

# Religious coping reconsidered.

## Part one: an integrated approach

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### ABSTRACT

In these two articles, the author highlights the need for a multidimensional approach toward religious coping. Not only should the interaction of religion and coping be seen as a bidirectional influence, the interactions with dimensions of identity and social context should be taken into account. Furthermore, the author claims that each of these dimensions should be conceptualized as a process. Implications for theory and research are being discussed. Besides this multidimensional approach, the author advocates a narrative reformulation of religious coping theories, and tries to show the usefulness of a narrative approach.

This article is the first in a two-part series. It proposes a multidimensional approach, based on a review of literature on religious coping, with a focus on the work of K.I. Pargament. Shortcomings of present approaches are discussed. Then four central dimensions of religious coping are described: crisis and coping; religion; identity; context. With these dimensions a multidimensional framework is construed, in which the interactions among the four dimensions are highlighted. Hypotheses and questions for further research are formulated. The aim of this article is to evaluate the present situation in religious coping research and theory and to contribute to a more integrating approach.

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### 1 INTRODUCTION

It has been said that religion prospers in times of need. Some even state that religion is merely a way of coping with contingency (Luhmann 1977). This all too reductionistic approach will not be followed here. Nevertheless, it is clear, that religion can play an important role in crisis-situations. Also, religious attitudes can evidently change in crisis periods. Questions remain however regarding the structure of these influences and the factors involved. In this article, we propose a multidimensional approach, based on a review of literature on religious coping.

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To put things straight, we first describe what we mean with the central concepts. We use the term 'Coping' for the process through which individuals try to understand and deal with significant demands in their lives (Pargament 1990). Put differently, Coping is 'a search for significance in times of stress' (cf. Pargament 1990, 1997). We define crisis as a disturbance of meaning, due to the appraisal of events as too demanding and resources as too limited, and visible in symptoms of the disruption of psychological equilibrium (cf. Ganzevoort 1994a,b). Religion will not be defined in strict terms, but be used as denoting experiences, cognitions and actions seen (by the individual or community) as significant in relation to the sacred. We distinguish between belief as the cognitive dimension, religious tradition as the communal history and framework, and faith as the personal commitment.

### 1.1 SHORTCOMINGS OF PRESENT APPROACHES

A sharp contrast exists between the abundance of publications on crisis or coping and religion as separate phenomena and the quality and quantity of publications about their interaction. If we focus on research on coping and religion, few psychological publications address the role of faith in coping and even fewer examine the influence of crisis and coping on faith.

In the field of religious coping research, K.I. Pargament and his co-workers deserve respect for their pioneering work in the systematic investigation of factors involved and their contribution to models for research and theory. Pargament has recently published a book length description of his approach, which should be considered the authoritative text presently available. His conceptual framework is well organized and coherent. He describes religion as 'the search for significance in ways related to the sacred' and coping as 'the search for significance in times of stress' (Pargament 1997). Central to his approach is the diversity of the religion-coping connection: 'the many faces of religion in coping'.

An earlier analysis by Pargament (1990) identifies three possible interactions between religion and coping. First, religion can influence all parts of the coping process (appraisal, coping activities, results, assistance and motivation). Second, religion can contribute to the coping process by preventing certain events from happening (through a beneficiary life style), and by influencing perception (attribution of meaning and the feeling of control). Third, religion can be the resultant of the coping process through religious attributes. In his 1997 book, Pargament distinguishes four processes of religious coping, dichotomized in two axes: conservation or transformation of the destinations or ends of significance, and conservation or transformation of the pathways or means to significance. Clearly, Pargament mentions various aspects of interaction, and speaks of multidimensionality. Still, at least three serious shortcomings are present in his approach, which we try to overcome in proposing a multidimensional model.

The first problem in the approach of Pargament and others is its limited focus. Pargament (1990) does note that a religious attitude can be the effect of the coping-process. He even advocates a bidirectional theory (Pargament et al. 1992). Yet, his model and research are almost completely restricted to the influence of religion on coping (see Pargament 1996). Not nearly enough attention is given to the influence of crisis and coping on religion. Coherent with this one-sidedness is, that (in our view) Pargament treats religion too much as a stable system, and not as a dynamic process,

changing over time and influenced by life-experiences such as crisis and coping (Vossen 1993). To be true, Pargament does describe religion as a process, but he does not follow the implications of that remark. As we will show in this article, the influence is mutual, demanding a model for theory and research that encompasses both influences.

The second problem in Pargament's approach is its emphasis on quantitative research methods. Pargament (1990, 1997) and Hathaway & Pargament (1991) seek to formulate a theoretical model that does justice to the highly complex function of religion. Their research attempts, however, are largely limited to quantitative approaches (Hathaway & Pargament 1990, Newman & Pargament 1990, Pargament & Hahn 1986, Pargament et al. 1992, 1994, 1995, cf. Schaefer & Gorsuch 1991, 1993; exceptions to be found in a qualitative preliminary stage of research reported in Pargament et al. 1988, Pargament et al. 1990, and in the plea for qualitative methods in Jenkins & Pargament 1995). In his 1997 book he uses excerpts from qualitative research interviews, but disqualifies their scientific value more than a bit in calling them 'anecdotal' and 'self-report' (Pargament 1997, p. 168). We would like to claim, that processes of signification and interpretation, studied in a field so complex and with so little sound theory available, demand an emphasis on qualitative research (cf. Bergin 1994).

A third shortcoming is that attention for other processes involved is too limited, such as identity and context. If these are mentioned at all, they are more seen as external independent variables, than as influencing and being influenced by the coping and religion processes. These shortcomings result in an oversimplified theory of religious coping, which a multidimensional model might overcome. In summary, Pargament's framework (1997) is an important contribution to the field, but he does not push his case for multidimensionality far enough.

## 1.2 TWO CASES

To illustrate the need for a multidimensional model and the developing theory in these pages, two cases will be presented here. These cases will serve in the following sections to provide examples of the ideas to be introduced. The first case is taken from research on the function and change of faith in a crisis (Ganzevoort 1994b). The second case is part of current research on faith and childhood sexual abuse in men (Ganzevoort 1997).

Case one: Berend: Berend is born in the early sixties in an upper-middle-class family. Both his parents are well educated. His first seven years he remembers as warm and harmonic, but the relationships are not tight. As the family income increased, they moved to an expensive house isolated from the neighborhood. Because they only had each other, the atmosphere in the family became more tense. His parents regularly argued among them, culminating in physical violence. Berend chose the side of his mother, and took the role of mediator. At the age of seventeen his parents divorced and Berend failed his yearly exams. In this period he experiences difficulties concerning his sexual development and medical problems concerning his neck.

After having completed his school-education, he reports living in a depressed state for over a year. Meanwhile he tries to study economics, but his physical problems force him to quit. After that, he spends a year working and living in Israel, another year at an anthroposofic center of education, and another year studying art-history. Finally he starts working at a museum.

Ever since he was a young boy, Berend was interested in questions of meaning and religion. His grandmother was important in this respect because to him she symbolized a spiritual life. Like his

grandmother, he joined a liberal Mennonite church. At the age of twenty-five, a friend invites him to a Pentecostal service, and Berend is impressed by seeing a woman being cured on prayer. Because of his own problems, and the new found hope for a solution, he commits himself to this congregation for some years.

As time passes by, Berend discovers several topics in the religious life view and doctrines of this group, with which he cannot agree. More than that, his problems (sexual, medical and relational) are not solved. It is then that he meets a few progressive-evangelical people living in a commune, and he decides to move in. The commune provides lodging and counseling for young people in distress, and Berend is a counselor. However, his own problems are not solved, and that is why, at the time of the interview, he has decided to move out again, planning to take up another study. Meanwhile Berend has also sought psychological counseling. He has undergone eye-surgery, but in both cases the hoped for and expected psychological rest was not the result.

Case two: André: André is a man in his fifties, born as the first and unwanted child in a half-jewish family. He lived with his grandmother most of his childhood, but frequently he walked the half an hour road to his parents. Often his mother sent him back, as she had men over. At age four, André and his mother were imprisoned during the war. There André was forced to have sexual contact with a soldier. His mother viewed the incident as part of normal life in a prisoners' camp. After the war, at age seven, his father, who had physically abused him for several years, started to abuse him sexually, using force and threats, and eventually going as far as anal intercourse. This lasted until André reached the age of thirteen. After that, his mother abused him for some years, accompanied by one of her many male friends. At approximately the same time a neighbor, a teacher and several people he met on the streets, took advantage of his vulnerability and his longing for warmth and attention. A life of misery followed, in which both homosexual and heterosexual relationships all ended suddenly and unexpected. One relationship, his marriage, ended when his wife and three children died in a car accident. At age fifty, André joined a Pentecostal community, was baptized, but the promised healing of his memories did not occur. Later, he joined a catholic church, in which he was baptized again, because the priest did not recognize the earlier baptism. Furthermore, when confronted with a false accusation of sexual abuse of children, André was asked by the priest not to attend church anymore. Now that he has moved to another city, he has joined a new parish.

During the interview, André portrays a struggle for intimacy, acceptance, trust and the sense of controlling his own life. These struggles are placed in ambivalent roles. Presenting himself as a warm person, longing for intimacy, he simultaneously keeps his distance. He takes the role of the rejected child, but also of the accepting adult. He describes himself as helpless and manipulated by others, but he manipulates others as well. He indeed takes the role of someone in control of his own life and actions, including some childhood sexual experiences, which would fit the label of sexual abuse. A closer look at the roles in the story André tells shows that a central struggle is between the roles of the child and the adult. It seems that the other roles are specifications of these central roles, and that the conflicts in the other, less central, roles are extrapolations of the conflict between the child and the adult. André rejects the view of God as a Father, but instead focuses on the image of God as a Son. Here André finds Jesus to be an ally to the child he wants to be.

## OBSERVATIONS

The two cases show several parallels. Both men come from disrupted families. Both can be described as seekers, rather than believers. They shift between religious denominations in line with their experiences. Both find it hard to find a religious meaning of life and to attribute meaning to their histories. In short, both live with fragmented selves and they do so in a religious way. In current theories of religious coping, they fit the description of religion and coping by Pargament (1992, 1997) as 'a search for significance in ways related to the sacred' and 'in times of stress'. They illustrate how religion can be a way of searching significance, closely connected to the coping process. More than that, they show the complexity of the interaction of religion and coping. The individual identity and social context are visibly important in

the process. The parallels noted are not characteristic for all human beings, nor for religious coping. They are the flesh and bones of these two individuals. This should be kept in mind when we use these cases as illustrations.

## 2 FACTORS INVOLVED

So far we have mentioned two central processes that a multidimensional theory of religious coping should deal with: coping and religion. We also noted the necessity to include identity processes and social processes, which will be described later. These were deliberately referred to as processes to underscore that all four should be seen as dynamic processes. We do not deny the structural constituents of the process, but focus on dynamic interaction and development over the life span. Only if we treat them as processes, we can get a grasp of their interactions. Each of these processes is connected with all the other processes mentioned. In this section we will discuss the separate processes briefly, so that in the next section we can propose a multidimensional approach, followed by a discussion of the interaction between the processes. The procedure followed is congenial to the classical multivariate approach (cf. Schaefer & Gorsuch 1991). This approach first seeks to establish the dimensions of the domains, then the relevance of those domains is established for specific applications through integration into a unifying theory that can be tested against criterion variables. The domains to be described are the four processes mentioned above.

### 2.1 CRISIS AND COPING

Our first discussion is on the process of coping, being the central theme of these articles. Since the seminal work of R.S.Lazarus and his co-workers, the understanding of coping as a process is widely accepted (Lazarus 1966). For that reason, attention is not only given to certain aspects (often regarded as having a more static nature) like personality-characteristics or the factuality of life-events involved. The model that has evolved out of this perspective is dynamic, multiplex, and process-oriented. It takes its starting-point in a transactional perspective: coping should not be investigated in terms of the person or the situation alone, but in terms of their interaction. In this process, Lazarus focuses on appraisal processes, being seen as the key factors determining experience and activities. Originally, Lazarus (1966) spoke of “primary appraisal,” concerning the meaning of the event, and “secondary appraisal,” concerning the availability of resources (coping-skills and social support). Lazarus & Folkman (1984) later admitted that these terms unjustly suggest chronological separateness, which is an argument to use the terms “event-appraisal” and “resource-appraisal” as proposed by Wilcox & Vernberg (1985). Undoubtedly these appraisals are influenced by the factual situation on the one hand and by the frame of reference or orienting system on the other.

The appraisal of events and resources leads to the choice of those coping-activities perceived as relevant and adequate. This choice is referred to by Pargament (1997) as ‘tertiary appraisal’. During this process, a constant evaluation (or reappraisal) of the situation occurs, the demands of the situation, one's resources and constraints, and the effect of coping-activities. Thus, the process of coping encompasses five

dimensions: event, event-appraisal, resource-appraisal, coping activities and coping outcome.

The process of constant appraisal and reappraisal is clearly visible in the cases described. In Berend's case, the appraisal of the event (especially the parental divorce) is threatening, and the appraisal of resources (personal skills and social support) is negative: his own mediating role seems no longer functional, and the isolated situation of the family hinders adequate interaction with the social context. Berend's medical and sexual complaints can be seen as indicators of these appraisals, but they are also new events to be coped with. This dual meaning of a situation is also present in the second case. André's searching for warmth and attention is a way of coping, but leads to revictimization. This calls for new coping-strategies. One means André employs is the appraisal of these revictimizations as neutral, or as voluntary sexual contacts.

## 2.2 RELIGION

Religion is no more a static and univocal phenomenon than coping. Brown (1987) states that research in the psychology of religion should differentiate between religious persons, their beliefs and knowledge, attitudes and responses, claimed experiences, and the religious tradition and group in which they live. McGuire (1992) distinguishes belief, ritual, experience and community. A multidimensional model of religious coping should address these dimensions of the religious process. Using the classifications of Brown (1987), Stark & Glock (1968) and Switzer (1986), we choose to use three dimensions: experience, interpretation and behavior (including ritual). The dimension of experience points to claimed experiences of the transcendent, but also to all the other affective components of religious life. The dimension of interpretation concerns the cognitive dimension, including beliefs and knowledge. The dimension of behavior is used to describe all actions performed in a religious perspective (for example one's lifestyle), whereas ritual encompasses the religious tradition in its symbolic and ritualistic aspects, as it functions within one's personal perspective. Dimensions of identity and social context will not be taken here as part of the religious process, because in the model we propose they will be described as separate dimensions.

We see these dimensions as intertwined and interdependent, constantly evolving over time, as the individual evolves and develops. Changes may occur in one or more of these dimensions, but major changes in one dimension should be expected to result in changes in the other dimensions as well. Instead of presenting a definition of religion now we opt for a broad and open concept including the afore mentioned aspects.

Besides that, we claim that religion should be studied as a process. At this point we see the usefulness of the contributions of Fowler (1981). He shows that the developmental phases differ structurally from each other in the way individuals organize their interpretations. This coheres with our emphasis on process in religion. In the second article, we will propose a defining framework for religion.

The cases of Berend and André clearly show the need to see religion broadly and as a process. The content of their religious convictions is not a stable system, but changes enormously. Their religious affiliation shows the same shifts. Liberal, orthodox, Pentecostal, catholic. It is almost as if the content and affiliation are only the resultant of other forces. Berend's story most explicitly shows a pattern of adhering to certain beliefs, and rejecting them as he finds out that they do not help him. Discussing maturity in his religious development would be possible. Likewise, we could call his attitude extrinsic religiosity. However, it seems more fruitful to try to understand why Berend cannot find a new orientation. As his story tells us, Berend has been interested in questions of religious meaning since he was a young boy. The pattern of seeking sense in different belief systems is part of his central story line.

The social context of Berend is fragmented from an early phase of his development and continues to be so. Coherent with that, his religious process and orienting system are fragmented. In his search for significance in ways related to the sacred and in times of stress, he is constantly interacting with other individuals and groups. Interrelated as he is within this social context, he is seeking a meaning of life in a religious mode.

### 2.3 IDENTITY

The third process to be considered is identity. Identity or personality can be regarded as an independent variable influencing the processes of coping, religion and social context. That observation may be correct, but it is only part of the truth. Crucial is the question what is meant by 'identity'. Although the theme is common in many theological and psychological approaches, we are far from reaching a consensus about its nature. Developmentalists often describe identity as the sense of continuity and uniqueness of the person in his or her interactions with the social context. Erikson (1968) is famous for his theory of identity as the cumulated outcome of critical encounters. His model is built on the assumption that ego qualities are added by the resolution of psychosocial crises. This view of identity is close to what Ricoeur (1988) terms 'idem'-identity. Idem-identity can be seen as a constant factor, present from the beginning, or as something to be acquired, but in both cases, it rests on the idea that there is something essentially the same in an individual. In contrast, Ricoeur proposes a view identity as 'ipse', focusing not on the continuity, permanent over time, but on the uniqueness of the person, the temporal (Streib 1994). 'Ipse'-identity is the struggle to interpret oneself faithfully (Wallace 1995).

The danger of identity as essentially there, is the neglect of process and development. The disadvantage of identity as something to be obtained, is the risk of ideology. Explicitly or implicitly, almost every developmental scheme has a normative structure, suggesting that the higher stages are to be preferred to the lower ones. Fowler's 'stages of faith' (1981) for example, claiming to be a description of developmental stages as they appear in individuals, has been criticized for being a prescription of how individuals should develop. This might be true especially for the last stage he describes, where the goal of development becomes most clearly visible. Recently, some have argued for a retrospective view of development (Breeuwsma 1993, Freeman 1991). In that view, development of identity should not be seen as a process in the direction of a certain (fixed) goal, but as the constant reconstruction of goals.

Furthermore, these developmental theories see the origin of development in individual inner structures, so that stage-transitions depend on natural changes over the life span. The impact of social context, coping processes and religion is systematically eradicated. We underscore the notion that identity is a dynamic process in constant reformulation and in ongoing interaction with coping, religion and social context. Identity then can be seen as the constant formulation and reformulation of the person as (s)he wishes to be in the eyes of self and others.

The case of André illustrates how identity is influenced by his social context, coping and religion, and evolving over his life. His self-understanding is formed in experiences of sexual abuse, rejection by religious persons and groups, etcetera. Coping processes contribute to his feeling in control, and the religious image of the Son Jesus is a role model for his present identity as a child facing the adult world. This case would be oversimplified, if his identity processes were only understood as influencing his religious and coping processes. The influence goes both ways.

## 2.4 CONTEXT

The fourth process is the social context in which the processes of coping, religion and identity are situated. This context, again, is not static, but constantly (and rapidly) changing, influenced by many factors, among which are economic changes (industrialization, migration), major events (war, natural disasters), religion and coping. Choices the individual makes in the realm of religion or coping can alienate him or her from the social context (s)he lives in, or establish relationships with a new context (as in conversion or self-help groups). This is expressed in the metaphor of the convoy, which accounts for the dynamic nature of social networks (Antonucci 1985).

Social Constructionism is an invaluable perspective to understand the interaction of the individual and his or her social context. As Gergen (1994) points out, identity, language, emotions and many more phenomena studied in psychology can be best understood as parts of the dramatic negotiation of narratives. It is in the making, shaping and breaking of relationships, that coping, religion and identity play their role (Day 1993). In our second article we will pursue this line of thought, but independent of the choice for a narrative approach, the dynamics of the social context merit structural attention in a multidimensional model of religious coping.

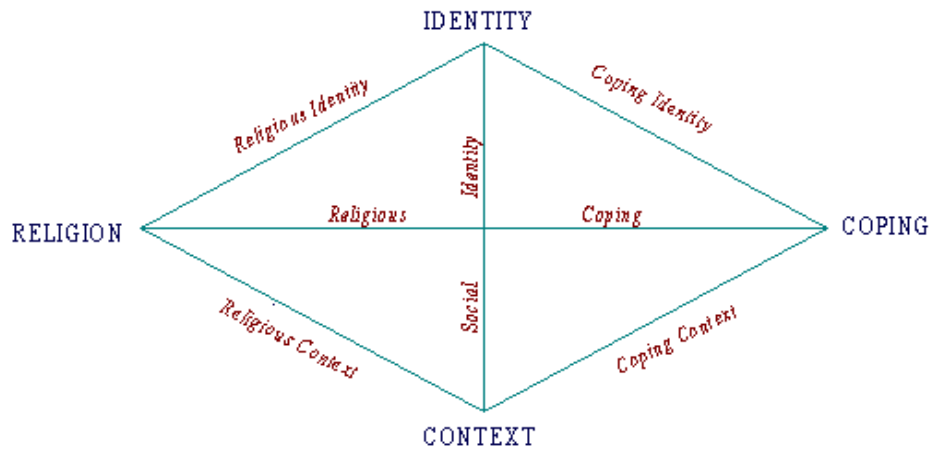
Both André and Berend show the impact of their social context on coping and religious processes. It can be hypothesized that the structure of their personal frame of reference (or personal narrative) is consistent with the structure of the social context during their youth (Ganzevoort 1994b). Both also show how the context changes due to crisis experiences, coping strategies and religious choices, and to the identities in which they present themselves.

## 3 A MULTIDIMENSIONAL MODEL

Each phenomenon in our model has been the subject of many inquiries. Therefore we have only given a (far too brief) indication of four processes and dimensions involved. A thorough description can be found in the many publications devoted to each subject. We now turn our attention to the interaction between these fields, limiting ourselves to the designation of interaction-factors that may be important in studying religious coping. This way, we try to contribute to a unifying theory. Our remarks here should be seen as an attempt to integrate results of previous research and as an invitation to future research, rather than as a fully developed theory. Given the complex nature of each process, in a visual presentation we will display them as a single item, connected with each other process. After some comments on the structure of this presentation, we will discuss the interactions.



FIGURE 1: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL MODEL



Where Figure 1 shows only one line between two fields, this is not to suggest that only one factor is involved. Each dimension of each field can influence each part of any other field. Furthermore, with regard to these influences, many possible factors could be proposed. For the sake of clarity, I have shown only one line of interaction between the fields. The four processes (religion, identity, context, and coping) are constantly evolving and fully interrelated. Religious coping in this model is the interaction of the processes of coping and religion. Social identity is the interaction of identity and context. Religious identity and religious context denote the relation between the religious process and the processes of identity and context, and, finally, the coping process is related to context and identity through coping context and coping identity. In the next section I will discuss some central interactions, following the structure of this model, and limiting the discussion to the central theme of religious coping. My purpose here is to formulate questions that should be integrated in the unifying theory. These questions will serve as a guide in the second article.

### RELIGIOUS COPING: RELIGION AND COPING

As mentioned earlier, Pargament et al. (1992) noted that religion and coping can influence each other, but they did not give equal attention to both sides of this interaction. Because religious coping is the central theme of this article, I will deal with this interaction in more depth. I begin start with the influence of religion on coping, and depict some important functions. Instead of following the dimensions of coping, I will structure the discussion according to basic dimensions of religion. This provides a view of the religious process in and beyond the coping process. I will follow the three dimensions described previously: experience, interpretation, and behavior.

### *Religious experience.*

Although it is the vaguest dimension, religious experience is listed first because frequently individuals mention strength and consolation as the primary meaning of faith (Ganzevoort, 1994b). André, for example, said: "If I have to meet someone I don't know, I ask, very childlike: please take me by the hand, because I am shaking and trembling now that I am facing something unfamiliar." This matches Van Uden's (1985) findings that some of his respondents expected and experienced faith to have a maternal role of comfort and consolation. Newman and Pargament (1990) noted that, although faith often provides support to individuals in crisis, it does not give direct solutions. According to Pargament (1997), spiritual support is one of the religious coping variables most clearly and positively correlated to positive outcomes.

The experience of support is ingrained in and refers to a second experience, being related to God (Scarlett & Perriello, 1991). It should be noted that several authors have pointed to the importance of an intrinsic religious orientation in which faith is not a means to an end (e.g., support) but an end in itself. The greatest support is found when support is not the object of faith (Cieslak, 1991; Newman & Pargament, 1990). Pargament (1992, 1997) however makes a strong case for an approach to religion and religious coping that is equally appreciative of and interested in both the means and the ends. He states that intrinsic, extrinsic and quest orientations can each be described by differing means and ends (cf. Kirkpatrick & Hood, 1990).

Graham et al. (1978) identify two risk factors or negative functions of religion for the dimension of experience. The first is the potential conflict between conviction and feeling which may lead to a conflict in the individual experience. The second is the "sick soul" as described by James (1906/1985). A divided self seeks unification in faith, but being divided is also a risk factor in crisis. Pargament (1997) and Thompson & Vardaman (1997) identified discontent with congregation or with God and pleading as harmful religious coping-experience variables.

### *Religious interpretation.*

Religious experience is clearly connected to the interpretation of events. That is to say, if certain events and experiences are understood as in some way religious, this understanding is interpretive and not factual. Only in the interaction with a religiously oriented frame of reference can a religious interpretation occur and can experiences be understood as religious. This is what McIntosh (1995) calls the religious schema. The schema can be triggered by schema-relevant cues in a specific situation. It then fosters the selection and perception of events in a specific way and offers a prescription of problem-solving strategies.

In literature on religious coping, providing a frame of reference is seen as an important function of religion (Lazarus, 1966; McIntosh, 1995; Van Uden,

1985). Of the functions of religion, described by Pargament & Park (1995; also Pargament, 1997), the search for meaning and search for the self could be seen as parts of the interpretational dimension of the religious process. Schaefer & Gorsuch (1993) studied religious coping styles and attitudes as described by Pargament et al. (1988): the attitude of activity and the perception of God as passive, the passive attitude and the perception of God as active, and the (predominant) attitude of a bilateral active alliance. The choice of attitude turned out to depend on, among other things, the situation and the religious disposition of the person. These attitudes point to interpretations made by individuals, interpretations which are influenced by experiences, events, social context, and so on. Nevertheless, they are still personal interpretations.

Religious interpretation can influence the appraisal process in crisis and coping, because a crisis pointedly questions meaning and identity (Ganzevoort, 1994a). Consequently, Peukert (1982) saw "coping with contingency" as a crucial function of religion. Religion provides a set of meanings with a clear message about the conceivable interpretations of events and situations (Pargament & Maton, 1991). Besides meaning, Pargament (1990) cited two more functions of religion that influence appraisal: control and self-esteem. The feeling of control is an important positive factor during a crisis. Religion can offer this factor by giving the feeling of controlling the situation and by controlling feelings. Self-esteem gives a positive outlook that may be influenced by the religious interpretation of God's love and grace. Finally, religious interpretation can also reduce the threat of a crisis, because it provides certain values and norms that direct the appraisal and can prevent certain situations and complications from happening (Cieslak 1991).

Again, I point to the notion of process in religion, to underscore the dynamic nature of religious interpretation. If we take into account that each individual over the life span has made a myriad of interpretations concerning God, life, and self, one can understand some conditions for religious interpretation to occur: the availability of the meaning system through religious socialization or conversion, the ability to convince, and plausibility (religion seen as the most compelling way to answer; Hathaway & Pargament, 1991; Pargament, 1997). The individual life span provides information needed to understand why certain individuals opt for specific religious interpretations. The actual frame of reference in a time of crisis is filled with previous interpretations. That is why a biographical approach is appropriate.

These interpretations are typically fragmentary, only loosely tied together. Thus the frame of reference will include contradictions and open questions that might be vulnerable elements in a crisis. On the other hand, a religious system that is too clear, stringent, and compelling also affects coping negatively. The incident of a crisis can generate a conflict of interpretations between the personal experience and the meaning provided by the religious frame of reference (Graham et al., 1978). A positive influence of religious experience can be expected if religion is central to the frame of reference (Pargament,

1990, 1997) and if the religious system is open for a variety of experiences (Ganzevoort, 1994b; McIntosh, 1995; Pargament, 1997). For a positive effect on coping, the religious interpretation (appraisal) should not be one of punishment by God (Hathaway & Pargament, 1991; Pargament, 1997).

#### *Religious behavior.*

The third dimension of the influence of religion on crisis and coping is religious behavior. Although it is just a deficient and reductive indication of the (factual and perceived) relevance of religion (Wulff, 1991), it can fulfill a function in the experiencing of, and coping with, a crisis. Several factors are identified. Besides church attendance, which probably also has a social function, it is mostly the propagation of a positive and healthy life style that contributes to the prevention of, and coping with, crises. However, this life style prescription may degenerate into strict requirements that can be unhealthy (Graham et al. 1978). Church attendance can also be associated with a negative religious function such as the suppression of grief (Sanders, 1989). It is still unclear how this negative function should be explained. Neither is it known precisely what external factors are involved. This may be due to the lack of attention to the dynamics of the process and to the processes of identity and social context.

The positive effects of life style norms derive from the limiting or controlling of stimulants, the emphasis on responsibility, the limiting of alternatives, and the appeal to a certain ethical way of life, also during a crisis. Besides that, religious behavior often has a social component. Cieslak (1991), for example, found that common religious activities have a positive effect on marital problems. Prayer can be part of the same dimension (Scarlett & Perriello, 1991), where it gives the experience of solidarity and of dedication to a purpose and has a ritualistic meaning. Discerning the exact influence of prayer is difficult, especially because it is embedded in the total life style, the religious attitude and the social context.

Religious behavior is no more a stable phenomenon than are the other dimensions. Here we should investigate not only the individual life span, but also the changes of the religious culture in which the individual lives and acts. The process of secularization (at least in Western-Europe) has had an enormous impact on religious behavior. Behavior is among the first dimensions of religion to be influenced by these cultural developments. Furthermore, it can be expected that different stages of the life span show a different attitude toward religious behavior.

A specific form of behavior is ritual. Although little attention has been given to ritual in religious coping literature, three aspects can be identified. First, many religious behaviors are ritualized, serving to structure religious experience. This may include the rituals of church meetings and services, and the individual rituals of praying, singing and reading the Bible. The structured nature of these ritualized behaviors serves to bring some religious order in a fragmented life.

Secondly, rituals play a role in the transition from one phase of life to the next. Here the function of the ritual is to direct emotions and allow them to be included in a larger framework shared socially (Baumgartner, 1990). In this manner the experience of the transition becomes legitimate. According to Hathaway and Pargament (1991), the transition rituals cause the events themselves to be considered religious. Thus they can become the source of what Loder (1981) has called convictional experiences, moments of transformation by which people discover a new future after experiencing a lack of purpose and meaning. This is why Pargament (1997) describes rites de passage in his section on reevaluation of significance: a conservation of the religious means and a transformation of the religious ends.

Thirdly, rituals play a role in coping with an accidental or traumatic crisis (Van der Hart, 1981; Van Uden, 1988). Graham et al. (1978) cite the ritual release, a release of emotions, as a protection factor. Rituals are available in a church context for several critical events (such as death). In other situations (such as divorce) they are not tendered, so that the experiences should be expressed differently. When Christian models are no longer adequate, new rituals are devised. This was found especially with respondents who are no longer explicitly involved with the Christian faith (Ganzevoort, 1994b).

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

To determine the specific influence of religion on coping, a multifaceted perspective is required, in which religion is seen as a biographical process, including all the aspects of human life. Research limited to certain religious convictions, feelings, or actions cannot do justice to the rich variety of religious life. The second article will propose a narrative reformulation of this biographical process.

## RELIGIOUS COPING - COPING AND RELIGION

I now turn to the influence of crisis and coping on religion. Here I am interested in the religious outcome of coping. Pargament (1997, p. 311) mentioned some research in this field, with a summarized result that religious coping is most strongly correlated to religious outcomes. As he did not focus on the impact on the religious process, he also did not offer a discussion of these results. To take a closer look, I will use coping-dimensions as described by Lazarus (1966) and Hathaway & Pargament (1991): event, event-appraisal, resource-appraisal, coping-activities, and coping-outcome. These are all seen as stages of the coping-process; each can be of influence in the religious processes.

The first remark on this issue is that a crisis is seen as a period of religious significance (Croog & Levine, 1972). Boisen (1970) concludes that, in essence, people are lazy and will not contemplate beyond what is needed immediately.

This means that, during a crisis, period the mental horizon is broken open and new perspectives are possible. Boisen's observation can be connected with what Oser (1991) calls religious judgment: a mode of thought that links the reality stemming from experience to something that transcends it with the purpose of providing meaning and direction. This mode of thought surfaces especially during periods of crisis. For this very reason, crisis periods have been identified as significant moments for the development of faith. Bruning & Stokes (1982) postulate that spiritual growth is greater in times of crisis. At this point I will note that in several studies the term crisis is broadly defined to include contemplation and doubts about religion (as in Jongsma-Tieleman, 1991). These studies support the view that discontinuity in religious development is an important phenomenon. However, for research on religious coping it might be preferred to conceptualize the processes of religion and coping as separate dimensions, to describe the interaction between them. The concept of crisis, then, should be limited to specific phenomena with characteristic features (Ganzevoort, 1994b).

It is striking that so little literature about this interaction is available. Likewise, the results are ambiguous, depending largely on interpretive definition and scoring. An example is provided by the conclusions of two qualitative research projects on religion and coping from the Netherlands. Van Uden (1985) stated his conclusion: "Among our respondents there was no purification of faith by grief. Spiritual growth as a result of a crisis is reserved for only a few". Ganzevoort (1994b), on the other hand, found, for 19 out of 39 respondents, a transforming or stimulating effect of crisis on faith.

One reason for the possible positive effect of crisis on faith is that, during crisis, existential questions are raised, which are religious in nature, even if they are not religious by content. Where contingency is experienced, there is a call for religion (Peukert, 1982). In the search for meaning and purpose, answers can be sought in religion as well (Shandor Miles & Brown Crandall, 1986). Here one can point to conversional experiences. The topic of conversion is important to the subject. Structurally, both coping and conversion are processes of change, where a system of meaning is perceived as no longer the most adequate frame of reference for the life of the individual. Both are also heavily influenced by relations with the social context. Besides that, for many conversions, a crisis experience is an important antecedent (Gillespie, 1979; Johnson, 1978; Johnson & Malony, 1982; Loder, 1981; Pargament, 1997; Ullman, 1989). Consequently, those who conduct research on the influence of crisis on faith can learn a great deal from conversion research and theory.

In the beginning of this section, I mentioned five dimensions that can be explored in the research on the influence of crisis on faith: event, event appraisal, resource appraisal, coping activities, and coping outcomes.

*Event.*

The first dimension of the coping-process is the event. It is possible that the influence of crisis on faith depends on the phase of life in which it occurs. Events occurring in childhood and adolescence (periods of primary identity formation) might have a larger impact on religious development than events in other stages of the life span. Unfortunately, we do not know of any research on this matter.

The nature of the event is the next event-factor. In a Polish study, Dorczak (1991) concludes that a religious appraisal is more likely to occur when events are more drastic and religious commitment is higher. Research by Newman and Pargament (1990), however, does not confirm this effect. It can be concluded from the lack of concurrence that there is some connection between an event and the occurrence of religious attributes, but that other factors are more important. This would be supported by life-event-theories. Although certain significant correlations between life-event and stress / influence were found, these findings cannot be limited to factual dimensions of the events. Individual response and appraisal should also be taken into account (Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1974). Furnham and Brown (1992) and Loewenthal and Cornwall (1993), for example, found that a religious attribution depended on the nature of the event and the religious background of the individual.

The impact of the event can be discovered in every dimension of the religious process: experience, interpretation, and behavior. Religious experience and interpretation can be influenced by the event, because some events induce more religious questions, attitudes, and emotions than other events. Here the personal identity and its development and the social context are probably important mediating variables. Religious behavior is influenced by the event in the sense that the nature of the event will determine whether ritual and other behavior are available and whether they will be employed (cf. Ellison & Taylor, 1996).

#### *Event appraisal.*

The second dimension in the coping-process is the event appraisal. The appraisal of an event is determined by characteristics of the event and by convictions of the individual, his or her orienting system (e.g., locus of control and religious beliefs). In this orienting system we find views of the self, religious beliefs, and so forth, based on previous appraisals and interpretations. From clinical experience, I suggest that event appraisals that are incompatible with religious convictions have a major disrupting power. Overcash, Calhoun, Cann, and Tedeschi (1996), on the other hand, found that traumatic events affected religious convictions only minimally, because the religious frame of reference has a strong resistance to change. In the literature, if a differentiation is made for the event appraisal, it is found that appraisals related to loss or threat lead to more religious coping than appraisals related to challenge (McCrae, 1984).

For each dimension of the religious process, the impact of the event-appraisal can be described. The appraisal of an event as beneficial may lead to a religious interpretation of gratitude and providential care. Religious experience then may be one of joy and closeness to God (although it was noted previously that these events tend to have less impact on the religious process). An appraisal of challenge may lead to an interpretation and experience of calling and obedience. An appraisal of loss or threat may induce interpretations varying from retaliation to pedagogical planning to solidarity and compassion or to apathy (Van der Ven & Vossen, 1995). Religious behavior (especially prayer) will reflect this interpretation and experience.

#### *Resource-appraisal.*

The third dimension of the coping-process is the resource-appraisal. Two kinds of resources can be distinguished: internal (coping-skills) and external (social support). Internal resources can mitigate the crisis and support coping-activities. Besides that, the appraisal of resources determines the gravity of the crisis: A crisis will occur if the resources are appraised as insufficient for coping with the event (as appraised). The appraisal of internal resources will influence an individual's sense of efficacy. This may influence the religious interpretation of the relation between humankind (i.e., this person) and God: for example, a positive appraisal of resources can induce a religious interpretation of God's presence and the giftedness of humankind. This may have a positive impact on religious experience and behavior as well.

For the appraisal of external resources, Pargament (1997) noted that congregational support is correlated positively with positive coping outcomes. An important consideration for the influence of coping on religion, however, is the fact that during crisis the context is frequently damaged. This is especially true for crises that are relational in nature, but the observation holds for health- and work-related events as well. The religious social context may be even less supportive (or may become dysfunctional at an earlier moment) than the nonreligious ones when the events to be coped with are burdened by an ethical dimension (e.g., divorce, AIDS). The effect of this change in context (including religiously oriented relations) is that the resource-appraisal becomes more negative. When the religious context is not supportive enough, a negative interpretation of the religious meaning-system can be the consequence (Ganzevoort, 1994b). Simply and boldly put, the experience (i.e., appraisal) of a supportive social context is a prerequisite for the experience of a supportive God.

#### *Coping activities.*

The fourth dimension of the coping-process is the choice and exercise of coping-activities. Religious behaviors, such as praying, attending church, doing works of mercy, and so forth, can be used as coping-activities. In a religious perspective, these activities can be experienced as a way to change a situation or one's perception of the situation. When these activities do not have a



beneficial effect (and often they do not), the effect can be a negative reappraisal and a growing conviction that religion is of no use when it really matters. Positive experiences through coping-activities enhance the experience that religion is of value. At this point the choice of coping activities may include and strengthen (or weaken) religious behavior.

#### *Coping-outcome.*

The last dimension of the coping-process is the coping-outcome. Here the remarks on the consequences of effective and non-effective context, skills, and activities come to their climax. A positive coping-outcome can be interpreted in a religious frame of reference as a gift from God and a sign that faith is a central issue in coping with the contingencies of life. A negative coping-outcome, on the contrary, has a tendency of blocking faith development and experience. Earlier in the description of the cases of both Berend and André, religious disappointments that affected these persons' trust in God were mentioned. Here the phrase holds that all's well that ends well. It should be noted, however, that outcome is not the only criterion for good religious coping (Pargament 1997).

### QUESTIONS ON RELIGIOUS COPING.

In concluding this section, I will formulate some questions that might be addressed. How can religion be studied in such a way that the relative importance of the dimensions can be discovered? How does an individual's coping history affect his or her faith development? Do all religious traditions have the same (possibly positive) effect, or is the specific content of the different traditions significant? Again, these questions underscore the need for a broad perspective, in which the various dimensions of the processes of coping and religion are taken into account.

#### *Social identity: Identity and Context*

As noted previously, I will not discuss the interaction of identity and social context overall. Instead, I will focus on their interaction with religious coping. The central questions here may be simple. The answers are probably very complex. How can the interaction between context and personality be discovered in the light of religious coping, where both religion and coping deal with the transcendence of the boundaries of human existence? What (social/individual) factors dominate the possible influences on religion and coping? How do religion and coping influence the interaction of context and identity?

#### *Religious Identity - Identity and Religion*

The interaction of religion and identity is a central theme in the psychology of religion (Wulff, 1991). Here I will limit the discussion to those aspects of the interaction connected with coping (Schaefer & Gorsuch, 1993; Van Uden,

1985). Pargament and Park (1995) see the search for the self as a central function of religion, and it could be stated that this is a key question in (religious) coping as well. At this point the question arises what is meant by a 'religious identity' in the relation with coping. Mere adherence to specific religious beliefs cannot be taken as an adequate definition of a religious identity. Equally important are attitudes, experiences, behavior, and so on. More than that, I advocate an approach that takes both religion and identity as processes. In the second article, I will go even farther and reformulate these processes in a narrative way. There I will propose narrative criteria to distinguish religious from non-religious narratives.

In this article, I propose that a religious identity should be described in terms of development and of relation. Both religion and identity deal with relations that transcend the individual. A religious identity is indicated if this process of identity is related (either in content or structure) to a transcendent Person or Object (taken as the object of religion). In this process of a religious identity there is found the same constant reformulation we mentioned earlier. Moreover, the presence of development, change, and discontinuity could be determined as necessary conditions for religion. This notion makes clear the specific importance of religious identity in the field of crisis and coping. Ricoeur even speaks of religious language as borderline language analogous to Jaspers' definition of borderline situations (Plüss, 1988).

I will return to this issue in the second article. Here I will formulate relevant questions for future research: What personality characteristics are most effective in religious coping? Is it possible to teach religious coping skills as part of a prevention program? What religious characteristics and coping skills are available in specific personality types? How do the processes of religion and identity interact within the specific realm of the coping process? What further criteria can be used to distinguish religious and nonreligious identity processes?

#### *Religious Context - Context and Religion*

It is well established in research on religion, that religion is not primarily an individual experience. Surely William James (1906/1985) gave an individualistic definition of religion as "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine" (p. 31). In contrast, McGuire (1992) noted that "religion represents an important tie between the individual and the larger social group, both as a basis of association and as an expression of shared meanings" (p. 27). Pargament and Park (1995) wrote of the search for intimacy as another function of religion. I will try to reformulate this relationship of religion and context in the second article.

Here I will focus on the interaction of religion and context in the coping process. Meaning and appraisal are always social processes. In addition, the context provides socioeconomic and practical support. In the first phase of

coping, this support is the most important role of the social context, and of the religious context as well. Support can be found on several levels of social relations. Foundational is the level of parents and educators, founded on unanimity, security, and stability. The next level is that of brothers, sisters, children, other family members, and good friends. The fact, that this level can provide alternate directions for reappraisal is relevant during a "search for meaning" (Shandor Miles & Brown Crandall, 1986). Involvement in a religious community is also found at this level. It is frequently mentioned as an important factor in religious coping. However, its meaning remains vague (House, Robbins, & Metzner, 1982; Zuckerman, Kasl, & Ostfeld, 1984). This vagueness is often caused by the lack of conceptual and methodological clarity.

An important social aspect is the availability and plausibility of interpretations as conditions for a religious appraisal. The dimension of meaning is more pronounced in the religious context than in other social contacts because the religious purpose is the basis of the relations. A religious context is important as a credibility reference for religious experience and appraisal (Hathaway & Pargament, 1991). If this contextual basis is not present, a cognitive solution to a conflicting appraisal may not be sufficient (Wikström, 1991). A problem in this regard is the increased fragmentation of the context as a whole recent decades, and a fragmented frame of reference that results from it (Ganzevoort, 1994a).

Practical assistance (personal or institutional), solidarity, and socioemotional support are important resources. The institutional assistance can consist of diaconal or pastoral church structures (Cieslak, 1991), instructions, or competence enhancement (Hathaway & Pargament, 1991). Moreover, context is an important part of the appraisal of resources (secondary appraisal), so that a network with a strong religious component will result in an appraisal that stands in a religious light (Hathaway & Pargament, 1991). Pargament (1990) postulated that the impact of religion on coping will be larger if a strong religious context is present.

Regarding the interaction of religion and context, most attention has been given to the influence of context on religion. Here we can mention research on religious socialization and conversion. In both cases the personal experience and attitude are, in many ways, shaped by the social interactions. The interaction of context and coping processes, and the influence of the coping-context interactions on faith development and conversion deserve further attention. In contrast with the abundance of literature available on faith development and conversion (which does not always give enough attention to the context and coping processes), very little is known about the influence of religion on the context. This is, however, an important issue during crisis periods, because the individual's religious experience, interpretation, behavior, and rituals may not always be acceptable to the religious context. At this point the questions are evident.

### *Coping - Context*

Over the last decades, social support theories and coping theories have become more coherent, indicating that these fields are largely interdependent. Questions remain as to the ways in which social support influences the coping process (e.g., as a direct independent effect on well-being or as a mediating variable between stress and well-being; see Lin, Dean, & Ensel, 1986). Less attention has been given to the effects of coping processes on the context in general and, more specifically, on social support. This is even more important when one observes that contexts change in various ways during crisis periods. Several questions can be asked when it comes to religious coping in context. How do the changes in society affect the possibilities of religious coping? What new forms of religious coping emerge in pluralistic and secularized contexts?

### *Coping - Identity*

In coping-research, many personality variables have been described that are important in the coping process. Again, the influence of coping on identity has been, until recently, mainly a matter of speculation, because identity and personality have been regarded as mainly static phenomena. Important personality theories like Freud's and Erikson's can be viewed as a coping theories of personality formation, but that would be a reformulation rather than a repetition of their perspectives. The investigation of the connection between identity and religious coping has only just begun (Schaefer and Gorsuch, 1993; Van Uden, 1985). Relevant questions concern the interaction of coping skills and personality types. Other questions regard the influence of crisis and coping on how a person esteems and interprets himself or herself.

## CONCLUSION: ONE FURTHER STEP

Despite the research done so far, important questions concerning these interactions remain. Repeatedly we referred to Pargament's (1997) impressive overview of the state of the art. I criticized his approach for being one-sided and simplifying, even though his framework is already thoughtful and elaborate. What is missing is a more radical focus on process, on mutual impact, and on identity and social context. The proposal for a consequent multidimensionality in a theory of religious coping is therefore strengthened by Pargament's book. I believe that the approach outlined in this article has helped identify some blind spots, which were reformulated as a series of questions for future research.

One last disappointment in the approach of Pargament should be mentioned. His central and powerful concept for the intersection of religion and coping is significance. Given that choice, a hermeneutical perspective seems most appropriate, as we stated in the opening of this article (see Ganzevoort, 1993). However, most research in religious coping, including Pargament's, soon exchanges this fundamentally hermeneutical approach for correlational

methods. To understand religious coping, I believe that the complement of a consequent and radically hermeneutical perspective is needed in conceptualization, theory, and research. In the next article I will propose a narrative reformulation, which could serve as a further integration and theoretical framework.

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