The aim of this study was to clarify the association between religion and psychological well-being after controlling for individual differences in personality. Data were provided by a sample of 507 undergraduate students in Canada who completed three instruments: the short-form Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity (Francis, Lewis, Philipchalk, Lester, & Brown, 1995), the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larson, & Griffin, 1985) and the five-factor model short form of the NEO-PI (Costa & McCrae, 1989). These data demonstrated that, when personality was taken into account, an apparent (small but significant) association between religion and psychological well-being vanished. These findings are interpreted against the background of previous studies employing the same index of religiosity alongside various measures of psychological well-being.

The relationship between religion and aspects of psychological well-being (including subjective well-being, happiness, satisfaction with life and quality of life) has been a lively field of psychological enquiry since the beginning of the twentieth century. James (1902) and Pratt (1920) proposed early psychological links between religion and happiness. In more recent years a considerable number of empirical studies have confirmed a positive link between happiness and religion, as documented and reviewed in the mid 1990s by Robbins and Francis (1996) and brought more up-to-date by Francis, Jones, and Wilcox (2000). For example, Inglehart (1990) analysed Eurobarometer data covering 14
European countries (a total of 163,000 respondents) and identified a modest association between happiness and church involvement: 85% of those who attended church once a week or more often said they were ‘very satisfied’ with life compared with 77% of those who never attended church. Witter, Stock, Okun, and Haring (1985) found a similar effect in a meta-analysis of 56 relevant studies. There are also indications that the association between religiosity and well-being becomes stronger with increasing age. Harris (2002) conducted a meta-analysis of ten studies of older people and found that those with higher levels of religiosity reported greater levels of life satisfaction and happiness.

Christian denominations and other faiths demonstrate a link between religiosity and well-being. Cohen (2003) found a positive relationship between the public practice of religion and measures of happiness, life satisfaction, and quality of life for Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. However, religious belief was a better predictor of happiness and quality of life for Protestants and Catholics than for Jews. A South Korean survey of Protestants, Catholics, and Buddhists report a similar relationship between religious faith and satisfaction (Eung-Kim, 2003). On the other hand, data from the World Value Survey (where each of the 41 nations included was represented by a randomly drawn sample of 1000 adult respondents), Diener and Clifton (2002) found that the relationship between well-being and religiosity was not strong, in comparison with a range of other predictors of well-being. Moreover, the extensive reviews of the literature provided by Robbins and Francis (1996) and by Francis, Jones, and Wilcox (2000) found that there were a number of studies, which had failed to find any significant association between religion and psychological well-being.

Robbins and Francis (1996) suggested that the equivocal findings from previous studies may, at least in part, be a consequence of the variety of ways in which the two elusive constructs of ‘religion’ and ‘psychological well-being’ have been operationalised and measured. They suggested that a significant advance could be made to the literature by a coherent program of studies which could agree on a common measure of religiosity applied among different samples and alongside different measures of psychological well-being. The measure of religiosity suggested was the established Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity (Francis, 1978; Francis & Stubbs, 1987) and the cognate instruments designed for application among other faith groups: the Sahin-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Islam (Sahin & Francis, 2002), the Katz-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Judaism (Francis & Katz, 2007), and the Santosh-