more idealistic, and come from higher socio-economic backgrounds than the general population. While the same criticism could be levelled at most of the other studies concerning religiosity and just world beliefs, this is an important qualification. However, this study is, as far as I know, the first of its kind in New Zealand. Therefore, it provides an insight into the relationship between just world beliefs and religiosity for New Zealanders. Any differences found were small compared to those reported in earlier North American studies.

The lack of large effect sizes could be attributed to the use of Lipkus' (1991) Global Belief in a Just World Scale instead of Rubin and Peplau's (1973) Belief in a Just World Scale. However, comparison of the psychometric properties of both scales has pointed to the superiority of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale. The Global Belief in a Just World Scale also appears to have good face validity in relation to Lerner's (1980) description of a just world as one in which people get what they deserve. Although the use of the Belief in a Just World Scale might reveal a larger relationship, the Global Belief in a Just World Scale appears to be a more accurate measure of the belief in a just world. The Global Belief in a Just World Scale should, therefore, give more accurate insight into the relationship between just world beliefs and religiosity.

Given the result that there were small (though non-significant) differences

based on religious upbringing, it would be beneficial for future research to devise more comprehensive measures of religious socialisation. This could include the number of years that respondents had been Christian, the religious backgrounds of parents, and the extent of involvement with religion as respondents were growing up.

## 6. Exploring new aspects of the relationship between Just World Beliefs and Religiosity

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The main intention of the first study was to concentrate on the replication of past research in the field of just world beliefs and religion. The second of the three studies, while again replicating previous research, had three additional important exploratory aspects. This included firstly, an investigation of the relationship between just world beliefs and more complex measures of religious beliefs. Secondly, it included an exploration of the relationship between just world and just universe beliefs. Thirdly, a comprehensive investigation of people's beliefs about suffering and the relationship of such beliefs to the belief in a just world and a just universe was undertaken.

### ***Method***

The second survey was conducted in July 1999, in the first week of a second semester introductory course in comparative politics. The survey was administered to the 84 students during class time. Slightly more females completed the survey than males (43 females and 41 males). The mean age of respondents was 21.6 and the median age was 19. The youngest student was 17 and the oldest student was 47.

Approximately 80% of students were aged 23 or younger.

In addition to the items in the previous study designed to measure religiosity, there were a number of items administered which were designed to measure religious beliefs (beliefs about God, the devil, the afterlife, heaven, hell, and religious miracles). These items were taken from the International Social Survey Programme's 1991 survey on attitudes to religion (International Social Survey Programme, 1991). Whilst the International Social Survey Programme survey used a 4-point scale ('definitely', 'probably', 'probably not', and 'definitely not'), a 7-point scale was used here to provide a wider range of responses and a neutral middle position. These were included to examine whether there was any relationship between these basic religious beliefs and beliefs about a just world and a just universe.

The Global Belief in a Just World Scale was again used to measure just world beliefs.<sup>31</sup> The belief in a just world is argued to have implications for victim blaming and also for beliefs about those who are successful. Two items were included to examine this:

1. People who suffer have probably done something to deserve their suffering.
2. People who are successful have done something to deserve their success.

These were administered using a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree).

Items measuring beliefs about suffering were included, partially derived from the discussion in chapter three and from other academic research. All these items were administered using a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree). The

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<sup>31</sup> Two additional questions were added to examine different aspects of people's just world beliefs. However, these were not found to be useful and are not included in the analysis. The second of these questions asked: "Do you think in general .... people tend to get what they deserve, people sometimes get what they deserve and sometimes don't get what they deserve, or people don't tend to get what they deserve". It was hoped that this item might reveal the difference between beliefs in a just, an unjust, or a random world. After further thought about this item, it was realised that the belief that people sometimes do or do not get what they deserve does not necessarily equate with the belief in the capriciousness of outcomes. It could equate with a more complex view of the world, that could accept the principle of a just world, while recognising that outcomes are not always just.

discussion of religious beliefs about suffering revealed a number of possible common beliefs about suffering. Although there were some predictions put forward in chapter three for possible relationships between just world beliefs and suffering, the inclusion of these items was largely exploratory. There were two exploratory questions. Firstly, what beliefs about suffering are most commonly held by people in general and religious people specifically? Secondly, how do these beliefs relate, if at all, to the belief in a just world? Foley's (1988) paper provided the basis for a number of items on beliefs about suffering:

1. I think that through suffering people grow into better people (325).
2. After suffering has happened to me, I think, "It could have been worse" (326).
3. Although suffering at first seems negative, it is often a blessing in disguise (326).
4. When people are suffering, it is because God is punishing them for the sins they have committed in their lives (322).
5. When I see people suffering, I think that God must have a meaning for it, even though I may not have discovered it (326).

The specific relevance of these items will be discussed as they are analysed. The other items regarding beliefs about suffering were derived from the discussion in chapter four:

1. When people are suffering it is usually the result of bad luck.
2. People suffer because the physical world is harsh.
3. When people are suffering it is often nobody's fault.

The first two of these items tapped the beliefs that suffering is due to bad luck and uncontrollable natural forces. The item which mentioned suffering as nobody's fault was originally included to tap the belief that humans are to blame for suffering, but it was realised that in its reversal, the meaning of the item changed, and that it was impossible to distinguish whether the respondent was meaning a human or



supernatural agent. The item still gave an insight into the belief that no causal agent had responsibility for human suffering.

Two of Wagner and Hunsberger's (1984) items were included using a 5-point Likert scale. Although these items were not applicable for people without religious beliefs due to the language that they used, these items still have relevance for those who expressed belief in God. The items used were:

After death God will reward the just and punish the wicked.

God rewards us for being faithful and punishes us for being disobedient.

The first item pertains to the belief in a just universe, the second reflects the more general belief that God actively rewards and punishes those who deserve it. A further item was created to examine people's beliefs about the justness of the universe:

If people don't get what they deserve in life, they will get what they deserve after they die.

The attitude questions which mentioned God were left until last, as it was possible that non-religious respondents might feel the whole survey was irrelevant and not complete it if these questions were placed earlier in the survey. Additional items were included, some of which were designed to be used in another study, others of which were decided to have no theoretical importance to this study. These items will not be discussed here.<sup>32</sup>

## **Results**

The main discussion and description of results will be divided into five sections, each regarding particular related research questions. These sections, in order, discuss the results concerning:

1. The relationship between just world beliefs and religiosity;
2. The relationship between specific religious beliefs and just world beliefs;

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<sup>32</sup> The survey is reproduced in full in appendix 2.

3. The relationship between ultimate justice and just world beliefs;
4. Beliefs about suffering;
5. The relationship between beliefs about suffering and religiosity;
6. The relationship between beliefs about suffering and just world beliefs;
7. The relationship between beliefs about suffering and just universe beliefs.

A preliminary section will assess the Global Belief in a Just World Scale, as this is a central research instrument chosen to measure the just world construct.

### Assessing the Global Belief in a Just World Scale

**Table 6.1: Comparison of studies with regard to the Global Belief in a Just World Scale**

<b>Scale Mean</b>	19.4
<b>Scale Median</b>	19.0
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	4.18
<b>% below scale midpoint</b>	54%
<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	0.78
<b>Factor Analysis</b>	Two factors

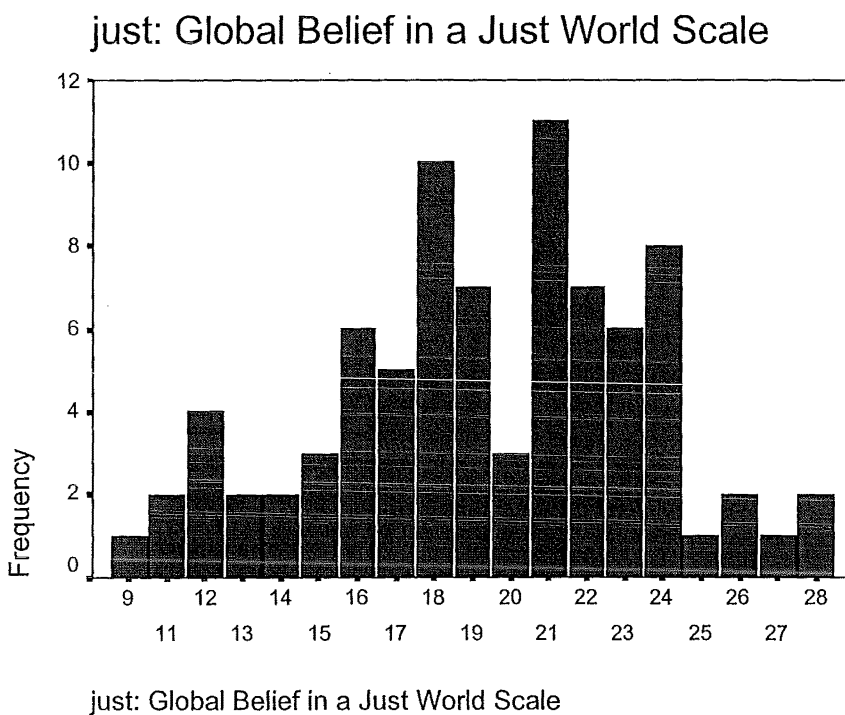
Table 6.1 describes the responses of people in this study to the Global Belief in a Just World Scale and summarises the reliability and factor analyses. As in the first study, the mean and median were below the scale midpoint of 21. However, the mean was larger than in the first study.<sup>33</sup> Slightly over half of people surveyed, on the basis

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<sup>33</sup> The scale mean in the first study was 17.6.

of their responses to the Global Belief in a Just World Scale, did not believe that the world was a just place. Figure 6.1 shows the distribution of respondents scores on the Global Belief in a Just World Scale. Scores ranged between nine and twenty eight. The average distance of responses from the mean, the standard deviation, was 4.2. Overall, scores were higher and more tightly distributed than the last survey. The reasons for this are unclear, but it may be attributable to problems found regarding the results of the factor analysis of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale.

**Figure 6.1: Distribution of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale<sup>34</sup>**



The Global Belief in a Just World Scale had an acceptable level of internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.78). As in the first study, the alpha was not improved by removing an item.

Factor analysis (principle components, varimax rotation) revealed two factors. These results raise questions as to whether the Global Belief in a Just World Scale should be seen to be measuring a single dimension of belief. The first factor contained four items:

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<sup>34</sup> The graph misses out scores with zero frequency (like 10). This is not meant to misrepresent the 108

Item 1: "I feel that people get what they are entitled to have"

Item 2: "I feel that a person's efforts are noticed and rewarded"

Item 3: "I feel that people earn the rewards and punishments they get"

Item 5: "I feel that people get what they deserve".

The remaining items which loaded on the second factor were:

Item 4: "I feel that people who meet with misfortune have brought it on themselves"

Item 6: "I feel that rewards and punishments are fairly given"

Item 7: "I basically feel that the world is a fair place"

There appeared to be no obvious theoretical reason why the items would group in this way.

The findings of the factor analysis place some doubt over the psychometric properties of this scale. The order of the items may have influenced the results. The items were administered in order in this study. In the first study, however, they had been randomly mixed with the other attitude items. The items loading on each factor are, apart from one item, in the order in which they were asked. In previous unpublished research the researcher had been involved with, the items were administered in order with no effects on the unidimensionality of the scale. In all previous applications of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale to student samples at the University of Canterbury, factor analysis has yielded only a one factor solution. Combined with this, the face validity of the scale appears to be good. The items, overall, reflect the belief in a just world described in the literature. This result may indicate a problem with our understanding of the just world construct in general. As already mentioned, other attempts to measure just world beliefs have been problematic. Perhaps, as Furnham and Proctor (1989) argue, the concept should be thought of as multidimensional, encompassing most importantly conceptions of personal, interpersonal and political spheres of control. Although their scale did not

exhibit adequate internal consistency, the development of a multidimensional conception of just world beliefs both in theory and measurement may be necessary.

As the Global Belief in a Just World Scale was found to be problematic, further representation of the just world belief construct relied on both the Global Belief in a Just World Scale and item five of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale. This item represents the heart of what just world beliefs are theorised to be, that is: “I feel that people get what they deserve”. This item will be referred to as the Single Just World Item. The results of the analysis of the Single Just World Item will only be mentioned where they differ dramatically from the Global Belief in a Just World Scale.

As in the previous study, bivariate correlations were calculated between the Single Just World Item, Global Belief in a Just World Scale and a measure of victim blame (“People who suffer have probably done something to deserve their suffering”)<sup>35</sup>, a measure of the deservedness of success (“People who are successful have done something to deserve their success”), a scale measuring political ideology (adapted from Evans, Heath and Lalljee, 1996) and a scale made up of two items taken from the Australian Work Ethic Scale (Ho, 1984) (“People who work deserve success”, “If you work hard you will succeed”). The purpose of this was to further validate the scale by confirming relationships with theoretically and empirically related constructs. This was made more crucial in this study due to the results of the factor analysis.

The results of this analysis, shown in table 6.2, support the continued use of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale. In almost all of the relationships considered in table 6.2, the Global Belief in a Just World Scale was more strongly related to the various constructs than the Single Just World Item. This finding warranted the continued use of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale. The item measuring deservedness of success did not appear to be highly related to just world beliefs. The correlation between the measures of just world belief and the deservedness of success

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<sup>35</sup> The relationship between this item and just world beliefs will also be discussed more fully in relation to beliefs about suffering at the end of this chapter.

were not statistically significant at normally accepted levels of significance (.1, .05, or .01). In the first chapter, research relating just world beliefs to support for the rich and powerful was described. It would be predicted that these would be positively related as believers in a just world would tend to believe that the successful deserved their success. The relationship between the measures of just world beliefs and deservedness of success was smaller in comparison to the belief that “People who suffer have done something to deserve their suffering”. The comparatively small size of this relationship suggests that just world beliefs may be more important in relation to the defensive function of explaining suffering than in explaining success. This was argued in the third chapter of this thesis. It should be emphasised that suffering and success are not opposites, but they do represent good and bad outcomes.

**Table 6.2: Bivariate Correlations (r) and significance levels (p) between measures of just world belief and related constructs.**

	Single Just World Item	Global Belief in a Just World Scale
“People who suffer have probably done something to deserve their suffering”	.197 (.075)	.347 (.001)
“People who are successful have done something to deserve their success”	.075 (.505)	.159 (.154)
<b>Political Ideology Scale</b>	-.141 (.204)	-.297 (.006)
<b>Protestant Work Ethic Scale</b>	.247 (.000)	.304 (.005)

## The relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs

The relationship between religiosity<sup>36</sup> and just world beliefs was, following the last chapter, analysed firstly by examining bivariate correlations between the Global Belief in a Just World Scale, Single Just World Item and measures of religiosity (importance of religion, and frequency of attendance). Means and distributions of different religious groupings, as in the last chapter, were also compared.

### 1. Bivariate Correlations

Bivariate correlations (see table 6.3) again provided little support for a strong relationship between the measures of just world beliefs (the Global Belief in a Just World Scale and the Single Just World Item) and the measures of religiosity (importance of religion and frequency of attendance at a place of worship). There was a strong positive correlation between frequency of attendance and importance of religion ( $r = .721, p = .000$ ). Correlations between the measures of religiosity and just world beliefs were mostly negligible. There was a small positive correlation between the measure of frequency of attendance and the Single Just World Item ( $r = .162, p = .150$ ). For all four correlations, however, the null hypothesis that the correlations would be zero could not be rejected at the .1 level of significance. As in the previous study the analysis was repeated for those who currently identified themselves as one of the Christian denominations. Correlations between the measures of religiosity and just world beliefs were not dramatically larger for current Christians compared to the group as a whole. As in the last study, the evidence did not support the existence of a strong positive relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs.

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<sup>36</sup> Although the item measuring belief in an active God (“There is a God who takes an active part in the affairs of people”) was analysed along with importance of religion and frequency of attendance in the last chapter, this item will be discussed here in relation to other specific religious belief.

**Table 6.3: Correlation Coefficients (r) Just World Beliefs and Religiosity**

	<b>Global Belief in a Just World Scale</b>	<b>Single Just World Item</b>
<b>Importance of Religion</b>	.066 (.575)	.062 (.597)
<b>Frequency of Attendance</b>	.050 (.659)	.162 (.150)

In the previous chapter, a separate analysis was undertaken for Anglicans and Catholics, the largest religious groups. These were again the largest religious groups, but they were numerically small (Catholics N = 15, Anglican N = 13). A within groups correlational analysis did not yield any useful, interpretable results.



## 2. Comparison of groups

**Table 6.4: Comparison of religious group scores on the Global Belief in a Just World Scale**

	Number	% below midpoint	% above midpoint	Mean	t-test	Cohen's d
Christian upbringing	51	49.0%	33.3%	19.8	t (78) = 1.409 p = .163	d = 0.33
No religious upbringing	29	62.1%	31.0%	18.4		
Christian now	36	47.2%	27.8%	19.9	t (73) = .641 p = .524	d = 0.14
No religion now	39	56.4%	38.5%	19.3		
Christian upbringing and now	36	47.2%	27.8%	19.9	t (60) = .949 p = .346	d = 0.22
Nonreligious upbringing and now	26	57.7%	34.6%	19.0		

Comparisons again revealed small differences between religious groups (see table 6.4). A larger proportion of non-religious than Christian groups disagreed that the world was a just place. Although on average both Christians and non-Christian groups rejected a just world, mean differences were in line with the idea that Christians would tend to accept the just world to a greater degree than non-Christians. Effect sizes were small, Cohen's d varied between 0.14 and 0.33. Effect sizes

(measured by Cohen's  $d$ ) were smaller than those found in the second study. This may have been the result of problems with the Global Belief in a Just World Scale in the second study. Tests of statistical significance for the equality of group means would not reject the null hypothesis that the mean difference was zero for each of the three comparisons.

Since Cohen's  $d$  is a relative measure of effect size based on standard deviations, comparison of effect size is possible. Out of the three comparisons made, the largest difference was between those who had had a Christian upbringing and those who had had no religious upbringing (Cohen's  $d = 0.33$ ). In the analysis of the first study it was observed that the largest difference was between those current Christians who had had a Christian upbringing and those non-religious people who had had no religious upbringing. The smallest difference was between the groups based on religious upbringing. It was argued that the larger difference would be expected between people who had had longer periods of socialisation. The effect sizes for the difference based on religious upbringing are in fact similar between the first and second studies. The other effect sizes are comparatively smaller between the two studies. Why is this result different here? In the last survey, means for the groups who were not religious were very similar, while the means for the Christian groups tended to vary. In contrast, in this survey the means for Christian groups were close to identical for the three comparisons and the means of the non-religious group tended to vary. Group means were also larger overall than in the first study. Both the groups surveyed were similar demographically. Perhaps this is a result of the problems found with measuring just world beliefs in this study.

There were also smaller differences and higher group means for the analysis of denominational differences. There were fewer members of specific denominations in this study since the overall number of respondents was smaller. The largest denominations were again Catholics and Anglicans. However, there were only thirteen Anglicans and fifteen Catholics. The size of the differences between denominational groups were smaller than in the last study conducted, and, given the smaller  $N$ , it was unsurprising that the null hypothesis that the means were the same could not be rejected at normally accepted levels of statistical significance ( $.1, .05$ ,

and .01). Given the smaller numbers, this result does not invalidate the results and discussion in the last chapter. It does, however, reinforce the fact that if there are differences between denominational groups, they are probably small.

### Specific Religious Beliefs and Just World Beliefs

In addition to the item measuring belief in an active God (“There is a God who takes an active part in the affairs of people”), respondents were asked six questions regarding specific religious beliefs. These questions asked to what degree the respondent believed in the existence of God, the Devil, a life after death, heaven, hell, and religious miracles.

The percentage of total respondents in the second study who indicated some degree of belief for each of the seven religious beliefs is shown in table 6.5.

**Table 6.5: Percent who accept different religious beliefs and correlations (r) with importance of religion and frequency of attendance**

	% who indicated some level of belief	Correlation (r) with importance of religion	Correlation (r) with frequency of attendance
<b>God</b>	54.9%	.540 (.000)	.522 (.000)
<b>Active God</b>	26.5%	.568 (.000)	.437 (.000)
<b>The Devil</b>	30.5%	.539 (.000)	.332 (.003)
<b>A life after death</b>	57.8%	.382 (.001)	.242 (.030)
<b>Heaven</b>	43.8%	.494 (.000)	.456 (.000)
<b>Hell</b>	22.5%	.426 (.000)	.329 (.003)
<b>Religious Miracles</b>	34.1%	.549 (.000)	.455 (.000)

All of these items correlated highly with each other. Correlation coefficients ranged between .499 (between belief in hell and religious miracles) and .823 (between belief

in the devil and hell). These beliefs<sup>37</sup> also correlated highly and positively with importance of religion and frequency of attendance as is shown in table 6.5.

As to the question of how these beliefs are related to the belief in a just world, bivariate correlations were calculated between the items measuring religious beliefs and the Global Belief in a Just World Scale and the single item: "I feel that people get what they deserve". Results of this analysis are shown in the table 6.6 below.

**Table 6.6: Bivariate Correlations (r) and Significance levels between measures of religious beliefs and just world beliefs**

	All respondents		Christian all life only	
	Global Belief in a Just World Scale	"I feel that people get what they deserve"	Global Belief in a Just World Scale	"I feel that people get what they deserve"
<b>Active God</b>	.035 (.754)	-.060 (.591)	.091 (.602)	.135 (.441)
<b>A life after death</b>	.223 (.044)	-.013 (.910)	.066 (.701)	.228 (.181)
<b>The Devil</b>	.047 (.680)	-.101 (.370)	.028 (.872)	.019 (.913)
<b>God</b>	-.051 (.650)	-.175 (.119)	-.113 (.511)	.006 (.973)
<b>Heaven</b>	.092 (.419)	-.021 (.852)	.054 (.762)	.030 (.865)
<b>Hell</b>	.106 (.351)	-.033 (.771)	.038 (.830)	.016 (.930)
<b>Religious Miracles</b>	-.003 (.980)	-.194 (.083)	-.023 (.892)	.106 (.537)

<sup>37</sup> The items measuring religious beliefs, except for the belief in an active God item, were reversed to aid in interpretation. A high score on a particular item thus indicates that the person accepts a particular belief.

As in the previous study, it does not appear that any of the religious beliefs were highly related to measures of just world beliefs. While there were some correlations that might be considered statistically significant<sup>38</sup> in this study, these correlations were small, not significantly correlated over both measures of just world beliefs, and were smaller when only those who had had a Christian upbringing and currently identified with one of the Christian denominations were examined in isolation. Whereas Rubin and Peplau (1973) found a moderate positive relationship between measures of belief in God and just world beliefs, there was no support for this in either the first or second study. Similarly, beliefs more specific to the Christian tradition like Heaven, Hell and the devil were not related to the belief in a just world.

These, of course, are not the only beliefs that may be considered religious. It would be valuable to examine other religious doctrines, particularly those religious ideas that differentiate the major religions and denominations within a religion. Religious beliefs about suffering will be discussed later in this chapter and more fully in the next chapter.

### **Relationship between the belief in a just universe and the belief in a just world**

The item chosen<sup>39</sup> to measure the belief in a just universe was:

If people don't get what they deserve in life, they will get what they deserve after they die.<sup>40</sup>

This item was moderately related to the measures of frequency of attendance ( $r = .320$ ,  $p = .004$ ) and importance of religion ( $r = .416$ ,  $p = .000$ ). There were large positive correlations (all  $r > .5$ ) between the Just Universe item and general religious beliefs.

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<sup>38</sup> The correlation between the Global Belief in a Just World Scale and the belief in a life after death was statistically significant at the .05 level of significance. The Single Just World Item was negatively correlated with belief in religious miracles. This was statistically significant at the .1 level of significance.

<sup>39</sup> Another item was included in the survey ("After death God will reward the just and punish the wicked"). This item relied on both belief in God and belief in the afterlife. Since it used religious language it was not included in the analysis.

<sup>40</sup> The mean of this item was 2.45, the median was 3 and the standard deviation was 1.15.

The Just Universe item correlated most strongly with belief in heaven ( $r = .626, p = .000$ ). There were large statistically significant differences between religious and non-religious groups based on religious identification and religious upbringing (all Cohen's  $d > .7$ ). Anglicans tended to be stronger just universe believers than Catholics. Catholics in turn were stronger believers than the non-religious.

Bivariate correlations were calculated between the Global Belief in a Just World Scale and Single Just World Item, and the Just Universe item (table 6.7).

**Table 6.7: Study 2: Bivariate Correlations (r) Just World Beliefs and Ultimate Justice**

	Global Belief in a Just World Scale	"I feel that people get what they deserve"
<b>Just Universe Item:</b>	.143	.008
"If people don't get what they deserve in life, they will get what they deserve after they die"	(.202)	(.946)
<b>Just Universe Item for Christian all life only</b>	.209	.210
	(.228)	(.227)

There was only a small positive correlation between the Global Belief in a Just World Scale and the Just Universe Item for all those surveyed ( $r = .143, p = .202$ ). This would not be considered statistically significant from zero at the .1 level of significance. The correlation between the Single Just World Item and the Just Universe Item was negligible ( $r = .008$ ). When only those who currently affiliated themselves with a Christian denomination and had some form of Christian upbringing were analysed in isolation, the size of the correlations between the Just Universe Item and the Global Belief in a Just World Scale ( $r = .209, p = .228$ ) and the Single Just World Item ( $r = .210, p = .227$ ) was larger. The null hypothesis that these correlations were equal to zero could not, however, be rejected at the .1 level of significance for

either of these correlations. The relationship between just world beliefs and just universe beliefs, if there is one at all, is small for both the religious and non-religious surveyed here. This supports the findings of Wagner and Hunsberger (1984).

The small correlations indicate that these constructs are at least close to independent. It is useful to examine the numbers of people who accept the four different intersections of these beliefs: people who believe in a just universe and a just world, those who believe in a just universe but not in a just world, those who do not believe in a just universe and believe in a just world and those who do not believe in a just universe or a just world. How many people accept each of these four sets of beliefs? This was estimated by examining the number in agreement with the Single Just World Item (believe in a just world) versus those who were neutral or disagreed (do not believe in a just world) and the number in agreement with the chosen measure of belief in a just world (believe in a just universe) and those neutral or in disagreement (do not believe in a just world). Based on this a distinction was made between those who believed in a just world and a just universe and those who did not believe. It should be noted that not believing is not the same as rejecting these beliefs.

The numbers and percentages who ascribed to these different sets of beliefs are shown in table 6.8 below. The majority of people did not believe in a just world or in a just universe. Very few believed in both a just world and a just universe. These results provide further evidence for the distinction between these beliefs. Of those who did not believe in a just universe, approximately half did not believe in a life after death. Not everyone who believes in an afterlife believes that people will get what they deserve in the afterlife. This could be because people view the afterlife as only a happy place, rather than a place to be rewarded and punished. This is reflected by the proportions of people believing in heaven (44%) and hell (23%). Fewer people accepted these beliefs than the belief in a life after death (58%).

**Table 6.8: Belief in a Just World and Belief in a Just Universe**

		Believe in a Just Universe		
		Yes	No	Total
Believe in a Just World	Yes	5 (6.2%)	12 (14.8%)	17 (21.0%)
	No	9 (11.1%)	55 (67.9%)	64 (79.0%)
	Total	14 (17.3%)	67 (82.7%)	81 (100.0%)

A similar pattern emerged when only those currently identifying with a Christian denomination were analysed (see table 6.9). Most Christians (around 7 out of 10) did not accept both beliefs. There was some support for the contention that Christian respondents would tend to believe in a just universe more than non-religious respondents. However, to examine this more rigorously would require a sample with a larger number of religious and non-religious people.

**Table 6.9: Belief in a Just World and Belief in a Just Universe (Christian only)**

		Believe in a Just Universe		
		Yes	No	Total
Believe in a Just World	Yes	3 (8.6%)	3 (8.6%)	6 (17.1%)
	No	5 (14.3%)	24 (68.6%)	29 (83.3%)
	Total	8 (22.9%)	27 (77.1%)	35 (100.0%)



As described in the first chapter just world beliefs were found previously to be related to political ideology. The more a person accepts the belief in a just world, the more they will tend to accept right-wing political beliefs.<sup>41</sup> Is the belief that the universe is just related to political ideology? The correlation between the measure of the belief in a just universe and political ideology was negligible ( $r = -.017, p = .877$ ). For those current Christians who had had a Christian upbringing there was a very small negative correlation between these beliefs ( $r = -.104, p = .553$ ). The evidence suggests that the relationship between the belief that the universe is a just place and right-wing political ideology is not substantively important.

### **Beliefs about suffering**

A number of items were included in this study to examine the beliefs of Christians and people in general about suffering. Table 6.10 lists these items with the number who agreed, disagreed, and were neutral. People overall rejected the idea that suffering was the result of bad luck, as only 10% of respondents agreed with this statement. More people agreed that suffering was nobody's fault (19% agreed). Which indicates that most people feel that someone is to blame for suffering. This may be a human or supernatural actor, as the item does not differentiate between the two causal agents. There appeared to be a relatively even distribution of those who agreed and disagreed that through suffering people grow, that suffering is a blessing in disguise and that suffering results from the harshness of the physical world. People mostly rejected the idea that people must have done something to deserve their suffering (67% disagreed).

Comparing the responses of those who had had a Christian upbringing and were currently Christian and those who had had no religious upbringing and had no current religious affiliation revealed mostly very small differences.<sup>42</sup> The largest difference was in the belief that suffering is bad luck. However, since very few people

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<sup>41</sup> The correlation between just world beliefs and political ideology was  $r = -.3$  in this study. A negative correlation indicated a moderate tendency for high just world believers to hold right-wing political beliefs.

<sup>42</sup> Only those explanations that did not rely on religious beliefs (belief in God in particular) were compared between the non-religious and religious. It is not a particularly interesting result that

actually accepted this belief, it is hard to make a meaningful conclusion about this.

**Table 6.10: Responses to beliefs about suffering**

<b>Belief about suffering</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
When people are suffering it is usually the result of bad luck.	8 (9.6)	17 (20.2)	59 (70.2)
People suffer because the physical world is harsh.	24 (28.6)	37 (44.0)	23 (27.4)
When people are suffering it is often nobody's fault.	16 (19.1)	20 (23.8)	48 (57.1)
I think that through suffering people grow into better people.	22 (26.1)	41 (48.8)	21 (25.0)
Although suffering at first seems negative, it is often a blessing in disguise.	22 (26.2)	34 (40.5)	28 (33.3)
People who suffer have probably done something to deserve their suffering.	6 (7.2)	22 (26.2)	56 (66.7)

The items which mentioned God were analysed separately for only those who indicated a high level of belief in God responding above the midpoint on the item measuring belief in God. No one agreed that “When people are suffering, it is because God is punishing them for the sins they have committed in their lives” (see table 6.11). This is an important result, as this belief has been argued to be tied to acceptance by Christians of the belief in a just world (Wagner and Hunsberger, 1984; Furnham and Proctor, 1989). In contrast to this belief, a quarter of those who believed in God agreed that “God rewards us for being faithful and punishes us for being disobedient”. This may have been the result of the mention of reward. It was realised that there are two stimuli that people might respond to, that is, a God who rewards and a God who punishes. It was also thought that in comparison to the other item

regarding suffering as a punishment from God, this item did not rule out other explanations for suffering. The other difference between these items is the difference between suffering and punishment. Punishment might not involve suffering. It can include withholding of reward. Punishment involving suffering as stated in one of the questions is worse than punishment by itself.

Over one quarter of those who indicated high belief in God also agreed that God must have some meaning for human suffering. Of those who indicated high belief in God, 41% rejected this idea. Based on the responses of those who believe in God to the questions mentioning God, most people do not attach causality for suffering directly to God. Even for those who believe that God must have a meaning for suffering this does not necessarily imply that God causes suffering. This is probably important for continued belief in God. While God does not cause suffering, the implication is that suffering may ultimately result in good.

**Table 6.11: Responses to beliefs relating God and suffering for those who believe in God**

<b>For those who Believe in God</b>			
	<b>Agree (%)</b>	<b>Neutral (%)</b>	<b>Disagree (%)</b>
When people are suffering, it is because God is punishing them for the sins they have committed in their lives.	0 (0.0)	11 (25.0)	33 (75.0)
When I see people suffering, I think that God must have a meaning for it, even though I may not have discovered it.	13 (29.5)	13 (29.5)	18 (40.9)
God rewards us for being faithful and punishes us for being disobedient.	11 (25.0)	17 (38.6)	16 (36.4)

## **The relationship between beliefs about suffering and religiosity**

The next major question to examine is the relationship of the various beliefs about suffering to the measures of religiosity and religious beliefs. It would be expected that the items which mentioned God would be highly correlated with the items measuring religiosity and those measuring religious beliefs. This was the case. Correlation coefficients ranged from .336 (between the God punishes and rewards item and belief in the afterlife item) to .690 (between the God punishes and rewards item and the belief in an active God item). Associations between almost all the other measures of beliefs about suffering and items measuring religiosity and religious beliefs were negligible. The item which looked at suffering as a blessing in disguise was positively and significantly correlated with measures of religious belief and religiosity.<sup>43</sup> It is possible that this was a result of the word “blessing”, which is a common word in religious language. Not much can be concluded from these correlations.

## **The relationship between beliefs about suffering and the belief in a just world**

To examine the relationship between just world beliefs and beliefs about suffering, bivariate correlations were calculated between the Global Belief in a Just World Scale and the measures of beliefs about suffering, firstly for the group as a whole and then only for the most religious respondents to the survey. Three separate correlational analyses were performed for those who had high belief in God ( $N = 45$ ), those who had a Christian upbringing and were also currently Christian ( $N = 36$ ), and those who attended a place of worship once a month or more often ( $N = 21$ ).<sup>44</sup> This analysis was repeated for the Single Just World Item (“I feel that people get what they deserve”). This analysis will only be mentioned where it differs dramatically from the

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<sup>43</sup> The item which said that suffering was often a blessing in disguise correlated positively with belief in God ( $r = .213, p = .054$ ), belief in an active God ( $r = .210, p = .056$ ), belief in the devil ( $r = .218, p = .049$ ), belief in an afterlife ( $r = .238, p = .030$ ), belief in heaven ( $r = .228, p = .042$ ), belief in religious miracles ( $r = .256, p = .020$ ), belief in hell ( $r = .184, p = .102$ ), frequency of attendance ( $r = .254, p = .021$ ) and importance of religion ( $r = .226, p = .050$ ). Significance levels were below .1, except belief in Hell, which was very close to .1 level of significance.

<sup>44</sup> Despite the small  $N$  there were some strong results. To confirm these associations would require more research with larger groups.

analysis using the Global Belief in a Just World Scale as the measure of just world beliefs. The items that measured the beliefs that suffering was due to bad luck and suffering was a punishment from God were excluded as only a few or no people accepted these beliefs.

Blaming the victim is one way in which people explain suffering. On observing a person suffering the observer may conclude that the suffering is in some way the sufferer's fault. As would be expected the item measuring victim blaming tendencies ("People who suffer have probably done something to deserve their suffering") was correlated with the Global Belief in a Just World Scale ( $r = .347, p = .001$ ). There was a high correlation between the victim blame item and item four of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale ("I feel that people who meet with misfortune have brought it on themselves") ( $r = .538, p = .000$ ). This is understandable as both items in effect are looking at victim blame. The victim blame item also correlated with items six ("I feel that rewards and punishments are fairly given";  $r = .393, p = .001$ ) and seven ("I basically feel that the world is a fair place";  $r = .344, p = .001$ ) of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale. It is interesting that this item did not correlate as highly with item five ("I feel that people get what they deserve";  $r = .197, p = .075$ ) of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale which is argued to be central to the just world belief concept. The size of the correlation between the Global Belief in a Just World Scale and the victim blame item was similar when the analysis was repeated for the "religious".<sup>45</sup>

There was a positive relationship between the Global Belief in a Just World Scale and the measure of the belief that through suffering people grow into better people ( $r = .229, p = .038$ ). The null hypothesis that the correlation was equal to zero would be rejected at the .05 level of significance. This relationship was stronger for those with a belief in God ( $r = .429, p = .003$ ) and those who attended a place of worship frequently ( $r = .409, p = .103$ ). For respondents, and particularly for more religious respondents, there was a tendency to believe that in a just world, where

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<sup>45</sup> By "religious" I mean those who had high belief in God, those who had a Christian upbringing and also indicated that they were currently Christian, and those who attended a place of worship once a month or more often. Three separate analyses were undertaken for these classifications.

people are rewarded and punished fairly for their actions, people also presumably learn from their suffering. This might further reinforce the fairness of a negative outcome. This result was not predicted as it was thought that since growth was a positive outcome, it may not be perceived that people are being “punished” for their actions. This eventual positive outcome is not the same as rewarding a misdeed. This belief may also function to explain any inconsistencies between experiences of the world and visions of the world as just. In a world which is just, bad outcomes which do not appear to be our fault, may actually be good if we learn from them. The belief that people grow through suffering can still be consistent with a conception of the world as just.

Similar conclusions might also be made for any relationship between the belief that suffering is a blessing in disguise and the measures of the belief in a just world. There was a small (and non-significant) correlation between these beliefs for the group as a whole ( $r = .163$ ,  $p = .142$ ), however, there were higher positive associations between the measures of the belief that suffering was a blessing in disguise and the Global Belief in a Just World Scale for the “religious”<sup>46</sup>. Correlations between the beliefs that God has a meaning for human suffering and the Global Belief in a Just World Scale were also very small for the group as a whole, except when frequent church attendees were examined in isolation ( $r = .438$ ,  $p = .089$ ). This correlation is of a moderate size. These correlations provide limited support for a positive relationship between these two variables. It was hoped that the third study, which would survey only highly religious subjects, would reveal more about the relationships between these variables for the religious.

The Global Belief in a Just World Scale was negatively related to the measure of the belief that suffering is the result of the harshness of the physical world ( $r = -.256$ ,  $p = .020$ ). The correlation between the two measures was much larger for those who attended Church frequently ( $r = -.457$ ,  $p = .065$ ). This result was expected, as the allocation of positive and negative outcomes was due to the unpredictable forces of

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<sup>46</sup> For those who believed in God:  $r = .202$ ,  $p = .184$ ; For those who currently had Christian affiliations and had had a Christian upbringing:  $r = .308$ ,  $p = .068$ ; For those who attended church once a month or more often:  $r = .284$ ,  $p = .269$ .

nature, and therefore not particularly just. As just outcomes could not be guaranteed people would be likely to reject the belief in a just world. It was interesting that the correlation was much larger for frequent church attendees. It was hoped that the third study of highly religious respondents might shed light on this result.

As the idea that those who are suffering are being punished by God for wrongdoing was so overwhelmingly rejected, it was not possible to examine a relationship between this belief and the belief in a just world. However, it was possible to examine responses to the item which stated: "God rewards us for being faithful and punishes us for being disobedient". It would be expected that this would be related to the belief in a just world. However, the results of this analysis revealed only small correlations, the directions of which varied. Again it was hoped that the third study with just highly religious participants might reveal more regarding this relationship.

### **The relationship between beliefs about suffering and the belief in a just universe**

The final question to be considered was how the measures of beliefs about suffering were related to the belief that there will be justice in the afterlife ("If people don't get what they deserve in life, they will get what they deserve after they die"). Table 6.12 shows bivariate correlations between the various items regarding suffering and the ultimate justice item. There were only small correlations between the Just Universe item and the items measuring the beliefs that suffering was due to the harshness of the physical world, that through suffering people grow, that suffering people deserve their suffering, that suffering is a blessing in disguise, and that suffering is nobody's fault.

Predictably there were larger correlations between the Just Universe item and the beliefs that God had a meaning for suffering and that God rewards the faithful and punishes the disobedient. This could be because of the mention of the word God. People who do not believe in God would reject this immediately. Most people who accept the belief in a just universe also have some other religious beliefs. It would therefore be likely, that there would be a correlation between these items. Repeating

the analysis only for those who had a high level of belief in God revealed smaller correlations for both these items. The correlation between the Just Universe item and the punish and reward item was close to zero ( $r = .015$ ,  $p = .924$ ). This suggests that most of the variance was accounted for by the relationship between a belief in a just universe and belief in God. Belief in God and belief in a just universe correlated highly ( $r = .521$ ,  $p = .000$ ). The correlation, however, between the item measuring belief in a just universe and the belief that God has a meaning in suffering was still relatively large ( $r = .301$ ,  $p = .047$ ). The null hypothesis of zero correlation would be rejected at the .05 level of significance. This result indicates that for those who believe in God, the belief that the afterlife will be just will tend to be associated with the belief that God has a meaning for suffering. The idea that God has an overall plan for people's suffering may encompass a belief that part of this plan is a restitution of unjust suffering in the afterlife.



**Table 6.12: Correlations (r) between beliefs about suffering and the belief in a just universe**

	<b>r (p)</b>
People suffer because the physical world is harsh.	-.120 (.284)
When people are suffering it is often nobody's fault.	-.045 (.686)
I think that through suffering people grow into better people.	-.102 (.363)
Although suffering at first seems negative, it is often a blessing in disguise.	.111 (.323)
People who suffer have probably done something to deserve their suffering.	.136 (.224)
When I see people suffering, I think that God must have a meaning for it, even though I may not have discovered it.	.532 (.000)
God rewards us for being faithful and punishes us for being disobedient.	.485 (.000)

The analysis was repeated for those who had had a Christian upbringing and were currently Christians. The results of this analysis did not differ dramatically apart from larger absolute correlations for the victim blame item ( $r = .259, p = .133$ ) and the idea that suffering is nobody's fault ( $r = -.301, p = .079$ ). The null hypothesis of zero correlation would be rejected for the relationship between the belief in a just universe and the belief that suffering is nobody's fault at the .1 level of significance. The null hypothesis would fail to be rejected at the .1 level of significance for the relationship between the belief in a just universe and the tendency to blame the victim. We can tentatively say that the respondents who had had more life exposure to Christianity

and believed in a just universe would also tend to believe that “someone”<sup>47</sup> is responsible for human suffering *and* that suffering people have probably done something to deserve their suffering. The rejection of the belief that suffering is nobody’s fault implies that someone is to blame for suffering. Although this is not the same as believing humans are responsible for suffering, if this item is an indicator of human responsibility then there might be some consistency between these beliefs. A blame the victim type belief may be a subset of a more general tendency to blame people for suffering. This was reinforced by the fact that the beliefs were negatively associated for those people who currently identified with one of the Christian denominations and who had had a Christian upbringing ( $r = -.325, p = .053$ ). For religious people who believe that people are in some way to blame for suffering, the opportunity for justice is possible in the afterlife. This speculation about the reason for these relationships should be qualified by the results of the third study which surveys only highly religious people.

## **Conclusion**

A major result of this survey was the problems found with the Global Belief in a Just World Scale. The two factor solution to the factor analysis necessitated the use of item five of the scale (“I feel that people get what they deserve”) as an additional and independent measure of just world beliefs. Comparison of the two measures showed a number of inconsistencies in the way they related to other variables. This placed some doubts over the conceptualisation of a just world as one in which people get what they deserve.

There appeared to be additional evidence from this study that the relationship between just world beliefs and religiosity, at least in the New Zealand University student context, is small if not negligible. This difference is not in how much the belief in a just world is accepted. More correctly, it is the difference in how much the belief in a just world is rejected. This was also reflected in the results of the analysis

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<sup>47</sup> The reversal of the item measuring belief in suffering as nobody’s fault would tend to imply suffering is somebody’s fault.

of just world beliefs and religious beliefs. In comparison to some overseas research that found relationships between belief in God and the belief in a just world, the relationships between the measures of just world beliefs and the measures of belief in God, the devil, the afterlife, heaven, hell and religious miracles were small or negligible for the group as a whole and for those who identified with one of the Christian denominations and had had some form of Christian upbringing.

Almost 70% of respondents did not accept either the belief in a just world or the belief in a just universe. The proportion who did not accept both beliefs was true of Christian respondents also, although the proportion who indicated that they believed that people will get what they deserve after they die was larger. The belief in the just universe is, predictably, related to religiosity, the belief in a just world is not. Just world beliefs and the belief in a just universe do not appear to be strongly related. It is clear that these beliefs are separate constructs. There was no evidence for a relationship between the belief in a just universe and right-wing political ideology.

The items assessing beliefs about suffering were a more important part of the purpose of this study. Most people disagreed that suffering was the result of bad luck, that suffering was nobody's fault, and that those suffering did something to deserve their fate. There were approximately equal numbers of people who believed that suffering was the result of the harsh physical world, that through suffering people grow, and that suffering is a blessing in disguise. Of the suffering items which mentioned God, most respondents who believed in God did not believe that God has a meaning for suffering, that God punishes the disobedient and rewards the faithful and that suffering is a punishment from God for sins (no one indicated agreement with this item). The argument that the belief that God punishes the sinful is the basis of Christians' acceptance of just world beliefs is not supported by this research. Very few of the respondents who believed in God indicated a direct role for God in causing suffering. The third study examined the beliefs of the highly religious about the role of God in causing suffering more closely, as well as examining the role of the devil in causing suffering.

There were moderate positive correlations between the belief that those who

suffer have done something to deserve their fate and the Global Belief in a Just World Scale. The existence of this relationship is an argument made throughout the literature on just world beliefs. There were smaller positive correlations between the measures of just world beliefs and items measuring the beliefs that through suffering people grow and that suffering is a blessing in disguise. The correlations were larger for the more religious respondents. Therefore, those Christians who accept just world beliefs will tend to also blame the victim, believe that suffering is good for growth and that it is often a blessing. In a just world where people deserve the suffering they get, there are also positive outcomes to be gained from the suffering experience. Suffering facilitates growth and is often a blessing in disguise. As predicted in chapter three, the belief that suffering is the result of the harshness of the physical world was negatively related to the belief that the world was a just place.

There were only small or negligible correlations between the belief in a just universe and most of the variables measuring suffering. This suggests that the belief in a just universe is largely independent of most of the beliefs about suffering that were examined. There were larger positive correlations between the belief in a just universe and the beliefs that God has a meaning for suffering and that God punishes the disobedient and rewards the faithful. The latter correlation was negligible when only those who believed in God were analysed. It was argued that the relationship for the group as a whole may have been the result of the high correlation between belief in God and belief in a just universe. There was still a moderate correlation between the just universe belief and the belief that God has a meaning for suffering when those who indicated belief in God were analysed separately. It was suggested that the belief that God has an overall plan for people's suffering may include restitution for suffering in the afterlife. For those people who currently identified with one of the Christian denominations and had some sort of Christian upbringing there were also small relationships between the belief in a just universe and the belief that suffering was nobody's fault and that suffering was deserved. It was suggested that these were related because the belief in a just universe allows an extension of the opportunity for restitution of people's negative behaviour unavailable for those who reject this belief.

The observation of relationships or lack of relationships between religiosity,

religious beliefs, the belief in a just world, the belief in a just universe and different beliefs about suffering for the religious and for the group as a whole has been another important step in this research process. The third study is an opportunity to validate these relationships for the highly religious in isolation. It must be emphasised that this research was undertaken in Christchurch, New Zealand, in 1999 with a group of undergraduate University students. The generalisability of these findings is limited by the geographic, temporal, and social context of this study. The main result from the last study, that any relationship between just world beliefs and religiosity is small, was reinforced by the findings of this study.

# 7. Religious Explanations for Suffering and Beliefs about Justice

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The first two studies provided a means to examine whether there appeared to be a relationship between just world beliefs and religiosity in New Zealand. The second study examined beliefs about suffering and the justness of the universe and how they relate to the belief in a just world. This study follows on from those studies by examining the beliefs of a highly religious group only. The major goals of this survey were, firstly, to examine what highly religious respondents believed about suffering, and secondly, to examine the relationship between specific religious beliefs about suffering and the beliefs that the world and the universe are just. There was also the opportunity to re-examine the relationship between the belief in a just world and the belief in a just universe.

## ***Method***

A third survey was administered on September 9, 1999 to 31 students (9 females, 22 males) on the Bible College of New Zealand Ministry Internship Course. Students on this course met one morning a week for lectures and were all involved in active service within their particular church. A variety of ages were represented: ages of those surveyed ranged from 23 to 57, the median age being 36 (the mean was 36.61). Most respondents labelled themselves as right of centre (centre-right, 14; centre, 5; centre-left, 3; left, 1; don't know, 7). All respondents came from Protestant denominations. In contrast to the previous studies, only two of the respondents were Anglicans and the largest denomination represented was the Baptist Church (twelve respondents).

Besides the highly religious nature of this group, this group was, on average, fifteen years older than the student sample. It is, therefore, likely that different events have shaped their perceptions of the world. The goal of this survey was not to explore differences between this group and the student groups. Side by side, these studies complement one another and provide a number of insights into the relationship between just world beliefs and religiosity.

Besides the measures of demographic variables, various measures of religiosity, religious identification, religious beliefs, just universe beliefs and just world beliefs repeated from the other studies, there were additional items relating to beliefs about suffering. There were also other items unrelated to this thesis that were included and these will not be discussed here.<sup>48</sup>

As the major goals of the survey concentrated on beliefs about suffering, the survey began with two open-ended questions examining beliefs about why people suffer. The first had no mention of religion or religious beliefs:

Human suffering has always been with us, why do you think that is?

The second question, which had two parts, cued religious beliefs explicitly and was designed to evoke respondents' religious beliefs about suffering. The question asked was:

Does God allow people to suffer?

If you indicated that God does allow people to suffer in question 2, then why do you think God allows people to suffer?

If you indicated that God does not allow people to suffer in question 2, then why do you think people suffer?

These questions provided, firstly, a means to verify the results of the close-ended questions administered to assess beliefs about suffering. Secondly, these questions provided a means to assess which beliefs about suffering, if any, people favoured without specifically cueing the beliefs themselves. Exploring the content of the

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<sup>48</sup> The survey is reproduced in full in Appendix 3.

responses to these questions required the classification and coding of people's responses. This will be discussed along with a description of the results.

In addition to the questions relating to suffering asked in the second survey, six additional questions were added. Again, these were derived from the literature reviewed and the original discussion in chapter three.

1. I am inclined to think that God is testing my faith in him by sending or allowing suffering into my life (adapted from Foley, 1988: 322).
2. Since everything that happens is willed by God, suffering in people's lives is the will of God. (Foley, 1988: 324)
3. The devil causes much of people's suffering.
4. It is only when I examine suffering from God's perspective that I get a glimpse of its meaning (adapted from Foley, 1988: 326).
5. My suffering doesn't seem so bad, because I know that Jesus suffered too.
6. People suffer because human nature is corrupted by sin.

The belief about suffering items and the just universe item (used in the last study) were presented in a random order.

The claim has already been made that this group could be considered highly religious. This is, of course, a testable statement that must be tested if we are to examine this group further. What criteria can be used to measure whether a person is highly religious? One initial indication of this is that the people who were administered this survey were all attending a theological course. This by itself does not indicate high religiosity as religious belief is not a prerequisite for studying a religion's holy texts and doctrines. There are several specific items in the survey administered that provide an indication of a respondent's religiosity. Firstly, a question was asked regarding the importance of religion in respondents' everyday lives. Of the 31 respondents, 25 indicated that religion was "extremely important" and 2 people indicated it was "very important". So 27 out of 31 indicated religion was important. Only 3 people indicated that religion was not important at all (one did not



specify an answer). Discussion with one of the respondents following the survey revealed a possible source of this result. It was pointed out that for some respondents the term 'religion' has connotations of mindless and "legalistic" practice of ritual, something which they do not associate with Christianity. In the minds of some Christians, the term 'religion' is associated more with non-Christian religions than Christianity. Investigating this could be an important research endeavour, as items similar to this are frequently used in research on religion.

A second indicator of high religiosity is the frequency with which the respondents attended a place of worship. All 31 respondents attended their place of worship at least once a week, while over half (17 people) said that they attended "several times a week". Finally, religious identification is an indicator of high religiosity. All 31 respondents indicated their current religion, either ticking one of the major Christian protestant denominations (Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist) or ticking other and writing Christian, Pentecostal, or some other Christian denomination. No respondent indicated no religion.

The respondents to this survey could be classed as highly religious. According to the reasoning of the majority of studies on just world beliefs and religion, then we should expect to find that this group would tend to believe that the world is a just place. Since a significant proportion of respondents also indicated that they were on the right of the political spectrum, this would tend to reinforce any belief in a just world. If this is so we would expect the group's mean score on the Global Belief in a Just World Scale to be over the scale midpoint.

## **Results**

There was little variance in the answers of respondents to the items measuring religiosity and religious beliefs. Discussion of the relationship between just world beliefs and religiosity and the relationship between specific religious beliefs and just world beliefs will be brief. The main focus of this discussion will be on the results regarding beliefs about suffering. The main results focus on the relationship between ultimate justice, beliefs about suffering and just world beliefs. As the Global Belief in

a Just World Scale was found to have two factors in the last study, analysis of this scale was necessary again before the other questions are examined.

### Assessing the Global Belief in a Just World Scale

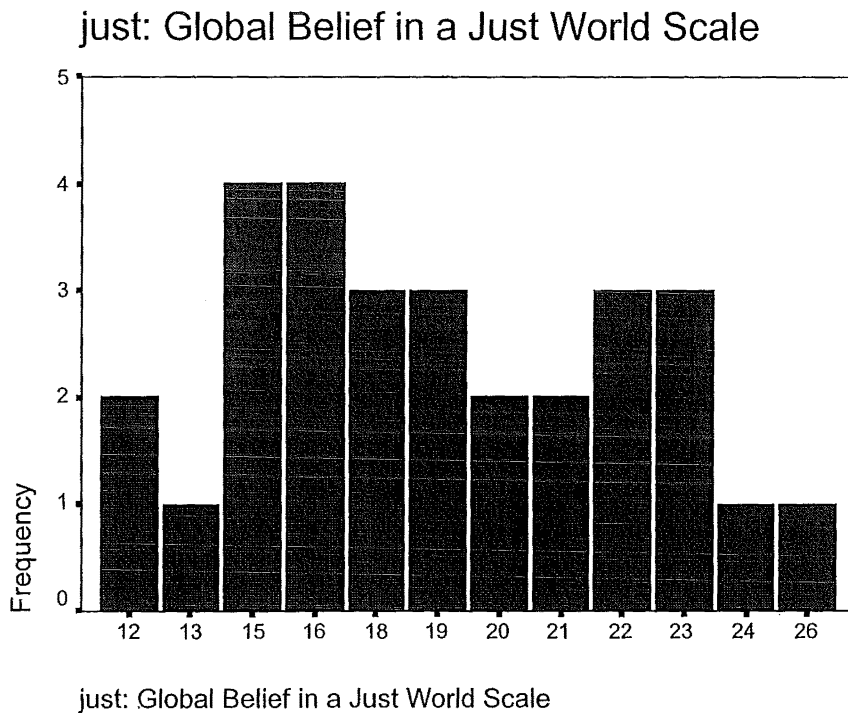
Table 7.1 reports the main results of the analysis of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale.

**Table 7.1: Analysis of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale**

<b>Scale Mean</b>	18.6
<b>Scale Median</b>	19.0
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	3.74
<b>% below scale midpoint</b>	66%
<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	0.76
<b>Factor Analysis</b>	Two factors

The mean and median for this study were again below the scale midpoint of 21. Two thirds of the highly religious group surveyed tended to disagree that the world was a just place. Figure 7.1 shows the distribution of respondents' scores on the Global Belief in a Just World Scale for this survey. Comparison of the distributions of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale for the three studies is useful at this point. The range of scores was largest for the first study and smallest for the final study. Scores on the Global Belief in a Just World Scale in this study ranged between 12 and 26. Just as there was a smaller range on responses to the Global Belief in a Just World Scale, there were also definite common responses to many of the other questions administered, including those on religious beliefs and suffering. These results support a contention that the members of this group are similar. The highly religious nature of this group may be the source of the small variation in responses to the Global Belief in a Just World Scale and other items.

Figure 7.1: Distribution of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale<sup>49</sup>



The indication was that the Global Belief in a Just World Scale had a satisfactory level of internal consistency. However, the internal consistency of the scale was improved by removing item seven (“I basically feel that the world is a fair place”). Cronbach’s Alpha with the seventh item removed increased from .76 for all seven items to .79.

A two factor solution was found to the factor analysis (principle components, varimax rotation). The idea that the Global Belief in a Just World Scale is measuring a single dimension of belief is again challenged by this result. The factor loadings were slightly different than in the second study. In the second study the fifth item (“I feel that people get what they deserve”) had loaded on a factor with the first three items, while in this survey it loaded on the other three items in the scale. The first factor contained:

Item 1: “I feel that people get what they are entitled to have”

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<sup>49</sup> The graph misses out scores with zero frequency (like 14 and 17). This is not meant to misrepresent the distribution. It is a peculiarity of the graphing package.

Item 2: “I feel that a person’s efforts are noticed and rewarded”

Item 3: “I feel that people earn the rewards and punishments they get”

The remaining items which loaded on the second factor were:

Item 4: “I feel that people who meet with misfortune have brought it on themselves”

Item 5: “I feel that people get what they deserve”.

Item 6: “I feel that rewards and punishments are fairly given”

Item 7: “I basically feel that the world is a fair place”

One clear observation is that the items separate out into factors based on the order in which they were asked. The first factor contains the first three items and the second factor contains the second four items.

The findings of the factor analysis and the reliability analysis must be tempered by the overwhelming rejection of many just world ideas in the responses of the group to the Global Belief in a Just World Scale. This may have contributed to the poor findings in the factor analysis and analysis of internal consistency as both of these analyses are based on correlational analysis of the individual items. The number of people who agreed and disagreed with each of the seven items of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale, out of the 29 who answered these questions, are shown in table 7.2 below. Of note is the fact that only one person agreed with item seven (“I basically feel that the world is a fair place”). Item seven was the item, which if removed, increased the internal consistency of the scale. Only one person out of 29 agreed with item four (“I feel that people who meet with misfortune have brought it on themselves”). Similarly only two people agreed with item six (“I feel that rewards and punishments are fairly given”). There was also very little agreement with item five of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale (“I feel that people get what they deserve”). Only five people agreed with this statement. In contrast to these results, most people did not reject the second (“I feel that a person’s efforts are noticed and rewarded”) and third (“I feel that people earn the rewards and punishments they get”) items of the

scale.

**Table 7.2: Agreement and Disagreement with items making up the Global Belief in a Just World Scale**

Global Belief in a Just World Scale Items	Out of 29 respondents	
	Agree	Disagree
1. I feel that people get what they are entitled to have.	3	12
2. I feel that a person's efforts are noticed and rewarded.	12	6
3. I feel that people earn the rewards and punishments they get.	14	6
4. I feel that people who meet with misfortune have brought it on themselves.	1	18
5. I feel that people get what they deserve.	5	13
6. I feel that rewards and punishments are fairly given.	2	15
7. I basically feel that the world is a fair place.	1	24

The rejection of many of the just world items may have been due to the questions on human suffering at the start of the questionnaire. The third survey began with an open-ended question which asked respondents to explain human suffering. This was followed by questions relating to whether God allows suffering. These questions may have influenced participant's general conception of the justness or

fairness of the world.

Whether these results are an effect of the order in which items were administered, or whether this was a characteristic of this group, is unfortunately unclear. As can be seen by the analysis of the responses to the open-ended questions on suffering and also the other items on suffering, there were large and consistent commonalities of response. There is no reason to suspect that the responses to the later questions on suffering were affected by question order. As in the case of the responses to the questions on suffering, the responses to the questions on just world beliefs may simply be the result of surveying people who share similar beliefs. This may also explain the tendency of the group members to accept rather than reject items two and three of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale. The overwhelming rejection of many of the just world items by this highly religious group is a result which tends to oppose the traditional thinking on just world beliefs and religiosity. That is, that highly religious people will tend to accept this belief more than less religious people.

One further interesting observation that came out of the assessment of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale is that in comparison to the other two studies, there was a larger proportion who agreed and a smaller proportion who disagreed with the second item of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale. Item two stated: "I feel that a person's efforts are noticed and rewarded". It is possible that this could be a result of the belief that besides people who notice and reward there is a God who notices and rewards people for their efforts.

As in the second study the Global Belief in a Just World Scale was used in conjunction with item five of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale ("I feel that people get what they deserve") to measure just world beliefs. The results of relationships between the Single Just World Item and other variables will only be mentioned where they differ dramatically from the Global Belief in a Just World Scale. Given that there was large disagreement with this item, there are problems in relying on this single measure of just world beliefs. Correlations between the two measures of just world beliefs and related constructs, which included political ideology, victim blame and the deservedness of success, were calculated. The results

of correlational analysis supported the expected direction of relationships between these measures.<sup>50</sup> While the correlations between the political ideology item and the measures of just world beliefs were negative<sup>51</sup>, where a high score on the political ideology item indicated left wing beliefs, they were not large enough for the amount of people surveyed to achieve a level of statistical significance that would be considered legitimate in most social science research (i.e.  $p = .1$  or  $.05$ ). This is because there were a large proportion of people who indicated that they did not know where their political beliefs were placed in terms of left and right labels.

### **Religiosity and just world beliefs**

As the third study concentrated on the beliefs of the highly religious, there was less variation in the items measuring frequency of attendance and importance of religion. Therefore, there is little that can be said regarding the religious and non-religious. Although there was some variation in the denominations that respondents affiliated with, there were no apparent differences in just world beliefs between the various denominations.

One important point is that most people surveyed rejected just world beliefs. Approximately two thirds of respondents were below the scale midpoint on the Global Belief in a Just World Scale. If high religiosity contributes to the belief that the world is just, then we would expect that the 'highly religious' would tend to score highly on the measures of belief in a just world. Since the people surveyed were what could be considered 'highly religious', we would expect a large proportion to be in agreement with many of the items of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale. As was described in the analysis of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale, there was very little agreement with a number of the component items of the scale. This is despite the fact that most respondents also indicated moderate right-wing beliefs, which one would expect to be associated with the belief in a just world. More thought and research is

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<sup>50</sup> There were moderate positive correlations between the Global Belief in a Just World Scale and blaming the victim ( $r = .43$ ,  $p = .02$ ) and the deservedness of success ( $r = .40$ ,  $p = .03$ ). Similar correlations were found between the Single Just World Item and these beliefs.

<sup>51</sup> Between the Global Belief in a Just World Scale and political ideology  $r = -.24$ ,  $p = .29$ . Political ideology was more weakly related to the Single Just World Item.

required to examine this suggestion.

This study provided an opportunity to examine the question of whether those highly socialised into Christianity would be more likely to believe that the world is a just place or not. A further indication that this group was highly socialised into Christianity was that very few of the group had had no Christian upbringing. Under a third of respondents had no religious upbringing. Although there were only a few, those who had had a non-religious upbringing tended to accept the just world to a greater degree or at least reject the just world to a lesser degree. The mean score on the Global Belief in a Just World Scale for those with a Christian upbringing was 17.9 and for those with no religious upbringing was 20.4. Cohen's  $d$  was 0.65, which is a 'medium' effect size. A  $t$ -test of the equality of the means revealed that at the .1 level of statistical significance the null hypothesis of no difference between the means would just fail to be rejected ( $t(27) = -1.64, p = .11$ ). However, this result is very close to the .1 level of statistical significance. Replication with a larger sample size would be necessary to confirm this tentative finding. The idea that those socialised into Christianity are likely to believe in a just world to a greater extent than those who had no religious upbringing is tentatively rejected by this result. For this group, there was some evidence that those who did not have a religious upbringing but became Christians later in life tended to believe that the world is a just place more than people who had had involvement with Christianity throughout their lives.

There are a number of possible reasons why this might be. One possibility is that a person's existing high just world beliefs had an influence on their conversion to active Christianity. Another possibility, argued in chapter two, is that those who were brought up as Christians learned, as part of their religious upbringing, themes emphasising the non-justness of the world. It is also possible that there are developmental differences in the beliefs of Christians, and that those who have not had lifelong exposure to Christian teaching may be at a different point in their development. The result of this might be that newer believers perceive the world as just. Adequate examination of these ideas would require further research and the use of a variety of measures of religious socialisation.



## Specific Religious Beliefs and Just World Beliefs

Respondents in the third survey exhibited almost unanimous belief in God, the devil, the afterlife, heaven, hell and religious miracles. As there was little variance in these beliefs it is difficult to conclude anything in particular regarding the relationship between these beliefs and the belief that the world is just.

### The belief in a just universe and the belief in a just world

Bivariate correlations were calculated between the Global Belief in a Just World Scale, the Single Just World Item and the Just Universe Item (“If people don’t get what they deserve in life, they will get what they deserve after they die”) to examine the question of whether and how just world beliefs are related to the belief in a just universe (see table 7.3). The correlations were very small and suggest that, at least for this group, these beliefs are not related.

**Table 7.3: Bivariate Correlations (r) Just World Beliefs and the belief in a Just Universe**

	Global Belief in a Just World Scale	“I feel that people get what they deserve”
<b>Just Universe Item:</b>	.038	.081
“If people don’t get what they deserve in life, they will get what they deserve after they die”	(.852)	(.689)

Table 7.4 displays the numbers who accepted the belief in a just universe and the belief in a just world.<sup>52</sup> For this group anyway, three times more people believed that the universe was just than believed the world was just. The majority of respondents to the third survey believed in a just universe and did not believe in a just world. As in the last study believers in a just world and a just universe were the

<sup>52</sup> The last chapter explains the construction of this schema.

minority. Two fifths of respondents did not believe in a just universe although over 90% “definitely” believed in an after life and heaven, and over 80% “definitely” believed in hell. There were a number of people in the third survey who believed in an afterlife and the traditional orthodox Christian version of this afterlife (heaven and hell) but rejected the notion that: “If people don’t get what they deserve in life, they will get what they deserve after they die”. This would suggest that beliefs in an afterlife, and heaven and hell do not require the belief in a just universe, that is, that people ultimately get what they deserve. This may have something to do with the Christian concept of grace which was discussed previously in this thesis. To review, the concept of grace is that salvation in the afterlife is gained not through the fallible actions of people but is given by God in spite of human sinfulness.

**Table 7.4: Belief in a Just World and Belief in a Just Universe**

		Believe in a Just Universe		
		Yes	No	Total (%)
Believe in a Just World	Yes	2 (7.4%)	3 (11.1%)	5 (18.5)
	No	14 (51.9%)	8 (29.6%)	22 (81.5)
Total (%)		16 (59.3)	11 (40.7)	27 (100)

The important point that table 7.4 shows is that, the people who believed that the universe was just did not tend to believe in a just world. The belief that the universe is just does not prop up the belief in a just world. These beliefs are separate and will have separate consequences. The belief in a just universe may have consequences for believers’ political beliefs. Political ideology was weakly related to the belief in a just universe ( $r = -.287, p = .234$ ). The N for this association was small ( $N = 19$ ) as a third of people surveyed did not place themselves on the right-left continuum. This correlation was similar in size and direction to the relationship found between political ideology and just world beliefs. This association did not reach a

legitimate level of statistical significance.

## **Beliefs about suffering**

This study was designed to give insights into the beliefs of Christians about suffering. In addition to a number of questions assessing specific beliefs about suffering, respondents were asked initially to answer open-ended questions about suffering. The first of these stated: “Human suffering has always been with us, why do you think that is?”. Respondents were then asked: “Does God allow people to suffer?”. If the response to this question was affirmative then participants were asked: “why do you think God allows people to suffer?”.

The open-ended questions were coded using thematic content analysis. Coding categories were derived from the discussion in chapter four and an initial scanning of responses. The categories used to code responses are different ways in which human suffering could be explained. The categories were:

1. Work of the devil
2. Result of the fallen state of humankind
3. The actions of people free to choose
4. Punishment of sin by God
5. Builds character, teaches lessons
6. Other religious explanations
7. Non-religious explanations
8. God uses suffering.

The eighth category, “God uses suffering”, was used only in the coding of the second of the two open-ended questions. It was included as a number of people’s responses emphasised this theme. The second open-ended question specifically cued explanations for suffering involving God (“why God allowed suffering”). Responses to this question were therefore more focused on God than in the first question.

Responses to the first open-ended question did not emphasise God as much.

Once categories were derived, responses were coded and then recoded by the same person to confirm the initial coding. It was possible for respondents to use more than one type of explanation. Over a third of respondents (11 out of 28) used two or more explanations in their answer to the first question. A similar proportion (12 out of 27) used two or more explanations in their answer to question two.

A large proportion of respondents used religious explanations to the general question on human suffering, where religion was not explicitly cued. Only two out of the twenty-eight who answered the first question used only non-religious (or ‘secular’) explanations.

**Table 7.5: Responses to open-ended questions on explanations for suffering**

<b>Response to open-ended questions</b>	<b>Human suffering has always been with us, why do you think that is?</b> (out of 28 people who answered the question)	<b>Why do you think God allows people to suffer?</b> (out of 27 people who answered the question)
Work of the devil	2	1
Result of the fallen state of humankind	23	6
The actions of people free to choose	5	12
Punishment of sin by God	0	1
Builds character, teaches lessons	3	9
Other religious explanations	2	7
Non-religious explanations	6	0
God uses suffering	NA	6

The results of these questions (shown in table 7.5) provide some clear indications concerning the beliefs of this group about explanations for suffering and why God allows suffering. For most of the respondents the pervasiveness of human suffering is not due to the work of the devil or the punishment of sin by God, which is an explanation emphasised in the literature on just world beliefs and religiosity. The overwhelming explanation for human suffering favoured by this group was that suffering is a result of the fallen state of humankind. Out of the twenty-eight people who answered this question, twenty-three people indicated that suffering was due to humankind's fallen nature. Respondents emphasised the relationship between the description of the fall in Genesis and the nature of humans. For instance:

Human suffering came about because of the sinful nature of humankind - the Genesis story of Adam and Eve describes how they rebelled against God and opened the way for evil to come into the world.

Another respondent wrote:

We live in a world that is 'fallen'. Mankind is fallen, creation itself suffers from the consequences of the 'fall' as outlined in Genesis.

A major theme of people's responses was that the outcome of the fall was a change in human nature, for instance:

At the very creation of humankind suffering was not a part of life. It was only after sin entered the world that suffering came with it. Humankind became greedy, selfish and self centred. It was not part of God's original order.

The third comment also describes another element of this explanation. That is, that human suffering was not God's intention. Another respondent, as well as emphasising the ideas already mentioned, argued that it is people, as a result of their fallenness, that ultimately cause each other to suffer.

... The world was corrupted by the 'original sin' and has lead to a state of human suffering ever since. Humanity is the cause of its own pain, the state of people's hearts creates suffering through greed, envy, lust etc. The world was made in a perfect state without injustice.

Overall, rather than emphasising God and the devil, participants emphasised the

proximal and observable cause of suffering, that is people.

The next question explicitly cued religious explanations for suffering by asking why God allowed people to suffer. Only one person rejected the notion that God allows people to suffer. This respondent's answer still emphasised the fallen state of the world:

I believe that suffering is part of living in a 'fallen' world where disease can strike anyone. Perhaps its fairer to ask why shouldn't I suffer? rather than someone else.

Why does God allow people to suffer? The most favoured explanation for why God allows suffering was that suffering was the result of the actions of people who are free to choose (12 out of 27). Respondents argued that there are consequences to people's actions. Suffering is one of these consequences. It is argued that for God to prevent suffering, it would require limits to be placed on the actions of people. These three responses of different people illustrate the explanation that suffering is the result of human freedom:

He has given us a free will and has placed laws of nature in place. This leads to consequences in nature and people's lives.

I don't believe God wants people to suffer, but he does allow it to happen because he gave mankind the freedom to choose to do right and wrong and with every decision there is a price at the end of each choice we make.

... God allows people to suffer because it is essentially a consequence of their own and humanity's choices and decisions.

Respondents also emphasised that there are benefits to suffering in building character and teaching lessons (9 out of 27). This is explained in the participants' own words as follows:

I think that he allows it because it helps us grow and become strong.

He wants us to grow and develop - fulfill the potential he has placed within us. Even Jesus was made perfect through suffering so if it's good enough for him it's good enough for me.

Sometimes because only in our suffering will we learn valuable lessons which will help us through life.

A few respondents also described other ways in which "God uses suffering" (6 out of

27). For instance:

... God can use suffering for good

One of the ways in which God uses suffering is that through suffering people come closer to God. For example:

Suffering brings us a lot closer to God.

Because unfortunately for many this is the only way they are drawn to a point at which they reach out ... Through suffering we can receive healing and strength in God.

The idea that suffering was, again, due to the fallenness of humankind was mentioned by a number of respondents (6 out of 27).

**Table 7.6: Responses of the highly religious to specific beliefs about suffering**

<b>Belief about suffering</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
When people are suffering it is usually the result of bad luck.	2	4	23
When people are suffering, it is because God is punishing them for the sins they have committed in their lives.	2	4	22
I am inclined to think that God is testing my faith in him by sending or allowing suffering into my life.	12	7	9
People suffer because the physical world is harsh.	15	8	5
Since everything that happens is willed by God, suffering in people's lives is the will of God.	2	1	25
When people are suffering it is often nobody's fault.	10	7	11
The devil causes much of people's suffering	18	7	3
When I see people suffering, I think that God must have a meaning for it, even though I may not have discovered it.	15	9	4
People who suffer have probably done something to deserve their suffering.	3	10	15
Although suffering at first seems negative, it is often a blessing in disguise.	18	8	2
I am convinced that through suffering people grow into better people.	22	6	0
People suffer because human nature is corrupted by sin.	28	0	0
My suffering doesn't seem so bad because I know that Jesus suffered too.	24	3	1
It is only when I examine suffering from God's perspective that I get a glimpse of its meaning.	23	3	2
God rewards us for being faithful and punishes us for being disobedient.	12	5	8



The responses to the open-ended questions were mostly mirrored in the answers to the items measuring beliefs about suffering. There was little variation in responses to a number of the questions on suffering (see table 7.6). All of the respondents agreed with the statement: “People suffer because human nature is corrupted by sin”. This supports the findings of the open-ended questions. This was also a major explanation for suffering when not explicitly cued in the open-ended questions. There was near unanimous expression of the fallen state of humankind as a cause of human suffering in the open-ended questions.

Most of the group (around 4 out of 5 respondents) disagreed that suffering was due to bad luck, that suffering was a punishment from God, and that suffering was God’s will. Similarly, most (4 out of 5) agreed that through suffering people grow into better people, that suffering does not seem so bad because of the suffering of Jesus, and that suffering becomes meaningful when examined from God’s perspective.

In contrast to the results of the open-ended questions, almost two thirds of respondents agreed that “The devil causes much of people’s suffering” (18 people agreed, which is 64% of those who answered this question). When the devil was not specifically cued, as in the open-ended questions, this explanation was only mentioned by a couple of people. The devil’s role in causing suffering fits with a conception of the devil as the most evil character in Christian thought. The idea that the devil causes suffering can fit with the other explanations mentioned, in that the devil may be conceived of as a more proximate cause of suffering. For example, God tests Job by allowing the devil to cause Job to suffer. The devil may also fit in with other explanations as a more distal cause. For example, the devil may be seen to manipulate humans to hurt one another. This is ‘the devil made me do it’ excuse. The devil as causer of suffering may be accommodated within the idea of the fall. That is, since humanity and the world is fallen, God has allowed the devil to cause suffering on earth. The accommodation of these other ideas with the notion that the devil causes suffering may explain why the devil was not mentioned frequently when not explicitly cued.

It is not unsurprising that Christians have cogent explanations which more often relate God and suffering than the devil and suffering. Firstly, this is because it is suffering that is a major challenge to belief in a powerful God and this may require some psychological energy to reconcile. Secondly, the idea of the devil who capriciously afflicts people with various forms of suffering would be psychologically disturbing and hence something that people might try to put out of their minds. Thirdly, in traditional Christian theology the power of the devil is seen as limited in comparison to the power of God and religious believers. A further examination of the role of the devil in causing suffering would be useful to clarify these ideas.

There was more variation in the responses to questions regarding suffering as a test of faith (43% agreed, 32% disagreed). Although most people agreed that through suffering people grow and a third of respondents mentioned this when asked why God allowed suffering, there did not seem to be a strong belief in the active agency of God in testing the faithful. Overall, explanations for suffering which emphasised the agency of God were not emphasised by respondents. People rejected the idea that suffering was a punishment from God (2 people (7%) agreed, 23 people (79%) disagreed) and that suffering was the will of God (2 people (7%) agreed, 25 people (89%) disagreed). There was, however, a belief in the idea that God has a meaning for suffering (54% agreed). The belief in the fallenness of humanity in a way removes the responsibility of God for human suffering in the believer's eyes. Sin and sinful people cause suffering, God uses suffering for a higher purpose. This pattern of responses was mirrored in the response to the first open-ended question on explaining human suffering. People did not emphasise God's role in directly causing suffering. The sinfulness of people was to blame.

There were roughly equal numbers of people who accepted and rejected the belief in suffering as nobody's fault (11 people disagreed and 10 people agreed). This item was originally intended to examine the importance to people of human causes in explaining suffering. The problem with this item was that it did not differentiate between human and supernatural causal agents. This item does give an indication of the belief that no causal agents are responsible for suffering and there seems to be

some acceptance of this position. How can humans cause suffering? A person may do something that causes them to suffer and people may do things that directly or indirectly cause other people to suffer. Although most people rejected the idea that people who suffer have probably done something to deserve their suffering, there was a role for humans in causing suffering in the thinking of respondents. The most common response to why God allows people to suffer was that people make choices and these choices often have negative consequences. This is sometimes unintentional. However, by the responses to the open-ended questions, it seemed to be believed by respondents that causing others to suffer was often intentional. A corrupt human nature encompasses greed, selfishness and other negative tendencies. These attributes contribute to a disregard for the negative effects of people's actions on other people and sometimes even malicious intent to hurt others. This was reflected in responses to the open-ended questions, for example:

Many times suffering is man induced. e.g. Turkey Earthquake. Suffering due to building codes not adhered to. Rwanda famine due to man's hatred of each other.

The overwhelming emphasis, in both the open-ended and closed-ended questions, on suffering as a result of humankind's fallen or sinful nature implies that, for these highly religious people, there is a place for human agency, whether direct or indirect.

The responses to the open-ended questions revealed only one person who favoured the explanation that suffering is a result of God punishing the sinful. This response was not cued explicitly. When cued explicitly only two out of the 28 people agreed that suffering was a punishment from God for sin. This finding is also supported by the second study. No one in the second study agreed with this item. This explanation for suffering was not one that was overtly favoured by Christians who were surveyed. There was, however, more acceptance of the belief that "God rewards us for being faithful and punishes us for being disobedient" (12 people agreed, 5 were neutral and 8 disagreed). Reasons for this, which were discussed more fully in the previous chapter, include the positive element in the item, that is that God rewards the faithful, and also the fact that in this item punishment does not have to involve

suffering.

Most people rejected the explanation that suffering was the result of bad luck (23 out of 28). There was, however, more acceptance of the idea that suffering could have natural causes (“People suffer because the physical world is harsh”) (15 out of 31). This idea fits with the strong belief in the fall. The fall in traditional Christian theology not only caused a change in humans but also a change in the nature of the created order on earth. Genesis chapter 3 reports the fall of Adam and Eve and their judgment by God. There are a number of consequences of the fall for the created order that God explained to Adam:

Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return (Genesis chapter 3, verses 17-19).

The change in the created order includes pain, toil, and death. This explanation can fit with the other explanations for suffering held by the religious.

### **Relating beliefs about suffering to beliefs about the just world**

In the group there were large commonalities in the responses to both the attitude items on beliefs about suffering and the open-ended questions regarding explanations for human suffering and why God allows people to suffer. There were also patterns of uniformity in response to the items of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale. As there was little variation in responses to these questions it is difficult to come to many conclusions about the relationship between the beliefs about suffering and the belief in a just world.

This thesis has, among other things, sought to examine the argument that there is a relationship between the belief that God is punishing people who are suffering and the belief that the world is just. The surveys conducted have not shown widespread support among Christians for the belief that God is punishing the suffering. Examination of the two respondents who indicated belief in this idea revealed that

they both scored around the midpoint of the questions assessing the belief in a just world. This qualitative assessment is not useful for the purpose of generalising about this relationship, but at least for these people, believing that God punishes people who are suffering does not mean that they believed in a just world. There was more variation in the item which stated: “God rewards us for being faithful and punishes us for being disobedient”. There was a small positive correlation between this item and the Global Belief in a Just World Scale ( $r = .279$ ,  $p = .177$ ). The null hypothesis of no correlation would fail to be rejected at the .1 level of significance. This provides only limited evidence for a connection between beliefs about God punishing and rewarding and just world beliefs. In fact, as mentioned in the previous chapter, there was a small negative correlation between this item and the Global Belief in a Just World Scale for those who believed in God in the second study. With these small and contradictory results in mind it is important to emphasise that the belief that God is punishing the suffering has been rejected by the majority in the research reported in this thesis.

The item which examined the belief that people suffer as a result of the harshness of the physical world was negatively related to the Global Belief in a Just World Scale ( $r = -.353$ ,  $p = .065$ ). This result is statistically significant at the .1 level. The more a person accepts the belief that suffering is due to nature the less they are likely to believe the world is a just place. This seems logical. A similar result to this was found in the second survey. Although this belief might not be considered a ‘religious’ belief, the consistency of this belief with the dominant belief in the fall has been discussed already.

There were some differences in responses to the Global Belief in a Just World Scale based on the explanations favoured in the open-ended questions. Those people who argued that suffering was a result of the fallenness of humankind tended to score lower on the Global Belief in a Just World Scale than those who did not mention this. The mean score on the Global Belief in a Just World Scale for those who mentioned the fall was 17.9, and the mean for those who did not mention this explanation was 21.8. Only four people did not mention this explanation. This difference was quite large: Cohen’s  $d$  for this difference was over one, that is, the difference was more than

one standard deviation in size. Given the large difference, even with a small sample size, a statistical significance test would reject the null hypothesis that the means of the groups were equal at the .1 level of significance ( $t(24) = 1.96, p = .062$ ). Chapter three discussed that there might be a possible independence between this belief and the belief in a just world as people will be considered generally 'bad' rather than specifically 'bad'. In effect, due to the fall, everyone does not deserve a just outcome. This tentative result demonstrates the possibility that rather than being independent, emphasis on the belief that humanity and creation are in a fallen state may temper the belief that the world is a just place. The widespread nature of the belief in the fall within this group may indicate its more general importance to Christian groups. Investigation of this is worth pursuing further.

There was also a difference between those who argued that the reason God allows human suffering is to teach lessons and build character and those who did not mention this. Those who mentioned these beliefs tended to score lower on the Global Belief in a Just World Scale than those who did not mention them (mentioned = 16.11, not mentioned = 19.56). This difference is quite large (Cohen's  $d = .92$ ). A t-test for the equality of means would reject the null hypothesis at the .05 level of significance ( $t(23) = 2.337, p = .028$ ). Discussion in chapter five argued that a focus on the positive elements of suffering, such as teaching lessons and building character, would be unlikely to be positively associated with the belief that the world was a just place as ultimately the victim cannot be derogated.

### **Relationship between beliefs about suffering and the belief in a just universe**

The commonalities in responses to many of the items in the survey also creates difficulty in drawing conclusions about the relationship between beliefs about suffering and the belief that the universe is just. There were strong positive correlations, however, between the just universe item and the belief that "God rewards us for being faithful and punishes us for being disobedient" ( $r = .349, p = .087$ ). The null hypothesis that this correlation was equal to zero would be rejected at the .1 level

of significance. What does this result mean exactly? Apparently for the highly religious, rather than being strongly related to just world beliefs, the belief that God rewards the faithful and punishes the disobedient is positively related to the belief in a just universe. This is an important result. Notions of God rewarding and punishing are not highly related to the belief in a just world. They are related to the belief in a just universe. Perhaps this is because the afterlife is where God is seen to have more desire and opportunity to reward and punish people. This is also in line with the belief that God allows people freedom in the way they live their lives, which was a major explanation put forward by respondents for why God allows human suffering. On earth God allows people to mostly act freely with necessary consequences of their actions for themselves and others. Some of the respondents to the open-ended questions implied the law-like nature of free-choice. It is not that God allows people a free choice in the way they live their lives. He must do this. For instance, one respondent wrote:

[God] cannot interfere with free will. It is like a law such as gravity. It [suffering] is mostly self imposed by the choices we make.

Another respondent wrote:

Our freedom is greatly upheld and protected by God. With this there is a consequence of our actions.

While it is believed that God may not be inclined to reward and punish actions in this life, in the afterlife the opportunity for judgment is available. The last book of the Bible describes the final judgment of people by God:

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as is recorded in the book (Revelation chapter 20, verse 12).

This association of the belief in God as rewarder and punisher and the belief in a just universe was confirmed by responses to the open-ended questions. For instance:

‘Good’ and ‘bad’ people are not immune to suffering since God will give justice to all on the

Last Day.

The belief that God has some meaning for suffering (“When I see people suffering, I think that God must have a meaning for it, even though I may not have discovered it”) was also positively related to the belief that the universe is a just place ( $r = .463, p = .015$ ). This result is statistically significant at the .05 level of significance. A reasonably strong positive relationship between these two measures was also found in the previous study, both for the group as a whole and for only those who indicated belief in God. The confirmation of the result found in the previous study with this different population is promising in terms of the external validity of the result. Why are these two beliefs related? One argument is that ultimately the meaning God has for suffering may only be realised in the afterlife. The afterlife may remove any necessity for understanding the meaning in suffering. Comments by Philip Yancey, a Christian writer on suffering, illustrates this:

Seventy years is a long time, and we can develop a lot of ideas about God and how indifferent He appears to suffering in seventy years. But is it reasonable to judge God and His plan for the universe by the swatch of time we spend on earth? ... Have we missed the perspective of the universe and of timelessness? ...

In the Christian scheme of things, this world and the time spent here are not all there is. Earth is a proving ground, a dot in eternity - but a very important dot, for Jesus said our destiny depends on our obedience here. Next time you want to cry out to God in anguished despair, blaming Him for a miserable world, remember: less than one-millionth of the evidence has been presented, and that one-millionth is being worked out under a rebel flag (Yancey, 1977: 176).

Rather than the afterlife being a ‘pie in the sky’ that compensates people for their suffering on earth, the belief expressed here is that the ‘pie in the sky’ is the understanding of the bigger picture in which suffering takes place.

## **Conclusion**

Since there was little variation in the items measuring religiosity and religious beliefs there was limited opportunity for an analysis of a relationship between religiosity, religious beliefs and just world beliefs. Given that the group surveyed



could be considered highly religious, the prediction based on previous research would be that this group would tend to accept the belief in a just world. Although there was no opportunity for comparison with a similar non-religious group, there was little overall agreement with the measures of just world beliefs. Most people rejected just world beliefs. The overwhelming lack of acceptance of some of the items may have been one factor contributing to the less than satisfactory results of the factor analysis and reliability analysis of the Global Belief in a Just World Scale.

The high religiosity of this group provided an opportunity to compare those who had had a Christian upbringing and those who had had no religious upbringing. The results of this analysis, while limited by the small number of people who had no religious upbringing, suggested that there was a difference, but that those who had had no religious upbringing tended to more readily accept the belief in a just world. There is more than one possible reason to explain this, but this result is consistent with the idea presented earlier in this thesis that there are various themes that can be learned through a person's religious socialisation regarding the justness of the world. It would be useful for future research on just world beliefs and religion to integrate a variety of measures of religious socialisation.

For this group there was little evidence of a relationship between just world beliefs and just universe beliefs. In comparison to the other studies where most people rejected both the belief in a just universe and the belief in a just world, the largest group of people in this survey believed in a just universe but rejected the notion of a just world (14 out of 31). Despite almost unanimous acceptance of beliefs in an afterlife and heaven and hell, not everyone agreed that "If people don't get what they deserve in life, they will get what they deserve after they die". It was argued that it is possible that the Christian doctrine of grace to some extent removes the deserving criterion from reward in the afterlife. The belief is that actually all people are sinners, and that no one deserves salvation. Salvation is a gift from God.

A clear picture of this group's beliefs about suffering emerges from the combination of closed- and open-ended measures in this study. There was unanimous agreement among those who responded to the item on suffering being a result of the

sinful nature of people. People suffer because humankind and creation are dominated by sin. This affects the way in which humans relate to one another and it seems to affect the way in which people perceive justness in the world. This was also the most commonly cited explanation for the pervasiveness of human suffering. Closely related to this is the emphasis on the relationship between human freedom and the necessary consequences of human freedom. Suffering is the intentional and unintentional result of the sinful actions of people. Overall, human agency is emphasised in relation to explaining suffering without relying heavily on victim blaming beliefs. For most of the respondents, humans generally are to blame for suffering, suffering is not simply the fault of the specific sufferer. There was some evidence for a relationship between the belief in the fallenness of humankind and the belief in a just world.

The role of God in causing suffering is, from the evidence presented here, predominantly seen by respondents as indirect. Rather than causing suffering directly, God allows suffering as a result of the sinful actions of people in a fallen world. Suffering was not seen as God's will. However, God was seen to have a meaning for suffering. Responses to the open-ended questions emphasised that God uses suffering, God teaches people and builds their character through suffering. There was less agreement, however, with the idea that God actively tests people through suffering. People also tended to emphasise the role of God in relation to human suffering when God was cued. In the first open-ended question, God was not emphasised directly in relation to human suffering.

The idea that God had a meaning for suffering was positively and strongly correlated with the belief in a just universe. It was suggested that it was possible that the meaning for suffering was something that would be realised in the just afterlife to come.

There was widespread rejection of the idea that when people are suffering it is because God is punishing them for sin. This is consistent with previous research presented in this thesis. No one in the second study accepted this belief. In this study there were only two people who agreed with this item. Only one person indicated they believed this when not explicitly cued. There was more support for the idea that God

rewards people for being faithful and punishes them for disobedience. It is unclear whether the increased agreement to this item was due to the inclusion of the idea that God rewards. This belief was related to the belief that people would get what they deserve in the afterlife. It was argued that it is in the afterlife that God is seen to be more active in rewarding and punishing people.

There was large belief in the devil among respondents. While the devil was rarely mentioned in the responses to the open-ended questions on explaining suffering, it was believed that the devil causes much of people's suffering. It was argued that while the devil is seen to have a role in causing suffering, this role is seen as subordinate to other explanations.

Luck as an explanation for suffering was rejected, but nature was seen by some people as an important explanation. The belief in suffering being a result of the harsh physical world was strongly and negatively related to just world beliefs. If nature is to blame for suffering then people are not to blame. It was argued that the belief in nature as a cause of suffering could be related to the belief in the importance of the fall, which was seen to have effects both on humans and on creation as a whole.

As to the generalisability of these results, this requires an understanding of the composition of the group. Firstly, this was not an undergraduate student sample. Analysis of this group revealed a high degree of religiosity (frequency of attendance and importance of religion in everyday life), an almost unanimous acceptance of beliefs central to traditional Christian theology (belief in God, the devil, the afterlife, heaven, hell and religious miracles), and identification with mostly non-mainline Protestant denominations. These results support the contention that this group can be considered 'highly religious'. It is likely that this group would be comparable to other similar groups in New Zealand. Of course further research is required to confirm this. How comparable this group is to other members of their churches and to similar highly religious groups overseas is another question.

The main point to be made is that, as has been argued previously, the nature of religiosity is what is important rather than merely the degree of religiosity in ascertaining the relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs. This analysis

can be seen as a case study to illustrate the beliefs of the highly religious about suffering. It also provides insights into the importance of explanations for suffering that are argued to be related to just world beliefs. The focus of the research into the beliefs about suffering here has largely been exploratory. There are definite benefits to further research both in terms of the robust detection of phenomena and the expansion of the external validity of the results described here.

## 8. Blaming the sinner?

### Conclusions

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One reason people care about justice is that injustice frequently involves suffering. The perception that a person is suffering undeservedly is a major challenge to our view of the world as a just place. In the Bible, this is the position that Job finds himself in. Job could not understand the bad things that had happened to him: he had lost his children, his possessions, and his health had deteriorated. Job claims his innocence and asks for God to reveal the sin he is being punished for:

If I have sinned, what have I done to you, O watcher of men? Why have you made me your target? Have I become a burden to you? Why do you not pardon my offenses and forgive my sins? (Job 7 v 20-21).

How many wrongs and sins have I committed? Show me my offence and my sin. Why do you hide your face and consider me your enemy? (Job 13 v 23-24).

Let God weigh me in honest scales and he will know that I am innocent (Job 31 v 6).

Job's vision of a world guided by the hand of a just God is challenged by his suffering:

Though I cry 'I've been wronged!' I get no response; though I call for help, there is no justice (Job 19 v 7).

Job reviews other cases of injustice he observes in the world and wonders why God is

not punishing those wrongdoers (chapter 24). Job, a devoutly religious man, has great difficulty in reconciling his own innocent suffering with a worldview that encompasses a just God and a just world.

Job's three friends, who were by all indications also devout religious believers, are initially sympathetic to Job's condition.<sup>53</sup> They are, however, shocked by the words of Job. Their perception of the justness of the world and of a just God is not challenged by the suffering they observed. One of Job's friends states:

Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed? As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it. At the breath of God they are destroyed; at the blast of his anger they perish (Job 4 v 7-9).

Their message to Job is that he ought to repent and, that if he does repent, God will restore him to health and prosperity. Job's friends blame Job, who they perceive as a sinner, for his own suffering.

### ***Beliefs about Suffering***

Would religious believers respond to Job's suffering in the same way today? Would they say that God is punishing a sinner and blame the sinner for his or her misfortune? The evidence reported in this thesis suggests that many would not. There was an overwhelming rejection of the belief that, "When people are suffering, it is because God is punishing them for the sins they have committed in their lives". One of the research questions this thesis set out to examine was, how common was the belief that God punishes the bad? The answer is that this is not common at all. Only two people, out of the 31 Bible College students surveyed accepted this belief when it was explicitly cued. Only one person in this group mentioned this belief uncued in an open-ended question. Only three people in this group agreed with the more general belief that people who are suffering have done something to deserve their suffering. Out of a class of eighty-four undergraduates, not one person expressed agreement with

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<sup>53</sup> "When they saw him [Job] from a distance, they could hardly recognise him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was" (Job 2 v 12-13).

the belief that suffering people are being punished by God for sin. These results firmly indicate that this belief is not an important explanation used by Christian people to explain suffering.<sup>54</sup>

How might highly religious people today explain the suffering of Job? The question regarding the extent to which various beliefs about suffering were held by religious believers was one of the questions examined in this thesis. There were some clear indications of what religious people believe about suffering. The major explanation for suffering expressed by the highly religious people surveyed pertained to the consequences of human sinfulness. There was near unanimous expression of this in both open-ended and closed-ended questions. In general, human suffering may be just because, as a result of 'original sin' and their state of sinfulness, people *in general* deserve the consequences of their sin. However, viewing human suffering as the result of sin does not imply the belief that God will punish specific sinners for their sinful actions, on earth anyway. For the highly religious group surveyed, sinners were not to blame for their suffering. To them, the condition of sin, which affects people and creation, is to blame for people's suffering in general.

Other beliefs held by the highly religious people who were surveyed were consistent with the explanation that suffering was the result of the fallenness of humankind. The third study builds a picture of a complex set of beliefs regarding suffering. Suffering, according to the highly religious people surveyed, is a consequence of humans exercising their free will. This was the major reason given for why God allows suffering: God allows people to exercise freewill. When sinful people exercise their freewill, one side-effect is suffering. Not only is humankind believed to be fallen, but also all of the created order. This is supported by the account of the fall in Genesis, where the consequences of Adam and Eve's sin are described to impact the earth as well as each other. Half of the highly religious group surveyed believed that suffering was a result of the harshness of the physical world.

For the majority of religious and non-religious people surveyed, suffering was

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<sup>54</sup> There was more support for the belief that God rewards the faithful and punishes the disobedient. There was probably more agreement with this item because it included the idea that God rewards and that punishment does not have to involve suffering.

not a result of bad luck. There seemed to be emphasis on people in general causing each other to suffer. God appears to be seen as not having much direct responsibility for suffering. Most people did not agree that God tests people or that He punishes them directly for sin. Suffering was not believed to be God's will. However, half of the people in the religious group believed that God had some meaning for suffering. Sinful people are seen in general to cause suffering, while God is seen by most religious people to use suffering for higher purposes. The majority of the highly religious group believed that suffering was often a blessing in disguise, and that through suffering people grow. While these were not explicitly linked to God in the attitude questions, they were linked in the responses to the open-ended questions in relation to why God allows suffering.

The devil, on the other hand, does have a direct role in causing suffering. When cued for explicitly, the devil was seen, by most of the highly religious group, to cause much human suffering. This is consistent with Hebblethwaite's (1976) point, quoted in chapter three, that the earth, as a result of the fall, is seen as under Satanic influence. However, uncued, the devil was only mentioned twice by people as a reason why humans suffer. This reinforces the view that suffering is predominantly thought of as a human problem. Humans are most often observed causing suffering, while the actions of the devil, for most people anyway, are only implied.

Another research question concerning beliefs about human suffering involved differences between the religious and non-religious in their beliefs about suffering. How do religious believers differ from non-believers in what they believe about suffering? Besides the obvious differences in acceptance of religious beliefs about suffering, there did not appear to be major differences in the degree of acceptance of non-religious explanations for suffering. This is also consistent with the finding that there were only very small differences in just world beliefs based on religiosity. Religious explanations for suffering may serve to reinforce more general beliefs about suffering, such as the belief in a just world. More research with larger groups would be required to adequately examine this question.

Related to this is one further research question: How do more general religious



beliefs relate to beliefs about suffering? Quite predictably, beliefs about suffering involving God were moderately or strongly related to religious beliefs. “Non-religious” beliefs about suffering were not.

### ***Relating Just World Beliefs and Religiosity***

The replication of past research on just world beliefs and religiosity was a research concern of this thesis. In contrast to some arguments in the literature and some past research, there was not evidence for anything more than a small positive relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs. A number of themes in the Christian religion may contribute to the perception that the world is not just. This was reflected by the results of the three surveys. In comparison to some of the early studies on just world beliefs and religiosity (Rubin and Peplau, 1973; Sorrentino and Hardy, 1974), there was little evidence for a strong positive relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs. There was some evidence of a small positive relationship between just world beliefs and religiosity. There are indications that there are differences based on the denomination people identify with.

A measure of religious upbringing was included to examine the previously unchallenged assumption that those who were socialised into religious belief will tend to accept the belief in a just world to a greater extent than those who were not. Among the university students surveyed, there was only a very slight tendency for those with a religious upbringing to more readily accept the belief in a just world than those who had not had a religious upbringing. However, those who had not had a religious upbringing, in the study of highly religious people, were more likely to accept the belief in a just world than those who had had a Christian upbringing. This contradicts common arguments in the literature. It provides a further indication that the nature of the relationship between just world beliefs and religiosity is not as simple as hypothesised by Rubin and Peplau (1975) and others.

How are religious beliefs related to beliefs about the justness of the world? Part of this question related to the relationship between beliefs about suffering and the belief in a just world. The results of this research question indicate that more general

religious beliefs (belief in God, an active God, the devil, life after death, heaven, hell and religious miracles) were not substantively related to the belief in a just world.

Overall, the differences between the religious and non-religious were in the degree to which they rejected the belief in a just world. Most people surveyed, either religious or non-religious, rejected the belief that the world is a just place. While the indication was that there was only a very small positive relationship, if any, between religiosity and just world beliefs, and between general religious beliefs and just world beliefs, there were indications that some specific beliefs concerning suffering were more strongly related to the belief in a just world.

### ***Beliefs about Human Suffering and the Belief in a Just World***

The research question of how beliefs about human suffering relate to just world beliefs was examined in both the second and third studies. The most robust finding was the moderate negative correlation in both studies between the belief that people suffer because the physical is harsh, and the belief that the world is just. This makes sense because, even if you are a good person, good outcomes can not be guaranteed by harsh natural forces. While this is not specifically a religious belief, this belief is consistent with the idea that the fall impacts not only people but creation in general. Religious beliefs about the fall may reinforce this relationship further.

The relationship between the belief in a just world and the belief that those suffering are being punished by God could not be confirmed, as basically no one believed this. Since nobody held this belief, any relationship between this belief and the belief in a just world is not important in contributing to religious people's beliefs about the justness of the world. The third study did provide very limited evidence for a small positive relationship between the belief that God punishes the disobedient and rewards the faithful and the belief in a just world. However, this was not supported by the findings of the second study, where the correlations were negligible. If these beliefs are related to the belief in a just world, the importance of this result is moderated by the lack of acceptance of these beliefs.

There was some evidence for a relationship between emphasis on the fall as an

explanation for suffering and the belief in a just world. The few who did not emphasise this belief were more likely to score highly on the Global Belief in a Just World Scale. While emphasis is not the same as belief, people's tendency to provide this as an explanation when not explicitly cued, indicates that it is a belief that is important to their belief system. This provides tentative support for an interpretation of the belief that suffering is a result of the fall as enforcing a conception that the world is not just. If this belief is a widespread belief among the larger religious population, then it may have a powerful influence on the way in which religious people in general perceive justness in the world.

There appears to be disagreement between results from the second and third studies. The second study revealed small correlations between the idea that suffering is a blessing in disguise and just world beliefs, and between the idea that people grow through suffering and just world beliefs. Where suffering is seen as a source of growth or as a possible blessing, the end result of suffering may be viewed as less than unjust. Another interpretation of this is that in a just world people learn from their punishments. In the third study, those people who emphasised the idea that God allows suffering to teach lessons and build character tended to score lower on the Global Belief in a Just World Scale. This may have something to do with the differences between the highly religious and university undergraduate samples.

### ***The Belief in a Just Universe***

There were three main questions concerning the belief that the universe is just. Firstly, how is the belief in a just universe related to religiosity? The seemingly obvious answer is that religiosity and just universe beliefs are highly related. Highly religious people tended to accept the belief in a just universe (that people will get what they deserve when they die) more readily than the belief that the world is just. However, not everyone who believes in a life after death accepts the concept of a just universe.

The second question was, how is the belief in a just universe related to just world beliefs? This was important because, as was argued in the second chapter, these

beliefs are conceptually different although they are often equated in the literature. Findings indicate that the idea that justice will come in the afterlife is not a foundation for a relationship between just world beliefs and religiosity. There were only small or negligible positive correlations between these beliefs in the second and third studies. There appears to be a large degree of independence between the belief in a just world and the belief in a just universe. Belief in a just universe is not a subset of just world beliefs. In the third study, in fact, there was a strong tendency to believe in a just universe more than a just world. The argument that the just universe might replace the need to believe in a just world for the highly religious was supported by this result. Both just world beliefs and just universe beliefs have a role in coping with suffering.

The third question relating to the belief in a just universe was, how are explanations for human suffering related to the belief in a just universe? This was examined in the second and third studies. In both studies, there were moderate correlations between the belief that God has a meaning for suffering and the belief in a just universe. One explanation for this is that a just afterlife may hold the potential for an understanding of God's reasons for suffering. God's plan may involve restitution in the afterlife. In the third study, the belief in a just universe was also moderately related to the belief that God rewards and punishes. This belief is more important to the belief that the universe is just than the belief that the world is just. The afterlife appears to be the domain in which it is perceived that God enforces justice. It appears that for some religious believers, the earth is a place where God leaves people to the consequences of sin and sinful actions and, consequently, their own attempts at justice.

## ***Contributions***

This research is different from past research in a number of ways. Firstly, this is, to my knowledge, the first treatment of just world beliefs and religiosity in the New Zealand context. It therefore, along with Furnham (1992) and Hirshberg and Ford (1998) contributes to further understanding of the nature of just world beliefs in New Zealand.

While some of the themes developed here have been touched on in the

literature on just world beliefs and religiosity, this is also, to my knowledge, the first examination of just world beliefs and religiosity which emphasises the importance of religious explanations for suffering. Just world beliefs may be viewed as a reaction to suffering, and religions have their own ways of dealing with the problem of suffering. Therefore, an emphasis on the aspects of religiosity that most closely relate to just world beliefs is important. Explanations for suffering are perhaps the aspect of religion which is most closely related to just world beliefs. Specific beliefs about suffering, such as the belief that suffering is the result of sin, or that those suffering are being punished by God, are closely related to people's perceptions of the justness of the world.

This approach is generally useful in relation to the study of the relationship between religiosity and other social and political constructs. Relationships are posited between religiosity and other social and political constructs based on particular themes that are perceived to exist within a religion. Simply measuring the relationship between religiosity and these other constructs is insufficient to confirm that the specific religious belief is important in determining the relationship between religiosity and other social and political constructs, like the belief in a just world. If a relationship is found, there may be other reasons for this besides a specific religious belief. If a small or negligible relationship is found, it may be that those religious believers who do accept this particular belief are in the minority. It is therefore important to verify whether religious people actually believe in these particular religious ideas that are often the foundation or justification of a hypothesised phenomena. This approach is important for an accurate examination of the theoretical reasons for a relationship. It still does not imply the nature of causality. It is also important to point out that specific religious beliefs may change without changing the fact that a person is in some way religious. While measures of religious commitment, religious identification, and general religious beliefs are very important, the examination of specific religious beliefs is integral to an adequate understanding of many social and political phenomena.

This survey also gave considerable insight into the beliefs of a highly religious group of Christians about suffering. This is a contribution to the under-researched area

of religious beliefs about suffering. The literature in this field has focused on descriptions of various explanations for suffering (Hebblethwaite, 1976; Foley, 1988), and relating these to religious belief (Furnham and Brown, 1992). This study has revealed the extent to which these various beliefs are held by one religious group, and how they might be important in relation to an important belief that has been found to influence thought and behaviour: the belief in a just world.

The literature on just world beliefs and religiosity has by and large focused on the reasons why just world beliefs and religiosity should be positively related (for example Rubin and Peplau, 1975; Wagner and Hunsberger, 1984). There have been a number of contributions that indicate otherwise. The research conducted for this thesis contributes to the idea (advanced, in particular, by the Zweigenhaft et. al. (1985) study) that there are a number of themes religious people may believe in about the justness of the world. There are themes within the Christian religion that might emphasise the justness of the world, including a number of stories from the Old Testament. There are also a number of themes, such as the idea that the earth and people generally are subject to the consequences of sin, that reinforce the notion that this world is not a just place. A recognition of this fact goes some way to explaining the small relationships or differences found in a number of studies (for example Wagner and Hunsberger, 1984; Benson, 1992; Crozier and Joseph, 1997), and the negative relationships found in Zweigenhaft et. al (1985). The Zweigenhaft et. al. study has probably provided the most insightful account of the relationship between just world beliefs and religiosity to date. The important conclusion of their study was that *how* people are religious is the key element in relation to their beliefs about the justness of the world. This thesis contributes to a greater understanding of the important aspects of how people are religious in relation to their beliefs in a just world.

Like the belief in a just world, the belief that the world is not just is an important belief. This thesis has revealed some factors in religion that might influence the perception of the world as *not* just. The first chapter described the political nature of a belief in a just world. While the political implications of the belief in a just world were referred to at the outset of this thesis, there are also political implications

concerning the belief in a world that is not just. As already mentioned, the belief in a just world creates a tendency to *not* help the victim of suffering if helping appears too difficult. Instead, the victim will be blamed. Presumably, derogation of victims will be less if the world is not perceived as just. However, it may follow from the belief that the world is not just that, as people do not get what they deserve, there is no hope for changing systems and structures that cause suffering. Hence, there is no point in attempting to pursue change. The case of the Quakers, as discussed by Zweigenhaft et al. (1985), appears to contradict this. Perhaps faith that this world can be changed or models of what the world should be like, which are derived from religious beliefs, are what is important. These models of what the world should be like may provide insights into how religious believers will act and react in the world they live in. This deserves future attention.

Despite what I argue to be evidence to the contrary in the literature, there is an acceptance of the idea that religiosity and just world beliefs are positively related in the wider literature on just world beliefs. Unsatisfactory accounts of the relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs in the wider literature obscure some previously unexamined assumptions about this relationship. These include the assumption that the Christian religion promotes the belief in a just world, and the assumption that religious socialisation may be examined by asking people about their current religious beliefs and practices. This thesis has examined both of these assumptions, revealing that there are beliefs promoted by the various sources of religious authority that challenge the justness of the world. Furthering an understanding of religious socialisation as a process is important to fully understanding the way in which these beliefs are integrated into people's belief systems. The development of better measures of religious socialisation and the conducting of longitudinal research are necessary to investigate this area further.

The research presented here also provides a more accurate description of the nature of the relationship between the belief that the universe is just and the belief in a just world. There has been a tendency in the literature in the past to overstate the case for a positive relationship between just world beliefs and religiosity, based on the explanation that religious people believe in ultimate justice. This thesis has

distinguished between two types of ultimate justice: ultimate justice on earth and ultimate justice in the afterlife. These beliefs are different and not necessarily related. This is supported by the findings, which suggest that these are distinct and possibly independent beliefs. On the basis of the evidence presented here, believing that the universe is just is not likely to be highly related to the belief in justice on earth. These beliefs have different causes and different results. Religiosity relates more strongly to the belief in the justness of the universe than the belief in the justness of the world. While the belief that the world is just relates to the way in which victims in society are perceived and treated, the belief in a just universe will have other important effects. Scholars would do well to distinguish between these beliefs in their characterisations of the relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs.

### ***Some Qualifications and Discussion on the Generalisability of Findings***

There are a number of qualifications that may be made regarding the research presented here. These qualifications also create some questions that require additional research to evaluate. Firstly, this thesis has concentrated on explaining suffering in general, not suffering in specific contexts. It is probable that certain explanations for suffering are more likely to dominate in specific contexts. However, this qualification also holds for the nature of just world beliefs. As discussed in chapter two, there may be a number of “worlds”, for instance personal, interpersonal, and socio-political, in which people may perceive justice or a lack of justice (Furnham and Proctor, 1989). The belief in a just world has most often been conceptualised in a general way. Therefore, I would argue it is also important to understand the way people think about explanations for suffering in general terms. An understanding of context-specific beliefs about suffering will be useful to integrate into future research on this topic.

A second qualification concerns the differentiation between the way a person perceives their own suffering and the way they perceive the suffering of others. It is likely that people think about their own suffering and others’ suffering in different ways. The example of Job illustrates this. Job knew he had done nothing bad to



deserve his suffering, but Job's friends did not know this. Closely related to this are perceptions about the suffering of in-groups and out-groups: in this case religious and not religious groups. It is likely that religious believers will tend to perceive the suffering of other religious believers in different terms than non-believers. The questions of how people perceive their own and others' suffering, and how they differ in their explanations concerning their in-group and out-group, deserve further attention.

One further qualification is that since this research was conducted in a specific geographic, cultural, and temporal context, there are limits regarding the generalisability of the results. This criticism also holds for other research done on just world beliefs and religiosity. This research found only small or negligible relationships between just world beliefs and religiosity in studies involving students in Christchurch, New Zealand in 1999. Other research in North American Universities in the early 1970s found positive associations between religiosity and just world beliefs. Possible explanations for these different results include cultural differences and time. It is possible that there are differences between the way religiosity is expressed in North America and New Zealand. It is also possible that there have been generational changes in the themes that religion expresses regarding the justness of the world. One thing that does link most of the studies undertaken on just world beliefs and religiosity, including the first two studies reported here, is that most of the participants were undergraduate students. Questions remain unanswered as to how generalisable these results are in the wider New Zealand population. The findings are, however, important in countering some unchallenged assumptions in the literature on just world beliefs. God was not perceived to be punishing the suffering, and this was not related to the belief in a just world. Similarly, the belief in a just afterlife as grounds for the perception of a just world was unfounded.

The recognition of culture and the social nature of human existence in an evaluation of the conceptions of the justness of the world held by religious believers is useful and necessary in the discussion of the relationship between religiosity and just world beliefs. It is possible and plausible that where dominant cultural explanations relating to the problems of human existence or strategies for coping with these

problems, such as the belief in a just world, are able to be sanctioned consistently by the other sources of doctrinal authority (such as religious text, tradition and experience), they will be. When validated by these doctrinal authorities, the tendency may be for the believer to be the most devout believer in a just world. I would argue that this is a process that is generalisable to many widely held beliefs or networks of beliefs (including Protestant work ethic beliefs and patriotic belief systems). Where religious beliefs do support dominant cultural beliefs, the religious person will tend to be the strongest proponent of those beliefs.

It is doubtful, however, that just world beliefs can be considered a dominant cultural belief in New Zealand. The research of Furnham (1992) on just world beliefs in different cultures illustrates this. New Zealanders did not tend to believe in just world beliefs as much as people in most of the other countries surveyed. Furnham's (1985) argument, that the perception that the world is a just place may be more widely endorsed and accepted in societies in which they are functional, has relevance here. At least until recently, New Zealand has been a nation where a myth of equality has had wide currency. Explanations for inequality, including the belief in a just world, may not have been as necessary in New Zealand as in other cultures where there was the perception that inequalities were greater. The initial theorising and research regarding just world beliefs predominantly took place in North America, where inequities are more noticeable. Perhaps the belief in a just world will become more dominant in New Zealand as the effects of the neoliberal policies of the late 1980s and 1990s become more noticeable.

The idea that religious beliefs may reinforce widely held cultural beliefs does not exclude the possibility of alternative explanations of and coping measures for the problem of suffering by religious believers. Thus, the strength of religiosity is not sufficient to indicate the strength of just world beliefs. The relationship is instead determined by the nature of what is believed, and how these religious beliefs interact with dominantly held cultural beliefs about the existence of suffering.

A lack of difference between the religious and non-religious, in terms of the comparative strength of their just world beliefs, may be a result of the Christian

foundations of Western (and in this particular study, New Zealand) society<sup>55</sup>. Notions of justice and deserving in Western society are based on the legacy of centuries of some form of Christian belief. Although Western society is now relatively secular, Christian notions of justice and morality are enshrined not only in religious belief, but also in dominant cultural wisdom, and are communicated and reinforced by many secular institutions. A lack of difference may be due to the religious basis of many widely shared and practised beliefs and norms in a specific culture.<sup>56</sup> This point warrants further future consideration.<sup>57</sup> Different religious traditions do come to dominate a particular cultural context. Regardless of this, specific beliefs within a religion will tend to relate to just world beliefs more than others.

It is not claimed here that the results of the study concerning the group surveyed on the Bible College of New Zealand course is generalisable to all highly religious people. More research will be required to examine the generalisability of the results. This thesis has emphasised the complexity of the relationship between just world beliefs and religiosity. Part of this complexity is derived from recognition that the nature of religiosity is important in determining any relationship. People vary in the strength of their religious commitment, with regard to the religion or denomination they identify with, and concerning the specific religious beliefs that they hold. Just as no two people are exactly alike, no two religious people are exactly alike. The study of the highly religious group illustrates this. Although their religious beliefs and the strength of their commitment to religion were similar in many ways, there were differences in the degree to which the people in the highly religious group accepted other beliefs, such as the belief in a just universe, the belief that God tests people, and the belief in a just world.

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<sup>55</sup> This is reflected in the number of respondents who indicated that they had had some sort of Christian background. In the first study, 65% of respondents indicated they had had a religious upbringing.

<sup>56</sup> Other agents of socialisation that impact more of society, such as the educational system and media, may promote beliefs about suffering too. These more general agents may influence religious and non-religious in similar ways and, therefore, lessen any specific impact of religion.

<sup>57</sup> Dolinski (1991), examining the just world beliefs of Polish people, also refers to this, stating: "it is possible that what is important in the formation of the belief in a just world is less the declared religious denomination than the common pattern of thinking and behavior produced by the prevailing religion" (49).

The fact that no two religious people are the same is not meant, however, to overstate the importance of individual differences. Shared beliefs (and ‘disbeliefs’) are powerful. The more people share beliefs, the more potential effect that these beliefs can have on society as a whole. The highly religious group in this particular study share many beliefs. One important belief that they share is that suffering is a result of human sinfulness. This potentially has an influence on the way in which they perceive justness in the world. A shared vision of the world as ruled by sin is likely to direct the behaviour of those who share this belief in similar ways.

### ***More Questions***

Are the arguments in this thesis relevant to other religions? The answer to this question is both yes and no. The specific findings relating to the relationships between just world beliefs, religiosity and explanations are constrained to a Christian religious context. The more general point, that specific religious beliefs are what is most relevant in explaining the nature of the relationship between just world beliefs and religiosity, is generalisable. One of the most significant gaps in the literature on just world beliefs and religiosity pertains to the neglect of discussion and research on religions besides Christianity (and to some extent Judaism). The concept of karma, in the eastern religions, is one belief that appears to hold some consistency with just world beliefs. Again, the distinction made between ultimate justice in this life and in the next is important to emphasise in considering other religions. This thesis has not aimed to fill gaps in the literature concerning other religions at all. Examination of the relationship between other forms of religiosity and just world beliefs is an important research task.

Given the overwhelmingly common beliefs about suffering revealed by the third survey, an important future step would be to examine the effects of their variance on just world beliefs. To do this would require a comparison of those religious believers who strongly hold those beliefs with those who do not hold those beliefs. This will provide insights into how they relate to the way in which justice is perceived in the world.

## ***Final Thoughts***

This chapter has concentrated on the implications for academic research on just world beliefs and religiosity. What are the lessons that people with religious beliefs can take from this thesis? The primary lesson is that the way in which suffering is explained has implications for those who are suffering. Trying to explain a person's suffering is often motivated by concern for the sufferer. Job's friends showed great initial sympathy for Job's terrible condition. Their concern changed, however, with their sure knowledge that Job must have sinned. This obviously did nothing for Job's predicament and definitely did nothing to strengthen their friendship. Just as "blaming the sinner" has implications for the way in which someone with religious beliefs perceives people who are suffering, so do other explanations for suffering. Does a perception that suffering is a fact of human existence remove the responsibility of people to help the sufferer, prevent suffering, or change the structures that cause or allow suffering? Answering these questions is a challenge to the religious believer and the social scientist alike.

The account of Job gives insights into the way in which people understand their own suffering and the way in which they perceive justness in the world. It also provides an illustration of the ways in which non-suffering observers react to explain suffering in light of their own perceptions of the justness of the world. Job's condition was ultimately restored to one better than before (apart from his dead children). The biblical account of Job does not describe whether his vision of the world as just or his perception of people's suffering changed significantly. His perception that God was just appears to be ultimately reinforced. However, it is likely that in order to integrate his own experience of suffering, Job's beliefs about suffering became more complex. By delving into these complexities, particularly in the beliefs of religious people about suffering, this thesis has provided insights into how religious people perceive justice in the world.

## APPENDIX 1 : FIRST STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE

### POVERTY AND JUSTICE QUESTIONNAIRE<sup>58</sup>

#### PART I: INFORMATION ABOUT YOURSELF

Please answer the following questions about yourself. You are not required to answer any question you do not wish to answer, and there will be no way of identifying you with your answers.

1. Are you a New Zealand citizen? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_
2. Are you female \_\_\_ or male \_\_\_ ?
3. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Which of the following best describes your general ethnic origin?

Maori \_\_\_\_\_

Pacific Islander \_\_\_\_\_

Asian \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>58</sup> Students were instructed that the questionnaire was anonymous, and that they would not be identified as a participant without their consent. They were instructed that they could withdraw their participation at any time, including withdrawing any information they had provided. By completing the questionnaire they were told that it was understood that they had consented to participate in the project, and that they consented to publication of the results of the project with the understanding that their anonymity would be preserved.

European \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

5. Which of the following most accurately describes you?

An extreme rightist \_\_\_\_\_

A moderate rightist \_\_\_\_\_

Middle of the road \_\_\_\_\_

A moderate leftist \_\_\_\_\_

An extreme leftist \_\_\_\_\_

Don't know \_\_\_\_\_

6. Which of the following parties do you most support?

ACT \_\_\_\_\_

National \_\_\_\_\_

Labour \_\_\_\_\_

Alliance \_\_\_\_\_

Don't know \_\_\_\_\_

7. How would you describe your current financial situation?

Desperately poor \_\_\_\_\_

Poor \_\_\_\_\_

Somewhat poor \_\_\_\_\_

Below Middle Income \_\_\_\_\_

Middle Income \_\_\_\_\_

Above Middle Income \_\_\_\_\_  
Somewhat Rich \_\_\_\_\_  
Rich \_\_\_\_\_  
Extremely Rich \_\_\_\_\_  
Don't know \_\_\_\_\_



8. How would you describe the general financial situation of your family when you were a child?

- Desperately poor \_\_\_\_\_
- Poor \_\_\_\_\_
- Somewhat poor \_\_\_\_\_
- Below Middle Income \_\_\_\_\_
- Middle Income \_\_\_\_\_
- Above Middle Income \_\_\_\_\_
- Somewhat Rich \_\_\_\_\_
- Rich \_\_\_\_\_
- Extremely Rich \_\_\_\_\_
- Don't know \_\_\_\_\_

9. How many years have you spent at university (don't include this year)? \_\_\_\_\_

10. How often do you give of your time or money to a charity that helps poor people in *New Zealand*?

- |                              |   |                            |   |
|------------------------------|---|----------------------------|---|
| Never .....                  | 1 | 2-3 times a month .....    | 5 |
| Less than twice a year ..... | 2 | Every week .....           | 6 |
| Several times a year .....   | 3 | Several times a week ..... | 7 |
| About once a month .....     | 4 | Can't say/don't know ..... | 8 |

11. How often do you give of your time or money to a charity that helps poor people *overseas*?

Never .....	1	2-3 times a month .....	5
Less than twice a year .....	2	Every week .....	6
Several times a year .....	3	Several times a week .....	7
About once a month .....	4	Can't say/don't know .....	8

12. If you were forced to choose, would you rather give money to:

- \_\_\_\_\_ a charity that helps poor people overseas, or  
 \_\_\_\_\_ a charity that helps poor people in New Zealand

13. What religion, if any, were you raised in?

Anglican (Church of England) .....	1	Baptist .....	5
Presbyterian .....	2	Other (Please Specify)_____	6
Catholic .....	3	No religion .....	7
Methodist .....	4	Don't know .....	8

14. What is your current religion?

Anglican (Church of England) .....	1	Baptist .....	5
Presbyterian .....	2	Other (Please Specify)_____	6
Catholic .....	3	No religion .....	7
Methodist .....	4	Don't know .....	8

15. How often do you attend a religious service?

- |                              |   |                            |   |
|------------------------------|---|----------------------------|---|
| Never .....                  | 1 | 2-3 times a month .....    | 5 |
| Less than twice a year ..... | 2 | Every week .....           | 6 |
| Several times a year .....   | 3 | Several times a week ..... | 7 |
| About once a month .....     | 4 | Can't say/don't know ..... | 8 |

16. To what extent do you feel religion is important in your everyday life?

- |                      |       |
|----------------------|-------|
| Extremely important  | _____ |
| Very important       | _____ |
| Somewhat important   | _____ |
| Not important at all | _____ |
| Don't know           | _____ |

## PART II: POVERTY IN NEW ZEALAND

Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statements by circling the appropriate number on the scales below:

1= Strongly Disagree

2= Disagree

3= Neutral

4= Agree

5= Strongly Agree

1. In New Zealand, poor people suffer a great deal.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                                 !.....!.....!.....!.....!

2. Poverty in New Zealand is a very serious problem.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                                 !.....!.....!.....!.....!

3. People are poor in New Zealand because they aren't as capable as everyone else.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                                 !.....!.....!.....!.....!

4. People are poor in New Zealand because the economic and social system is unfair.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                                 !.....!.....!.....!.....!

5. People are poor in New Zealand because there just isn't enough to go around.

Strongly Disagree    1        2        3        4        5 Strongly Agree

!.....!.....!.....!.....!

6. People are poor in New Zealand because of the political leaders in government.

Strongly Disagree    1        2        3        4        5 Strongly Agree

!.....!.....!.....!.....!

7. Poor people in New Zealand really can't help it if they are poor.

Strongly Disagree    1        2        3        4        5 Strongly Agree

!.....!.....!.....!.....!

8. People are poor in New Zealand because they don't get enough help.

Strongly Disagree    1        2        3        4        5 Strongly Agree

!.....!.....!.....!.....!

9. If the poor in New Zealand would make more of an effort, they would be much better off.

Strongly Disagree    1        2        3        4        5 Strongly Agree

!.....!.....!.....!.....!

10. People are poor in New Zealand because they have too many children.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                          !.....!.....!.....!.....!

11. People are poor in New Zealand because they are unlucky.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                          !.....!.....!.....!.....!

12. If the poor in New Zealand would work harder, they wouldn't be so poor.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                          !.....!.....!.....!.....!

13. The poor in New Zealand really need our help.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                          !.....!.....!.....!.....!

14. No matter what is done, there will always be poverty in New Zealand.

Strongly Disagree    1        2        3        4        5 Strongly Agree  
                          !.....!.....!.....!.....!

15. We each have a responsibility to help the poor in New Zealand as much as we can.

Strongly Disagree    1        2        3        4        5 Strongly Agree  
                          !.....!.....!.....!.....!

16. More money should be spent to help the poor in New Zealand.

Strongly Disagree    1        2        3        4        5 Strongly Agree  
                          !.....!.....!.....!.....!

17. The poor in New Zealand need to be taught how to help themselves.

Strongly Disagree    1        2        3        4        5 Strongly Agree  
                          !.....!.....!.....!.....!

18. Better birth control would go a long way in solving the poverty problem in New Zealand.

Strongly Disagree    1        2        3        4        5 Strongly Agree  
                          !.....!.....!.....!.....!

19. Revolutionary change is needed to end poverty in New Zealand.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                                 !.....!.....!.....!.....!

20. More modern technology is what's needed to eliminate poverty in New Zealand.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                                 !.....!.....!.....!.....!

21. Handouts aren't an effective way to help the poor in New Zealand.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                                 !.....!.....!.....!.....!

22. Ultimately it's the responsibility of the poor in New Zealand to make their lives better.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                                 !.....!.....!.....!.....!



23. Poor people in New Zealand rarely benefit from the money that is given to charities that are supposed to help them.

Strongly Disagree    1        2        3        4        5 Strongly Agree

!.....!.....!.....!.....!

24. Some people blame poverty in New Zealand on the way the society is run, while others blame it on the poor themselves. Where do you stand on this?

\_\_\_ I blame the poor, not society.

\_\_\_ I blame both, but the poor more.

\_\_\_ I blame both equally.

\_\_\_ I blame both, but society more.

\_\_\_ I blame society, not the poor.

\_\_\_ I don't blame either society or the poor.

### **PART III: EXPLAINING POVERTY IN NEW ZEALAND**

The following is a list of reasons some people use to explain why there are poor people **in New Zealand**. Please indicate how important you think each reason is in each case.

1. Failure of society to provide good schools for poor children.

\_\_\_ Very Important    \_\_\_ Somewhat Important    \_\_\_ Not Important    \_\_\_ Unsure

2. Being taken advantage of by rich people.

\_\_\_ Very Important    \_\_\_ Somewhat Important    \_\_\_ Not Important    \_\_\_ Unsure

3. Lack of effort by the poor themselves.

\_\_\_ Very Important    \_\_\_ Somewhat Important    \_\_\_ Not Important    \_\_\_ Unsure

4. Loose morals and drunkenness.

\_\_\_ Very Important    \_\_\_ Somewhat Important    \_\_\_ Not Important    \_\_\_ Unsure

5. Prejudice and discrimination against minorities.

\_\_\_ Very Important    \_\_\_ Somewhat Important    \_\_\_ Not Important    \_\_\_ Unsure

6. Failure of private industry to provide enough jobs.

\_\_\_ Very Important    \_\_\_ Somewhat Important    \_\_\_ Not Important    \_\_\_ Unsure

7. Low wages in some businesses and industries.

\_\_\_ Very Important    \_\_\_ Somewhat Important    \_\_\_ Not Important    \_\_\_ Unsure

8. Lack of thrift and proper money management by poor people.

\_\_\_ Very Important    \_\_\_ Somewhat Important    \_\_\_ Not Important    \_\_\_ Unsure

**PART IV: DO YOU AGREE?**

Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statements by circling the appropriate number on the scales below:

1= Strongly Disagree

2= Disagree

3= Neutral

4= Agree

5= Strongly Agree

1. We should make sure that all new Zealanders are leading comfortable lives before we devote ourselves to feeding people who are starving overseas.

Strongly Disagree    1    2    3    4    5 Strongly Agree

!.....!.....!.....!.....!

2. It is important that there be the opportunity for people to rise and fall in society.

Strongly Disagree    1    2    3    4    5 Strongly Agree

!.....!.....!.....!.....!

3. People should have about the same standard of living.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree

!.....!.....!.....!.....!

4. Sometimes I don't seem to have very much control over what happens to me.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree

!.....!.....!.....!.....!

5. I can do anything if I make an effort.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree

!.....!.....!.....!.....!

6. There is a God who takes an active part in the affairs of people.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree

!.....!.....!.....!.....!

7. I feel that people get what they are entitled to have.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                                 !.....!.....!.....!.....!

8. I feel that a person's efforts are noticed and rewarded.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                                 !.....!.....!.....!.....!

9. I feel that people earn the rewards and punishments they get.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                                 !.....!.....!.....!.....!

10. I feel that people who meet with misfortune have brought it on themselves.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                                 !.....!.....!.....!.....!

11. I feel that people get what they deserve.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                                 !.....!.....!.....!.....!

12. I feel that rewards and punishments are fairly given.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                                 !.....!.....!.....!.....!

13. I basically feel that the world is a fair place.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                                 !.....!.....!.....!.....!

14. People who work deserve success.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                                 !.....!.....!.....!.....!

15. Hard work is not fulfilling in itself.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                                 !.....!.....!.....!.....!

16. Nothing is impossible if you work hard enough.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree

!.....!.....!.....!.....!

17. Hard work is not a key to success.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree

!.....!.....!.....!.....!

18. You should be the best at what you do.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree

!.....!.....!.....!.....!

19. If you work hard you will succeed.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree

!.....!.....!.....!.....!

20. By working hard an individual can overcome most obstacles that life presents and make his or her own way in the world.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree

!.....!.....!.....!.....!

21. When people are suffering it is usually the result of bad luck.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree

!.....!.....!.....!.....!



22. When people are suffering it is usually nobody's fault.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                          !.....!.....!.....!.....!

23. Suffering is designed to test faith in God.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                          !.....!.....!.....!.....!

24. Some People who suffer are being punished by God.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                          !.....!.....!.....!.....!

25. Suffering is part of God's plan.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                          !.....!.....!.....!.....!

**PART V: POVERTY IN AFRICA**

Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statements by circling the appropriate number on the scales below:

1= Strongly Disagree

2= Disagree

3= Neutral

4= Agree

5= Strongly Agree

1. In Africa, poor people suffer a great deal.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                          !.....!.....!.....!.....!

2. Poverty in Africa is a very serious problem.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                          !.....!.....!.....!.....!

3. People are poor in Africa because they aren't as capable as everyone else.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                          !.....!.....!.....!.....!

4. People are poor in Africa because the economic and social system is unfair.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                                 !.....!.....!.....!.....!

5. People are poor in Africa because there just isn't enough to go around.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                                 !.....!.....!.....!.....!

6. People are poor in Africa because the political leaders don't care about them.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                                 !.....!.....!.....!.....!

7. Poor people in Africa really can't help it if they are poor.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                                 !.....!.....!.....!.....!

8. People are poor in Africa because they don't get enough help.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
!.....!.....!.....!.....!

9. If the poor in Africa would make more of an effort, they would be much better off.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
!.....!.....!.....!.....!

10. People are poor in Africa because they have too many children.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
!.....!.....!.....!.....!

11. People are poor in Africa because they are unlucky.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
!.....!.....!.....!.....!

12. If the poor in Africa would work harder, they wouldn't be so poor.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
!.....!.....!.....!.....!

13. The poor in Africa really need our help.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                          !.....!.....!.....!.....!

14. No matter what is done, there will always be poverty in Africa.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                          !.....!.....!.....!.....!

15. We each have a responsibility to help the poor in Africa as much as we can.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                          !.....!.....!.....!.....!

16. More money should be spent to help the poor in Africa.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                          !.....!.....!.....!.....!

17. The poor in Africa need to be taught how to help themselves.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree

!.....!.....!.....!.....!

18. Better birth control would go a long way in solving the poverty problem in Africa.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                                 !.....!.....!.....!.....!

19. Revolutionary change is needed to end poverty in Africa.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                                 !.....!.....!.....!.....!

20. More modern technology is what's needed to eliminate poverty in Africa.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                                 !.....!.....!.....!.....!

21. Handouts aren't an effective way to help the poor in Africa.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                                 !.....!.....!.....!.....!

22. Ultimately it's the responsibility of the poor in Africa to make their lives better.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree  
                                 !.....!.....!.....!.....!

23. Poor people in Africa rarely benefit from the money that is given to charities that are supposed to help them.

Strongly Disagree    1       2       3       4       5 Strongly Agree

!.....!.....!.....!.....!

24. Some people blame poverty in Africa on the way societies are run, while others blame it on the poor themselves. Where do you stand on this?

\_\_\_ I blame the poor, not society.

\_\_\_ I blame both, but the poor more.

\_\_\_ I blame both equally.

\_\_\_ I blame both, but society more.

\_\_\_ I blame society, not the poor.

\_\_\_ I don't blame either society or the poor.



## PART VI: EXPLAINING POVERTY IN AFRICA

The following is a list of reasons some people use to explain why there are poor people **in Africa**. Please indicate how important you think each reason is in each case.

1. Failure of society to provide good schools for poor children.

\_\_\_ Very Important    \_\_\_ Somewhat Important    \_\_\_ Not Important    \_\_\_ Unsure

2. Being taken advantage of by rich people.

\_\_\_ Very Important    \_\_\_ Somewhat Important    \_\_\_ Not Important    \_\_\_ Unsure

3. Lack of effort by the poor themselves.

\_\_\_ Very Important    \_\_\_ Somewhat Important    \_\_\_ Not Important    \_\_\_ Unsure

4. Loose morals and drunkenness.

\_\_\_ Very Important    \_\_\_ Somewhat Important    \_\_\_ Not Important    \_\_\_ Unsure

5. Prejudice and discrimination against minorities.

\_\_\_ Very Important    \_\_\_ Somewhat Important    \_\_\_ Not Important    \_\_\_ Unsure

6. Failure of private industry to provide enough jobs.

\_\_\_Very Important    \_\_\_Somewhat Important    \_\_\_Not Important    \_\_\_Unsure

7. Low wages in some businesses and industries.

\_\_\_Very Important    \_\_\_Somewhat Important    \_\_\_Not Important    \_\_\_Unsure

8. Lack of thrift and proper money management by poor people.

\_\_\_Very Important    \_\_\_Somewhat Important    \_\_\_Not Important    \_\_\_Unsure

THAT'S ALL!

PLEASE CLOSE YOUR QUESTIONNAIRE AND SET IT ASIDE.

FEEL FREE TO QUIETLY OCCUPY YOURSELF (READ A BOOK, A COURSE  
OUTLINE, OR WHATEVER) FOR A FEW MINUTES, WHILE YOUR  
CLASSMATES FINISH THEIR QUESTIONNAIRES.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP!

## APPENDIX 2 : SECOND STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE

### QUESTIONNAIRE<sup>59</sup>

#### INFORMATION ABOUT YOURSELF

Please answer the following questions about yourself. You are not required to answer any question you do not wish to answer, and there will be no way of identifying you with your answers.

1. Are you female \_\_\_ or male \_\_\_ ?
  
2. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. How many years have you spent at university (don't include this year)? \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Please circle the number next to the category which most closely describes your political beliefs?

- Far right ..... 1
- Right ..... 2
- Centre-right ..... 3
- Centre ..... 4
- Centre-left ..... 5
- Left ..... 6
- Far left ..... 7

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<sup>59</sup> See footnote in Appendix 1 for instructions and information given to respondents.

Don't know ..... 8

5. Which party do you most support?

ACT .....	1
Alliance .....	2
Labour .....	3
National .....	4
Other .....	6
Don't know .....	8

6. How would you describe your current financial situation?

Desperately poor .....	1
Poor .....	2
Somewhat poor .....	3
Below Middle Income ...	4
Middle Income .....	5
Above Middle Income ...	6
Somewhat Rich .....	7
Rich .....	8
Extremely Rich .....	9
Don't know .....	88

7. How would you describe the general financial situation of your family when you were a child?

Desperately poor .....	1
Poor .....	2
Somewhat poor .....	3
Below Middle Income ...	4
Middle Income .....	5
Above Middle Income ...	6
Somewhat Rich .....	7
Rich .....	8
Extremely Rich .....	9
Don't know .....	88

8. How often do you give of your time or money to a charity that helps poor people?

Never .....	1
Less than once a year .....	2
Several times a year .....	3
About once a month .....	4
2-3 times a month .....	5
Every week .....	6
Can't say/don't know .....	8

9. What religion, if any, were you raised in? (If there was more than one please indicate the one that was most influential in your life).

Anglican (Church of England) .....	1
Presbyterian .....	2
Catholic .....	3
Methodist .....	4
Baptist .....	5
Other (Please Specify)_____	6
No religion .....	7
Don't know .....	8

10. What is your current religion?

Anglican (Church of England) .....	1
Presbyterian .....	2
Catholic .....	3
Methodist .....	4
Baptist .....	5
Other (Please Specify)_____	6
No religion .....	7
Don't know .....	8

11. How often do you attend a religious service?

- Never ..... 1
- Less than twice a year ..... 2
- Several times a year ..... 3
- About once a month ..... 4
- 2-3 times a month ..... 5
- Every week ..... 6
- Several times a week ..... 7
- Can't say/don't know ..... 8

12. To what extent do you feel religion is important in your everyday life?

- Extremely important ..... 1
- Very important ..... 2
- Somewhat important ..... 3
- Not important at all ..... 4
- Don't know ..... 8

13. Do you believe in the existence of ... [circle the appropriate number]

God                      Definitely | | | | | | |                      Definitely not  
   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

A life after death                      Definitely | | | | | | |                      Definitely not  
   1   2   3   4   5   6   7



The Devil **Definitely** | | | | | | | **Definitely not**  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Heaven **Definitely** | | | | | | | **Definitely not**  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Hell **Definitely** | | | | | | | **Definitely not**  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Religious miracles **Definitely** | | | | | | | **Definitely not**  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

13. Below are two sets of contrasting beliefs. Circle the number that corresponds most closely with your belief.

Good things always Good things never  
 happen to good people. | | | | | | | | | happen to good people.  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Bad things always Bad things never  
 happen to bad people. | | | | | | | | | happen to bad people.  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

14. Do you think that in general ...

- People tend to get what they deserve ..... 1
- People sometimes get what they deserve and sometimes don't get what they deserve ..... 2
- People don't tend to get what they deserve ..... 3



**DO YOU AGREE?**

Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statements by circling the appropriate number on the scales below:

1= Strongly Disagree

2= Disagree

3= Neutral

4= Agree

5= Strongly Agree

J1. I feel that people get what they are entitled to have.

Strongly Disagree 1      2      3      4      5 Strongly Agree

|-----|-----|-----|-----|

J2. I feel that a person's efforts are noticed and rewarded.

Strongly Disagree 1      2      3      4      5 Strongly Agree

|-----|-----|-----|-----|

J3. I feel that people earn the rewards and punishments they get.

Strongly Disagree 1      2      3      4      5 Strongly Agree

|-----|-----|-----|-----|

J4. I feel that people who meet with misfortune have brought it on themselves.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

\_\_\_\_\_

J5. I feel that people get what they deserve.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

\_\_\_\_\_

J6. I feel that rewards and punishments are fairly given.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

\_\_\_\_\_

J7. I basically feel that the world is a fair place.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

\_\_\_\_\_

J8. People who work deserve success.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

\_\_\_\_\_


J9. If you work hard you will succeed.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

\_\_\_\_\_


P1. Government should redistribute income from those who are better off to those who are less well off.

Strongly Disagree 1      2      3      4      5 Strongly Agree



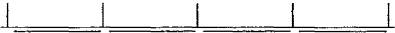
P2. Big businesses benefit their owners at the expense of their workers.

Strongly Disagree 1      2      3      4      5 Strongly Agree




P3. The legal system treats rich and poor people the same.

Strongly Disagree 1      2      3      4      5 Strongly Agree



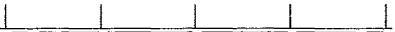
P4. Ordinary working people do not get their fair share of the nation's wealth.

Strongly Disagree 1      2      3      4      5 Strongly Agree



P5. Business managers try to improve the conditions of employees if they can.

Strongly Disagree 1      2      3      4      5 Strongly Agree



S1. When people are suffering it is usually the result of bad luck.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

\_\_\_\_\_

S2. I think that through suffering people grow into better people.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

\_\_\_\_\_

S3. When people are suffering it is often nobody's fault.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

\_\_\_\_\_

S4. After suffering has happened to me, I think, "It could have been worse".

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

\_\_\_\_\_

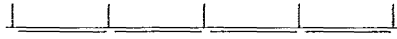
S5. When I look at how others suffer, I realise my suffering is not so bad.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

\_\_\_\_\_

S6. People who suffer have probably done something to deserve their suffering.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree



S7. Although suffering at first seems negative, it is often a blessing in disguise.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

S8. People suffer because the physical world is harsh.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

S9. If people don't get what they deserve in life, they will get what they deserve after they die.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

S10. People who are successful have done something to deserve their success.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

R1. There is a God who takes an active part in the affairs of people.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

R2. When people are suffering, it is because God is punishing them for the sins they



have committed in their lives.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

\_\_\_\_\_

R3. When I see people suffering, I think that God must have a meaning for it, even though I may not have discovered it.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

\_\_\_\_\_

R4. After death God will reward the just and punish the wicked.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

\_\_\_\_\_

R5. God rewards us for being faithful and punishes us for being disobedient.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

\_\_\_\_\_

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION**

## APPENDIX 3 : THIRD STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE

### QUESTIONNAIRE<sup>60</sup>

*Below are several questions, try and use the space provided to answer them. If you need more space, use the back of the sheet and label which question you are answering.*

1. Human suffering has always been with us, why do you think that is?

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<sup>60</sup> See footnote in Appendix 1 for instructions and information given to respondents.



2. Does God allow people to suffer?

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3. If you indicated that God does allow people to suffer in question 2, then why do you think God allows people to suffer?

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4. If you indicated that God does not allow people to suffer in question 2, then why do you think people suffer?

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## INFORMATION ABOUT YOURSELF

Please answer the following questions about yourself. You are not required to answer any question you do not wish to answer, and there will be no way of identifying you with your answers.

1. Are you female \_\_\_ or male \_\_\_ ?

2. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Please circle the number next to the category which most closely describes your political beliefs?

- Far right ..... 1
- Right ..... 2
- Centre-right ..... 3
- Centre ..... 4
- Centre-left ..... 5
- Left ..... 6
- Far left ..... 7
- Don't know ..... 8

4. Which party do you most support?

- ACT ..... 1
- Alliance ..... 2
- Labour ..... 3

National .....	4
Other .....	6
Don't know .....	8

5. How would you describe your current financial situation?

Desperately poor .....	1
Poor .....	2
Somewhat poor .....	3
Below Middle Income ...	4
Middle Income .....	5
Above Middle Income ...	6
Somewhat Rich .....	7
Rich .....	8
Extremely Rich .....	9
Don't know .....	88

6. How would you describe the general financial situation of your family when you were a child?

- Desperately poor ..... 1
- Poor ..... 2
- Somewhat poor ..... 3
- Below Middle Income ... 4
- Middle Income ..... 5
- Above Middle Income ... 6
- Somewhat Rich ..... 7
- Rich ..... 8
- Extremely Rich ..... 9
- Don't know ..... 88

7. How often do you give of your time or money to a charity that helps poor people?

- Never ..... 1
- Less than once a year ..... 2
- Several times a year ..... 3
- About once a month ..... 4
- 2-3 times a month ..... 5
- Every week ..... 6
- Can't say/don't know ..... 8

8. What religion, if any, were you raised in? (If there was more than one please indicate the one that was most influential in your life).



Anglican (Church of England) .....	1
Presbyterian .....	2
Catholic .....	3
Methodist .....	4
Baptist .....	5
Other (Please Specify) _____	6
No religion .....	7
Don't know .....	8

9. What is your current religion?

Anglican (Church of England) .....	1
Presbyterian .....	2
Catholic .....	3
Methodist .....	4
Baptist .....	5
Other (Please Specify) _____	6
No religion .....	7
Don't know .....	8

10. How often do you attend a religious service?

- Never ..... 1
- Less than twice a year ..... 2
- Several times a year ..... 3
- About once a month ..... 4
- 2-3 times a month ..... 5
- Every week ..... 6
- Several times a week ..... 7
- Can't say/don't know ..... 8

11. To what extent do you feel religion is important in your everyday life?

- Extremely important ..... 1
- Very important ..... 2
- Somewhat important ..... 3
- Not important at all ..... 4
- Don't know ..... 8

13. Do you believe in the existence of ... [circle the appropriate number]

God                    **Definitely** | \_ | \_ | \_ | \_ | \_ | **Definitely not**  
                             1   2   3   4   5   6   7

A life after death    **Definitely** | \_ | \_ | \_ | \_ | \_ | **Definitely not**  
                             1   2   3   4   5   6   7

The Devil **Definitely** | | | | | | **Definitely not**  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Heaven **Definitely** | | | | | | **Definitely not**  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Hell **Definitely** | | | | | | **Definitely not**  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Religious miracles **Definitely** | | | | | | **Definitely not**  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

14. Below are two sets of contrasting beliefs. Circle the number that corresponds most closely with your belief.

Good things always Good things never  
 happen to good people. | | | | | | | | | | happen to good people.  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Bad things always Bad things never  
 happen to bad people. | | | | | | | | | | happen to bad people.  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

15. Do you think that in general ...

- People tend to get what they deserve ..... 1
- People sometimes get what they deserve and sometimes don't get what they deserve ..... 2
- People don't tend to get what they deserve ..... 3



## DO YOU AGREE?

Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statements by circling the appropriate number on the scales below:

1= Strongly Disagree

2= Disagree

3= Neutral

4= Agree

5= Strongly Agree

0. There is a God who takes an active part in the affairs of people?

Strongly Disagree 1      2      3      4      5 Strongly Agree  
|-----|-----|-----|-----|

1. I feel that people get what they are entitled to have.

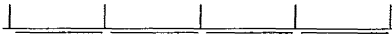
Strongly Disagree 1      2      3      4      5 Strongly Agree  
|-----|-----|-----|-----|

2. I feel that a person's efforts are noticed and rewarded.

Strongly Disagree 1      2      3      4      5 Strongly Agree  
|-----|-----|-----|-----|


3. I feel that people earn the rewards and punishments they get.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree




4. I feel that people who meet with misfortune have brought it on themselves.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree



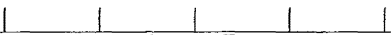
5. I feel that people get what they deserve.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree




6. I feel that rewards and punishments are fairly given.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree



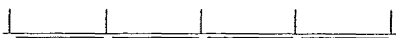
7. I basically feel that the world is a fair place.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree




8. When people are suffering it is usually the result of bad luck.

Strongly Disagree 1      2      3      4      5 Strongly Agree



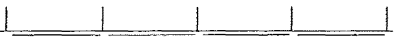
9. When people are suffering, it is because God is punishing them for the sins they have committed in their lives.

Strongly Disagree 1      2      3      4      5 Strongly Agree



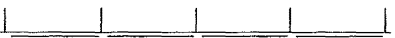
10. I am inclined to think that God is testing my faith in him by sending or allowing suffering into my life.

Strongly Disagree 1      2      3      4      5 Strongly Agree




11. People suffer because the physical world is harsh.

Strongly Disagree 1      2      3      4      5 Strongly Agree



12. Since everything that happens is willed by God, suffering in people's lives is the will of God.

Strongly Disagree 1      2      3      4      5 Strongly Agree



13. When people are suffering it is often nobody's fault.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

|\_\_\_\_\_||\_\_\_\_\_||\_\_\_\_\_||\_\_\_\_\_||

14. The devil causes much of people's suffering.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

|\_\_\_\_\_||\_\_\_\_\_||\_\_\_\_\_||\_\_\_\_\_||

15. After suffering has happened to me, I think, "It could have been worse".

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

|\_\_\_\_\_||\_\_\_\_\_||\_\_\_\_\_||\_\_\_\_\_||

16. When I see people suffering, I think that God must have a meaning for it, even though I may not have discovered it.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

|\_\_\_\_\_||\_\_\_\_\_||\_\_\_\_\_||\_\_\_\_\_||

17. When I look at how others suffer, I realise my suffering is not so bad.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

|\_\_\_\_\_||\_\_\_\_\_||\_\_\_\_\_||\_\_\_\_\_||



18. It is only when I examine suffering from God's perspective that I get a glimpse of its meaning.

Strongly Disagree 1      2      3      4      5 Strongly Agree

|-----|-----|-----|-----|

19. People who suffer have probably done something to deserve their suffering.

Strongly Disagree 1      2      3      4      5 Strongly Agree

|-----|-----|-----|-----|

20. Although suffering at first seems negative, it is often a blessing in disguise.

Strongly Disagree 1      2      3      4      5 Strongly Agree

|-----|-----|-----|-----|

21. My suffering doesn't seem so bad, because I know that Jesus suffered too.

Strongly Disagree 1      2      3      4      5 Strongly Agree

|-----|-----|-----|-----|

22. People who are successful have done something to deserve their success.

Strongly Disagree 1      2      3      4      5 Strongly Agree

|-----|-----|-----|-----|

23. I am convinced that through suffering people grow into better people.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

\_\_\_\_\_

24. People suffer because human nature is corrupted by sin.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

\_\_\_\_\_

25. God rewards us for being faithful and punishes us for being disobedient.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

\_\_\_\_\_

26. After death God will reward the just and punish the wicked.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

\_\_\_\_\_

27. If people don't get what they deserve in life, they will get what they deserve after they die.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

\_\_\_\_\_

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION**

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