Meaning-making Coping Among Contemporary Science of Mind Congregations in the United States

Figure 1

Josyanne Visscher

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Groningen, 12-08-2018

Josyanne Visscher
Student number: S2385848
Word count: 20.878

ABSTRACT

This study aims to increase our knowledge regarding the Science of Mind movement in general and processes of religious coping—including meaning-making coping—within that movement. Studying the Science of Mind movement and the psychological processes of religious coping contributes to our understanding of what role religion plays in contemporary society. In other words, this research demonstrates how religion helps individuals to deal with stressful situations, and it will enable us to get a better understanding of how people shape their religious lives, and how their ideologies and practices reflect modern-day spirituality and esotericism.

The assertion that the religious practices and ideologies found within the Science of Mind movement can be employed as meaning-making coping strategies, gave rise to the following question: "To what extent do members of contemporary American Science of Mind groups employ religious meaning-making strategies in order to cope with stressful events?" This question is the main focus of the current study, using psychological religious coping and meaning-making theories as a theoretical framework. A combination of different research methods was employed in order to obtain knowledge of the different religious coping strategies present within the Science of Mind movement, including literature analysis and survey research. The data gathered was analysed both quantitatively as well as qualitatively.

The results show that spiritual connection, religious helping, seeking spiritual support, collaborative religious coping, seeking support from clergy and members, and benevolent religious reappraisal [meaning-making coping] are frequently used by Science of Mind members. This supports the claim that meaning-making coping is an important religious coping strategy that coexists with other important religious strategies.

Therefore, the concepts of religious coping and meaning-making appear to be in a dynamic relationship. This eliminates the assumption that meaning-making coping is superior to the religious coping strategies as formulated by Pargament or vice versa. This may direct future research on the processes of religious coping and meaning-making coping.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Uncovering the Science of Mind movement

My thesis will focus on the examination of different religious coping strategies, including meaning-making coping, as employed by Science of Mind members in the United States. Science of Mind is a spiritual, philosophical, and metaphysical religious movement within the broader New Thought movement. Science of Mind is part of the United Centers for Spiritual Living and International Centers for Spiritual Living, also known as the United Church of Religious Science and Religious Science International, respectively. These organizations originate from the Institute of Religious Science that was established by Ernest Holmes in 1927.

Not all members agree with the term Center for Spiritual Living, because it does not refer to the origin of Science of Mind or the teachings of Ernest Holmes. Consequently, the terms Religious Science, Centers for Spiritual Living and Science of Mind are used interchangeably by its members. For the purposes of this study, however, I will refer to the movement as Science of Mind. According to Ernest Holmes, Science of Mind is a spiritual philosophy, a way of life that is focused on the correlation of laws of science, philosophy, and revelations of religion.[1] At the same time, however, Science of Mind can also be regarded as a secular philosophy.

Ernest Holmes asserted that Science of Mind is "based entirely upon the supposition that we are surrounded by a Universal Mind into which we think; this Mind, in Its original state, fills all space with Its Presence. (…) It is in man as well as outside of him. As he thinks into this Universal Mind he sets in motion a Law which is creative, and which contains within Itself a limitless possibility."[2] Thus, Science of Mind adherents believe in a God who is omnipresent and omnibenevolent—a good God that is one with the

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[1] Holmes, Ernest. *The science of mind* (New York 1926), eds. unknown, *The science of mind* (Guilford 2012), 1–24.
[2] Ibidem, 139.

universe and one with humans. In the Science of Mind philosophy, true selfhood is regarded as divine. Human beings hold the same creative potential as God, since humans were made in his image. This creative potential of humans is expressed in the limitless capacities of thought, which means that all human accomplishments originate in thought. Therefore, Science of Mind adherents believe that this form of divine thought is a force of good and can be used to change one's life: "right thinking" has a healing effect.[3]

Nowadays, there are many Science of Mind groups around the world. From my own experience I learned that many of these groups focus on something called "spiritual mind treatment," which is a form of affirmative prayer based on positive thinking and "right thinking." For example, some Science of Mind members will employ positive affirmations, such as "I recognize an existence of Greatness that overcomes within me. I allow myself to no longer suffer from unwanted or hurtful moments. Instead, I celebrate that each and every second of my life and every experience I have had, brings me closer to shedding those things which cause me grief and pain. (…) I know that God is in me and It is expressing Its Divine Nature as my very life. I hold myself up in the midst of any crisis that may befall me knowing that the truth of my being is I am One as God."[4] This type of thinking is what is seen as positive or affirmative thinking and Science of Mind members believe that when you employ this technique, you will attract positive energies and the universe will reciprocate (similar to the *law of attraction*). In this way, one's thoughts manifest in the material world.

Ernest Holmes drew on different psychological theories to substantiate his claims. For instance, he refers to the psychoanalytical distinction between the conscious mind and the subconscious mind, as formulated by Freud.[5] Moreover, Holmes' notion of a Divine Mind that is all-

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[3] Holmes, Ernest. 'What we Believe.' Website: http://scienceofmind.com/what-we-believe/).
[4] Demarco, Les. 'Treatment to Lift a Heavy Heart.' Website:
https://revlesblog.wordpress.com/2013/01/15/treatment-to-lift-a-heavy-heart/).
[5] Holmes, Ernest. *The science of mind* (New York 1926), eds. unknown, *The science of mind* (Guilford 2012), 59.

encompassing and ever-present fits the concept of the collective unconscious advocated by Jung. Both terms refer to aspects of the unconscious experienced by all people in different circumstances and different cultures. Holmes also appropriated Jung's conceptualization of the anima and animus, emphasizing that God—and therefore every human being—contains "within itself the principle of both the masculine and the feminine."[6] In addition, Holmes' focus on individuality corresponds with Jung's emphasis on the individuation process. At first glance, these terms might seem incompatible, but Jung and Holmes employ these different terms to refer to the same process. They both view individuality or individuation as a process of personal growth—a process during which individuals discover their true potential.

Interestingly, positive thinking within the Science of Mind movement can be linked to the centrality of positive thinking within the positive psychology movement, which "hopes to develop a science that will maximize human happiness and potential, helping people to live well."[7] Positive psychologists argue that achieving goals of happiness and well-being is dependent on a person's individual strength, character traits, moral virtues, as well a sense of meaning and significance in life. Research has found that positive thinking can aid in stress management and plays a significant role in one's overall health and well-being.[8] Both religion and psychology are well-equipped to aid people in their search for happiness and well-being.

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[6] Ibidem, 30.

[7] Nelson, James M. *Psychology, religion and spirituality* (New York 2009), 353.

[8] Naseem, Zarghuna and Ruhi Khalid. 'Positive Thinking in Coping with Stress and Health outcomes: Literature Review,' *Journal of Research and Reflections in Education*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2010), 42–61.

1.2 The prevalence of religious coping

During my stay in Houston, I visited a Science of Mind congregation or Center for Spiritual Living, and I observed that many people were coping with stressful events by making use of Science of Mind's metaphysical tools and rituals. As he explained, Science of Mind has helped him cope with his loss. I also noticed that many Science of Mind members were talking about hurricane Harvey to help them cope with its devastating consequences. These different ways of coping with adversity, initially inspired me to make a connection between Science of Mind and religious coping and meaning-making strategies. Mental healing and other coping strategies, can provide people with ways to deal with stressful events.

According to Pargament, coping is the "continually changing process through which individuals try to understand and deal with significant personal or situational demands in their lives."[9] Here, Pargament assumes that people are active agents who constantly construct the significance of events through the appraisal of meaning. This raises the question of when and how coping involves religion. According to Pargament, religion is a way to search for meaning "in ways related to the sacred."[10] Religion helps people to deal with life's difficulties. Religious coping occurs when events and our main goals are understood in relation to the sacred. Therefore, religion has a functional aspect that helps people to preserve or transform their views of stressful events and their main beliefs or goals.[11]

Religious coping has been examined among many different populations. For instance, studies of US and British psychiatric inpatients have found that approximately 70% to 80% use religious coping, including worship, prayer and service attendance. It is less common among college

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[9] Pargament, Kenneth I. 'God Help Me: Toward a theoretical framework of coping for the psychology of religion,' *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 2 (1990), 198.

[10] Pargament, Kenneth I. *The psychology of religion and coping: theory, research and practice* (New York 1997), 32.

[11] Nelson, James M. *Psychology, Religion and Spirituality* (New York 2009), 320–321.

students, but still very frequent. Moreover, religious coping is more likely to be observed among people with higher levels of religiosity, and among members who have less access to secular resources, such as those who are elderly, poor or less educated. According to Pargament, religious coping may be more likely in potentially harmful situations that are hard to control and that may result in a loss or threat to a person's well-being.[12] The reason for this is that all individuals generally bring an orienting system to the coping process. Religion (e.g. religious beliefs, practices, feelings and relationships) is one part of this larger orienting system. As an element of this orienting system, religion precedes a particular crisis, thereby "structuring the way critical situations are anticipated, interpreted and handled."[13] Thus, religion is more likely to be part of the coping process when it is more available to the individual.

A process that relates to religious coping is referred to as meaning-making. Meaning-making is the process by which persons construe, understand, or make sense of life events, relationships and the self.[14] Although this is a good definition of the process of meaning-making, it suggests that meaning-making is a process that is independent from the process of religious coping. Most scholars in the field of the psychology of religion, including Pargament, regard meaning-making as a form of coping. By viewing religion as a way to search for significance, Pargament asserts that all religious coping strategies can be regarded as meaning-making. When a stressful event threatens an individual's sense of meaning in life, a new meaning is given to the event. This process is often referred to as the appraisal of meaning. As stated by Pargament, this is the most important factor in the process of religious coping. With regard to my research, I am mainly interested in how persons construe meaning and make sense of life events in the face of adversity. This emphasis on stressful events is specific

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[12] Ibidem, 322.

[13] Pargament, Kenneth I. *The psychology of religion and coping* (New York 1997), 144.

[14] Ignelzi, Michael. 'Meaning Making in the Learning and Teaching Process,' *New Directions for Learning and Teaching*, Vol. 82 (2000), 5–14.

to the concept of coping. Therefore, I will refer to meaning-making as a form of coping, using the term *meaning-making coping* as formulated by Park.[15] Throughout the text, I will employ *meaning-making coping* as core analytical term. According to Park, meaning-making coping is "often characterized as attempting to see the event in a better light, or as cognitively working through the event. It may involve meaning-making mechanisms such as reappraising events as more positive or creating more benign reattributions [i.e. finding more acceptable reasons why an event occurred and who or what is responsible for its occurrence]. For example, following the death of a loved one, a person may come to see the event as an opportunity to learn new coping skills or develop new sources of social support."[16] This coping strategy differs from other coping strategies, because it specifically focuses on meaning-making. Other coping strategies, such as spiritual discontent, do not necessarily result in meaning-making. See chapter two for more information on meaning-making.

Park's Meaning-Making Model is a useful theoretical framework for understanding the processes of meaning-making coping. The Meaning-Making Model identifies two levels of meaning: global and situational. Global meaning refers to individuals' general orienting systems, while situational meaning refers to meaning regarding a specific instance or 'appraised meaning.'[17] There are certain stressful events that can cause discrepancies between people's appraised meaning of a particular situation (situational meaning) and their global meaning.[18] These discrepancies create distress. As a result, different coping strategies can be employed to reduce this distress. According to Park, meaning-making coping is the most adaptive coping style. It involves changing the very meaning of the stressor and

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[15] Park, Crystal L. 'Religion as a Meaning-Making Framework in Coping with Life Stress,' *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 61, No. 4 (2005), 707–711.
[16] Idem.
[17] Park, Crystal L. 'Implicit Religion and the Meaning Making Model,' *Implicit Religion* (2011), 405-406.
[18] Ibidem, 407–408.

searching for a more favourable understanding of the situation and its implication.[19]

Religion engenders high-level meaning-making coping processes, by framing stressful events in metaphysical frameworks.[20] This way, a new meaning is given to life, and even to death. Worldwide, 85% of people report that they have some sort of religious belief, and in the United States the majority of American citizens state that religion is an important feature of their lives.[21] This means that there are many individuals who view religion as a main source of meaning. Moreover, research has indicated that religion exerts its influence in times of stress.[22] Therefore, it is plausible to argue that construing meaning in the face of adversity is an important function that religion has today.

Schnell identified at least twenty-six different sources of meaning that can vary according to one's own commitments, and his or her personal sense of belonging. This means that individual differences exist in meaning-making coping, and that meaning can be sought in many different ways.[23] Moreover, Park asserts that in human lives, religious and non-religious aspects of global meaning are intermingled. This means that a person might turn to either secular meaning systems or religious systems in their search for meaning.[24]

Now one might ask how the different coping strategies, including meaning-making coping, are relevant for the examination of the Science of Mind movement. I will explain this in further detail. Cognition—or all conscious and unconscious processes by which knowledge is accumulated,

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[19] Idem.

[20] Van Uden, Marinus H.F. and Hessel J. Zondag. 'Religion as an Existential Resource: on Meaning-Making, Religious Coping and Rituals,' *European Journal of Mental Health*, Vol. 11 (2016), 1–7.

[21] Pew Research Center, 'Importance of Religion and Religious Beliefs.' (Website: http://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/chapter-1-importance-of-religion-and-religious-beliefs/).

[22] Park, Crystal L. 'Religion and Meaning,' in: Crystal L. Park and Raymond F. Paloutzian (eds.) *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* (New York 2013), 366–367.

[23] Schnell, 'Individual Differences in Meaning-making: Considering the Variety of Sources of Meaning, their Density and Diversity,' *Personality and Individual Differences* Vol. 51 (2011), 671–672.

[24] Park, Crystal L. 'Religion and Meaning,' in: Crystal L. Park and Raymond F. Paloutzian (eds.) *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* (New York 2013), 360–361.

such as perceiving, recognizing, conceiving and reasoning—is central to religion and to processes of religious coping and meaning-making. Whether it is understood as a religion or a secular philosophy, Science of Mind informs an individual's understanding of the world, it explains the nature of their existence and attributes causes to stressful events.

Moreover, the Science of Mind philosophy focuses on how certain events can be changed and interpreted, giving a leading role to human beings as divine thinkers. For this reason, it is likely that the Science of Mind movement provides its members with meaning-making coping potential. For instance, the idea that Divine Intelligence permeates us, influences the way a person deals with stress and changes the meaning of a stressful situation: sickness, death, insanity or negative thoughts are not permanent anymore, but can be changed, because the Divine Mind works for us, through us and can be directed by us. Furthermore, Science of Mind works by applying a conceptualization of an omnipresent and omnibenevolent God. Science of Mind provides people with a general orienting system. Therefore, it is plausible to frame the different coping strategies within the Science of Mind movement as religious coping.

Religious coping plays an important role in dealing with life-changing, stressful events, because religion contributes to the construction of meaning. However, due to a scholarly neglect it remains unclear if religious coping strategies are applied within esoteric movements such as Science of Mind, and to what extent these strategies are applied—especially when considering the differences between esoteric religious practices and ideologies [including images of God, conceptions of God] and Christian, Jewish or Muslim practices and ideologies. This is an important statement to make, because researchers examining religious coping have mainly focused on the three Abrahamic religions. Accordingly, this study examines the extent to which different religious coping strategies are employed, based on the writings published by Holmes, and survey research among the members of contemporary Science of Mind congregations.

My research is exploratory in nature, meaning that its first and foremost purpose is to obtain knowledge of how Science of Mind ideologies and practices help people to deal with stressful events by engendering religious coping strategies, thereby mapping new developments in esoteric religious coping practices, including meaning-making coping. In addition, some Science of Mind members may employ secular coping strategies, meaning that my research might provide valuable insights into processes of secularization. With regard to the different religious coping strategies, I expect that Science of Mind members are provided with different methods to deal with stressful events. Some of these strategies will consist of rituals and processes that can be identified with other religions, while other religious coping strategies are more nuanced, such as the spiritual mind healing techniques that are employed within the Science of Mind movement.

1.3 Research question, Methodology and Ethics

I examine the following question: "To what extent do members of contemporary American Science of Mind congregations employ religious meaning-making strategies in order to cope with stressful events?" To examine how coping strategies emerge in the context of American Science of Mind communities and teachings, the following sub-questions will be addressed:

1. **What** kinds of religious coping strategies are prescribed in the teachings of Science of Mind?
2. **What** do adherents of contemporary American Science of Mind congregations or Centre's for Spiritual Living report on their religious coping strategies?

1.3.1 Design and Setting

This cross-sectional and interdisciplinary study was conducted in an exploratory quantitative design. The investigation was performed in the form of online survey research. Most of the surveys were completed in the southern and western states of America. Southern culture is viewed as a subculture of the United States. Due to its unique history, southern cultures are more socially conservative and more religious compared to other countries in the United States. Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Virginia, West-Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia and Florida are generally regarded as the Southern United States.

The West has been formed by a multitude of ethnic groups. California, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Utah and Nevada all have large Hispanic populations. In the north western states of Oregon and Washington, the Mexican-American population has grown as well. The western states have also been influenced by Asian and Native American culture. In general, individuals with a Mexican-American, Asian or Native American background have been found to be more religious. The term Western United States refers to Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Idaho, Utah, Arizona, Nevada, California, Oregon, Washington, Hawaii and Alaska.

1.3.2 Sample

The sample consisted of both men and women at the selected institutions: Science of Mind congregations or Centers for Spiritual Living in the western and southern states of America. High-status individuals as well as low-status individuals were included. No distinction was made between ordained Science of Mind priests and practitioners or members without an authoritative position. Members of all ages and ethnicities were included. Including both men and women of all ages, regardless of their social status,

allowed for maximum variation sampling. Maximum variation sampling allows for a wide variety of respondents to participate, and ensures that the sample is representative.

Respondents had to be active members of the Science of Mind movement in order to partake in my survey research. I initially focused on the southern states, because southerners are perceived to be more religious than American citizens living in other parts of the United States. For this reason, I expected a concentration of movement supporters in the southern states. Moreover, my research was inspired by an observation within a Science of Mind congregation in Houston, Texas. Nonetheless, during the last phase of my research, I decided to include individuals living in the western states as well, because it proved to be quite difficult to gather data focusing mainly on the southern states.

In order to reach more members of Science of Mind congregations or American Centers for Spiritual Living, I employed snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a recruitment technique in which research participants are asked to assist researchers in identifying other potential subjects.[25] The greatest advantage of snowball sampling is its success in identifying individuals from previously unknown and potentially very large populations. The greatest disadvantage of this technique is that the researcher has little control over the sampling method. The subjects that the researcher can obtain are completely dependent on the previous subjects that were observed, meaning that it is uncertain how many participants will be reached and whether they meet the inclusion criteria.

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[25] Oregon State University, 'Snowball Sampling.' Website: https://research.oregonstate.edu/irb/policies-and-guidance-investigators/guidance/snowball-sampling.

1.3.3 Data collection

In order to gather as much information as possible, I decided to combine different research methods. I employed literature analysis of primary books and survey research. I decided to combine the methods of literature analysis and survey research in order to gain a better understanding of the Science of Mind movement from an emic as well as etic perspective. This enabled me to provide a thorough, detailed study of the religious coping strategies that are employed in Science of Mind communities.

I made the decision to conduct survey research for three reasons. First, survey research provided me with the opportunity to collect data from a larger population. This means that the conclusions of this research are potentially more representative of the population of Science of Mind communities in the western and southern states of America. Second, survey research enabled me to explore different aspects of religious coping within the American Science of Mind movement. Although qualitative interviews also have the capacity to provide such an examination, survey research allows for more certainty about the validity of the operationalisation of certain constructs.

Survey research has its limits. This method might not account for all developments within the contemporary American Science of Mind movement. When asked to complete surveys, participants may not feel encouraged to provide answers [*non-response bias*]. Moreover, participants may not feel comfortable providing answers that present themselves in an unfavourable manner. Finally, survey question results can lead to obscure data. Respondents may interpret each statement differently.

However, in my view this is a good method to conduct my research. Employing Pargament's RCOPE gave me detailed information on the different religious coping strategies that were employed by Science of Mind

members.[26] The survey format allowed me to incorporate open-ended questions, thereby acquiring more in-depth knowledge of Science of Mind as a source of meaning. Finally, having respondents fill in surveys helped me to determine to what extent meaning-making coping processes are employed, because the RCOPE includes a Likert-type scale with four items: Very often, often, seldom and not at all.[27] The survey focused on three different aspects. The first part of the survey was focused on collecting background information, such as ethnicity, age, gender, religious identification and so on. Next, the participant was asked to reflect on a stressful event in their lives and how they coped with that event. This part of the survey consisted of twelve open-ended questions on meaning-making coping within the Science of Mind movement. The final part of the survey consisted of Pargament's RCOPE, containing eighteen statements on positive religious coping and eleven statements on negative religious coping. The survey was concluded by asking the participants if they had any other responses that were not covered in the survey, followed by some questions on how Science of Mind provides them with a sense of meaning in life. Finally, the respondent was asked whether they wanted to receive a summary of this research. They could do so by providing their contact information. However, this was optional.[28]

1.3.4 Data analysis

In order to analyze the primary data, I employed qualitative and quantitative data analyses. First, I interpreted and color-coded all answers to the twelve open-ended questions of the survey [*content analysis of textual material*]. This accelerated the process of identifying common

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[26] Pargament, K.I. 'The Brief RCOPE: Current Psychometric Status of a Short Measure of Religious Coping,' *Religions*, Vol. 2, No. 51–76 (2011), 51–76; Pargament, K.I. 'Religion and Coping,' in: Harold G. Koenig (ed.) *Handbook of Religion and Mental Health* (Cambridge 1998), 111–128; Pargament K.I. 'The Many Methods of Religious Coping: Development and Initial Validation of the RCOPE,' *Journal of Clinical Psychology,* Vol. 56, No. 4 (2000), 519–543.

[27] Idem.

[28] See appendix II for a copy of the original survey.

patterns of religious coping, including meaning-making coping. Secondly, I coded the scale items and linked each RCOPE statement to a corresponding religious coping strategy. Thirdly, I calculated the mean subscale scores per religious coping strategy of the entire population [*group average*] by using Microsoft Excel. Finally, I identified subgroups within the main population [most of the participants being female]. I also recorded the main characteristics of the population with regard to the background information provided at the beginning of the survey.

1.3.5 Ethics

There are some ethical concerns that need to be taken into consideration when conducting research. In survey research, ethical principles are primarily centred on protecting research participants [the respondents] and employ the guiding foundation of "do no harm." Core ethical principles that are important in survey research are: respect for persons (respecting the autonomy, decision-making and dignity of participants), and respect for communities (protecting and respecting the values and interests of the community as a whole and protect the community from harm). This includes voluntary participation and informed consent.[29]

I included an informed consent form in the survey to ensure that all respondents participated in the survey of their own volition, and that they were fully informed regarding the procedures of my research. This form explained the topic of my research, its goals, its purpose and provided further information with regard to anonymity, privacy and confidentiality. It also allowed the participant to agree or disagree with voluntary participation.[30] I have protected and preserved the identity of participants by not referring to their personal name, but by giving them an alias.

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[29] Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching, 'Ethical Concerns in Research.' Website: https://cirt.gcu.edu/research/developmentresources/research_ready/designing_surveys/survey_ethics.
[30] See appendix II for a copy of the informed consent form (part of the survey).

In addition, encryptions were put in place to protect the data being accessed by unauthorized users. Files uploaded as responses can only be viewed by users with permission to view their responses. Since the survey contains sensitive and rather private information, I provided participants with an "I'd rather not specify" option. While taking the survey, participants could choose whether they wanted to disclose certain information or not. For instance, not filling in the open-ended questions would not hinder a participant's progress in completing the survey.

In the previous section I explained the Science of Mind movement, and offered a detailed overview of my research topic, including my research questions, while this section mainly focused on methodology and ethics. Before moving on to a more in-depth analysis of the specific meaning-making coping strategies within the Science of Mind movement, it is necessary to provide more background information. Therefore, the next two chapters will examine Pargament's different religious coping strategies and the Meaning-Making Model proposed by Park, as well as the historical development of Science of Mind in greater detail.

2. Psychological theories of religious coping and meaning-making

2.1 Pargament and his theory of religious coping strategies

Although I have mentioned what religious coping is, little has been said about the different religious coping strategies that exist. My research question is centered on what kinds of religious coping strategies, including meaning-making coping, are prescribed in the teachings of Science of Mind. In order to answer this question in the next chapters, it is necessary to include a detailed overview of the different religious coping strategies according to Pargament.

Pargament's theory of the different religious coping strategies is based on the assertion that religion can be understood as a way of coping human beings use to solve problems. However, not all coping is necessarily religious and not all religion is a means of coping. In general, "People look for some grounding in coping. What they turn to is an orienting system to help them make sense of and deal with the world, an orienting system that includes, to a greater or lesser extent, religion."[31] Thus, relying on a general orienting system helps individuals to find a sense of meaning in life.

Pargament asserts that there are three main styles of religious coping: a self-directing approach, a deferring approach, and a collaborative approach. In the self-directing coping style, the individual affirms the presence of the divine, but remains self-reliant. Instead of relying on God, the focus here is on personal autonomy and control. In contrast, in a deferring coping style, the responsibility for a problem is deferred to God. This coping style is more passive and depends on the authority of God. Thus, it is linked to lower personal control and self-esteem. Finally, there is the collaborative coping style, which is focused on an active partnership between the individual and God. This religious coping style is related to high personal control and self-esteem.[32]

In his original theory, Pargament suggested that the collaborative and self-directing coping strategies are the most desirable. In addition, recent research has demonstrated that the collaborative style and the self-directing style are most consistently linked with positive adjustment.[33] However, research also shows that no single strategy is best all the time. This indicates that religious coping strategies need to be adapted to the situation and that individual adjustment is achieved by employing a variety of coping methods.[34] Other religious coping strategies have been suggested

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[31] Pargament, Kenneth I. *The Psychology of religion and coping: theory, research, practice* (New York 1997), 149; 162.

[32] Nelson, James M. *Psychology, religion and spirituality* (New York 2009), 322.

[33] Pargament, Kenneth I. *The Psychology of religion and coping: theory, research, practice* (New York 1997), 180–182.

[34] Idem.

by researchers in the field of the psychology of religion. For instance, Wong-McDonald and colleagues suggested the "surrender-to-God" coping style. In contrast to the passive waiting of the deferring style, the surrender-to-God style refers to an active submission to God in a particular situation.[35]

In addition, many researchers, including Pargament, advocate a broader categorization of religious coping styles, distinguishing between positive and negative coping styles. Positive religious coping refers to a positive focus with regard to the religious dimension. God is understood as benevolent, forgiving, loving, and in control. He is a partner in handling stressful situations. Here, the individual feels supported by his or her congregation and feels a sense of comfort in his or her spirituality.[36] Doing good deeds and living a better life are part of this coping strategy. Conversely, negative religious coping refers to a feeling of spiritual discontent, a crisis of faith and a lack of congregational support. Here, God is understood as punishing or not a source of help. This may lead a person to feel afflicted by God. This results in passive forms of religious coping: either deferring or pleading.[37]

Positive religious coping is related to beneficial outcomes, while negative religious coping is connected to poorer outcomes. As such, positive religious coping strategies seem to correspond with a better physical health, a higher sense of self-esteem and life satisfaction, and better adjustment to negative life events. Positive coping styles may result in better psychological and spiritual outcomes: there is less indication for depression or stress and more spiritual growth.[38] In contrast, negative coping styles seem to relate to negative cognitions and less successful outcomes.[39]

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[35] Wong-McDonald, A. 'A Multivariate Theory of God Concept, Religious Motivation, Locus of Control, Coping and Spiritual Well-Being,' *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (2004), 323.

[36] Nelson, James M. *Psychology, religion and spirituality* (New York 2009), 324–325.

[37] Idem.

[38] Idem.

[39] Corsini, Kevin D. "Examining the Relationship between Religious Coping Strategies, Attachment Beliefs and Emotion Regulation in a Mixed Sample of College Students Attending an Evangelical University in Central Virginia," PhD. diss., Liberty University, Lynchburg (VA), 2009, 55–59.

There has been heavy critique of Pargament's categorization of positive and negative coping strategies. Ano and Vasconcelles investigated "four types of relationships: positive religious coping and positive psychological adjustment, positive religious coping with negative psychological adjustment, negative religious coping with positive psychological adjustment, and negative religious coping with negative psychological adjustment."[40] Significantly, the results of the study conducted by Ano and Vasconcellles did not support the hypothesis that "negative religious coping is inversely related to positive psychological adjustment."[41] This means that individuals who felt punished by God or attributed their suffering to the work of the Devil did not necessarily report a lower level of self-esteem or less spiritual growth.[42] The fact that negative religious coping strategies may not always result in poorer outcomes undermines the distinction between positive and negative religious coping, because the distinction itself is based on the assumption that positive religious coping leads to positive outcomes, while negative religious coping leads to negative outcomes. As the research has revealed, this is not always the case.

Pargament suggested another way of viewing the positive and negative coping styles by focusing on the costs and benefits of religion. Pargament (2002) argues that religion is a double-edged sword, meaning that religion may engender both positive and negative life attitudes. He also mentions that those who "orient their lives more closely to religion appear to experience more of the benefits associated with benevolent systems of belief and practice, (…) and more of the costs associated with religious stress and struggle."[43] In stating that religious individuals will experience both the costs and benefits of religion, both the positive and negative, Pargament undermines the distinction between positive and negative

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[40] Ano, G.G. and E.B. Vasconcelles, 'Religious Coping and Psychological Adjustment to Stress: A Meta-Analysis,' *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 61, No. 4 (2005), 461; 473–474.
[41] Idem.
[42] Idem.
[43] Pargament, Kenneth I. 'The Bitter and the Sweet: An Evaluation of the Costs and Benefits of Religiousness,' *Psychological Inquiry*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (2002), 173–174.

religious coping. Thus, this raises the following question: Why is a theoretical distinction between positive and negative religious coping necessary if negative or positive religious attitudes coexist in reality?

Moreover, how can one decide that religious coping is either positive or negative? In the future, longitudinal research may suggest that negative religious coping can lead to positive outcomes, since spiritual struggle may increase an individual's level of stress-related growth.[44] Another valid critique is concerned with Pargament's conceptualization of negative religious coping strategies. In my opinion, his description of negative coping styles does not fit the coping framework. This depends on how we interpret the terms "positive," "negative," and "coping." In general, people who use the positive strategies display a more secure relationship with God, whereas the people who use the negative strategies display a more insecure relationship with God, perhaps as a consequence of a large discrepancy between global and situational meaning. This would imply, however, that the negative strategies are not coping strategies, but are symptoms of distress.

In addition, coping strategies refer to the specific efforts that people employ to master, tolerate, reduce, or minimize stressful events. Reappraisals of God's power, spiritual discontent, and interpersonal discontent do not help the individual to reduce distressing emotions or to deal with his or her problems. In fact, these appraisals are associated with greater distress. What Pargament describes as negative religious coping strategies can be understood as situational appraisals. Views of God as powerless or punishing can strongly influence an individual's initial appraisal of a highly stressful event, and negative appraisals often occur before the actual coping process takes place. Thus, the negative religious coping strategies formulated by Pargament appear to be unrelated to the coping

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[44] Ibidem, 171–172.

process. For this reason, it is questionable to regard such negative appraisals as coping strategies.

Pargament created five subcategories that can be linked to the collaborative, the self-directing, and the deferring coping styles: religious methods of coping to find meaning, to gain control, to gain comfort and closeness to God, to gain intimacy with others and closeness to God, and to achieve a life transformation. The first subcategory refers to the coping strategies of benevolent religious reappraisal, punishing God reappraisal, and reappraisal of God's powers. The second subcategory consists of collaborative religious coping and self-directing religious coping. The third subcategory of coping strategies that are employed to gain comfort and closeness to God include seeking spiritual support, religious focus, religious purification, spiritual connection, and spiritual discontent. The fourth subcategory of strategies to gain intimacy with others and closeness to God relates to seeking support from clergy or fellow congregation members, religious helping, and interpersonal religious discontent, while the fifth subcategory is linked to seeking religious direction and religious forgiving.[45]

Seeking spiritual support or spiritual connection and seeking support from clergy or members are understood as collaborative forms of religious coping. Seeking spiritual support focuses on the individual's loving and nurturing relationship with God. God is understood as loving and caring, available for help in times of need. Similarly, seeking support from clergy or other congregation members is a collaborative strategy in which the individual is supported by other believers. For instance, when confronted with illness, a person may pray to God to provide serenity and healing (spiritual support). The same person may also share his or her worries with friends at church or any other religious community (seeking support from clergy or other members).[46] According to Nooney and Woodrum, religious

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[45] Pargament, Kenneth I. 'The Many Methods of Religious Coping: Development and Initial Validation of the RCOPE,' *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (2000), 519–525.

[46] Pargament, Kenneth I. *The Psychology of religion and coping: theory, research, practice* (New York 1997), 184–186.

coping combined with church-based social support affects depression scores. However, they also insist that church-based social support can be either positive or negative.[47]

Self-directing strategies of religious coping focus on the individual's responsibility in dealing with stressful situations. Spiritual discontent is a self-directing strategy that refers to a feeling of anger and alienation towards God. Corsini argues that this strategy falls under the category of negative religious coping, because it does not result in positive outcomes.[48] Pargament, however, states that the self-directing approach is related to higher levels of psychological and social resourcefulness.[49] Spiritual discontent can be constructive; feeling anger towards God may lead to more realistic expectations of God, provided that other religious coping strategies are employed simultaneously. Therefore, the self-directing style can be associated with positive outcomes.

The deferring styles of religious coping draw attention to the individual's inability to cope with a stressful situation on his or her own, and instead choosing to passively wait for God to intervene (divine intervention). These styles involve religious helping and interpersonal religious discontent. Religious helping focuses the individual's attention on living a better life in order to please God and earn his approval. Individuals who make use of this strategy generally hope that God will reward their good deeds by removing stress or grief. Interpersonal religious discontent refers to a feeling of confusion and dissatisfaction in relation to clergy or fellow congregation members, thereby deferring responsibility or autonomy to external sources. According to Corsini, deferring strategies do not result in positive outcomes and are thus understood as forms of negative religious

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[47] Nooney, Jennifer and Eric Woodrum. 'Religious Coping and Church-Based Social Support as Predictors of Mental Health,' *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (2002), 366.

[48] Corsini, Kevin D. "Examining the Relationship between Religious Coping Strategies, Attachment Beliefs and Emotion Regulation in a Mixed Sample of College Students Attending an Evangelical University in Central Virginia," PhD. diss., Liberty University, Lynchburg (VA), 2009, 55–59.

[49] Pargament, Kenneth I. 'Religion and Coping,' in: Koenig (ed.) *Handbook of Religion and Mental Health* (San Diego 1998), 120–121.

coping.[50] While these strategies may not be associated with the resolution of the problem or the negative emotions an individual is experiencing, religious helping is associated with receiving more social support or experiencing satisfaction, both of which relieve distress.[51]

The religious coping framework has produced a large body of useful literature. However, Pargament's religious coping theory has its deficiencies. Although different religious coping styles can be identified, these categories are generally too broad to explain individual differences in the usage of multiple religious coping strategies.[52] In a context-bound stressful situation, people may use alternative coping strategies or a new combination of strategies that has not yet been examined. Moreover, the theory may not account for all factors that are of importance to the religious coping process.[53]

According to Nelson, potential complicating factors are " (1) the individual's level of cognitive and spiritual development, (2) the type of problem or stressor, (3) the specific situational and cultural context within which coping takes place, (4) changes in the coping process over time, (5) the specific group or population being studied, and (6) the multidimensional nature of religion and spirituality."[54] Future theoretical models should include more variables such as religious experience, motivation, affect, values, and actual coping behavior.[55] Knowing that the specific situational and cultural context may affect what types of religious coping are used and to what extent, Pargament's theory may result in misrepresentations with regard to the specific group or population being studied. Within the framework of his theory of different religious coping strategies, Pargament

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[50] Corsini, Kevin D. "Examining the Relationship between Religious Coping Strategies, Attachment Beliefs and Emotion Regulation in a Mixed Sample of College Students Attending an Evangelical University in Central Virginia," PhD. diss., Liberty University, Lynchburg (VA), 2009, 55–59.

[51] 'The Bitter and the Sweet: An Evaluation of the Costs and Benefits of Religiousness,' *Psychological Inquiry*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (2002), 171–172.

[52] Nelson, James M. *Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality* (New York 2009), 326–327.

[53] Idem.

[54] Idem.

[55] Idem.

focuses on a Christian and Jewish concept of God. This emphasis can lead to complications within the context of an esoteric current such as Science of Mind—a movement that mainly focuses on human inner divinity instead of a transcendent, unknowable God.

2.2 Park and the Meaning-Making Model

The previous section focused on an in-depth explanation of the theory advanced by Pargament. This section will address the Meaning-Making Model proposed by Park. In chapter one, I explained the Meaning-Making Model and the process of meaning-making coping that is set in motion when a stressful event causes a discrepancy between a person's appraised meaning of a particular situation (situational meaning) and his or her global meaning (see figures 1 and 2). In addition, a short description of the outcomes of the meaning-making coping process was provided (see figure 2). This section provides a detailed description of religion and meaning in stressful circumstances and elaborates on the positive and negative outcomes of the meaning-making coping process.
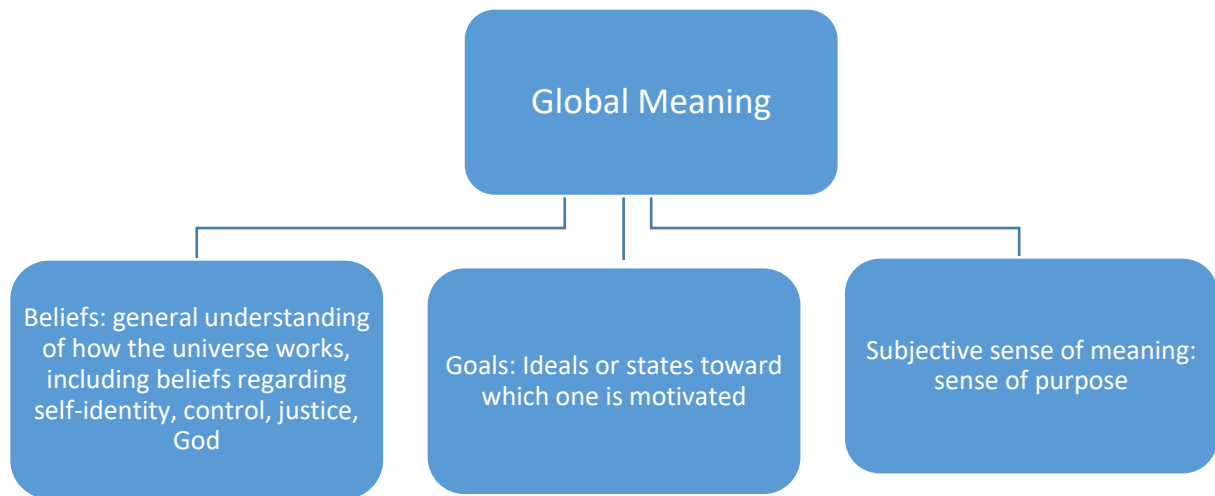
Figure 1. The composition of global meaning (based on Park's meaning-making model)[56]

[56] Park, Crystal L. 'The Meaning Making Model: a Framework for Understanding Meaning, Spirituality, and Stress-related Growth in Health Psychology,' *The European Health Psychologist*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2013), 40–41.

Situational meaning/ appraised meaning: attributions, primary appraisals (threat, loss, challenge), resources & efficacy

Discrepancy between situational and global meaning?

Distress

Making meaning: automatic effortful meaning-making coping

Meanings made: changes in situational meaning or global meaning and stress-related growth
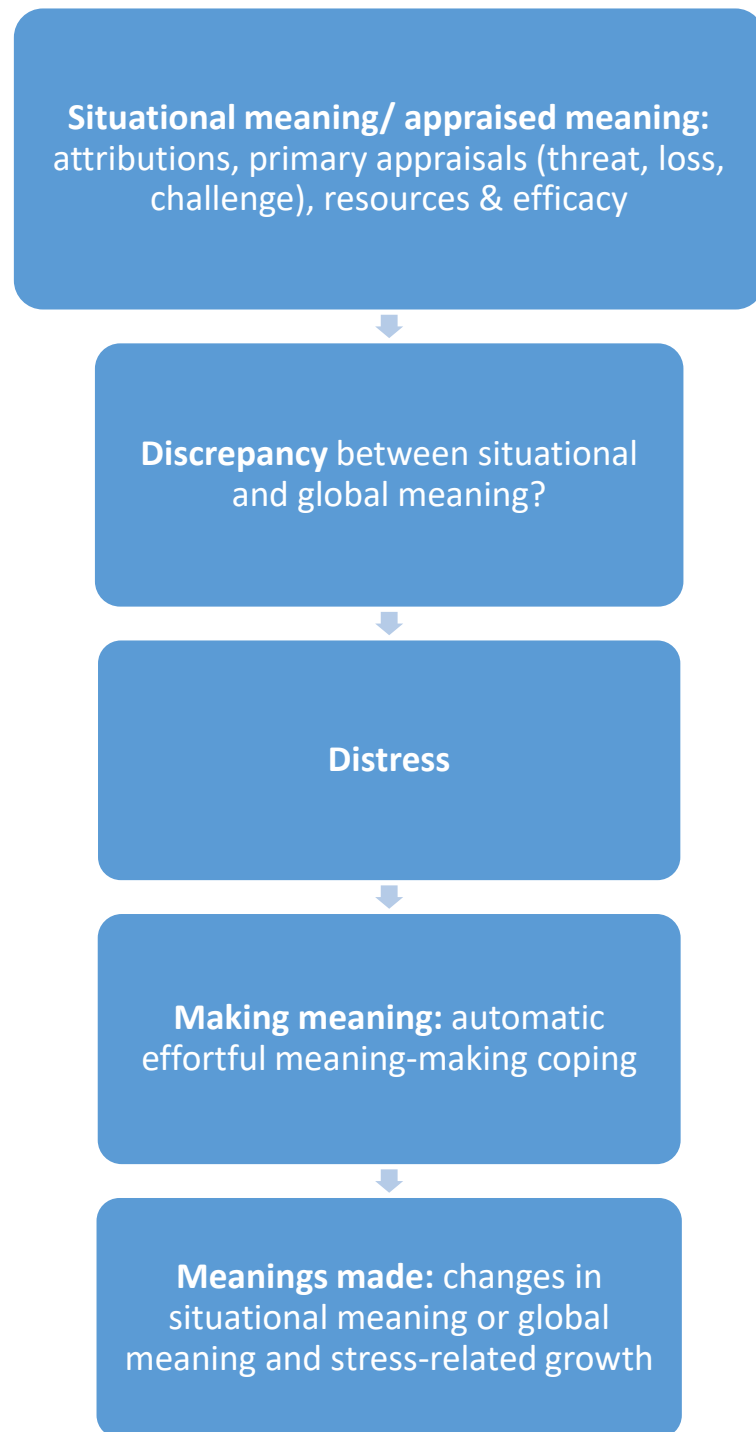
Figure 2. Causal model of the process of meaning-making (based on Park's meaning-making model)[57]

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[57] Idem.

The Meaning-Making Model posits that stressful events trigger processes of meaning-making coping, through which individuals reduce discrepancies between situational meaning and global meaning. Religion is a potentially important aspect of this process and appears to be influential in times of great stress. Although religious individuals tend to rely on religion as a source of their global beliefs and goals, it is not the only common basis for global meaning systems.[58] Nonetheless, when an individual's global meaning system is threatened or violated by a stressful event, most religions offer ways of understanding, reinterpreting, and adding value to the act of suffering by functioning as a general orienting system. For individuals who are experiencing injustice, suffering, or trauma, a religious belief system is one of multiple methods to make meaning from their experiences.[59]

Religion as a framework of meaning-making coping can affect people's initial appraisals or understanding of a particular event. Following a stressful event, individuals have different ways of constructing meaning. In general, this involves transforming the appraised meaning of an event by interpreting it in a less stressful way. For instance, some people may understand suffering as having redeeming value, or they may search for positive aspects of the event. Alternatively, individuals may change their global beliefs and goals to make them more compatible with their current understanding of what has happened. The following section explains how religion is involved in constructing meaning through the processes of initial appraisals, meaning-making coping, and the results of this process (the meanings made).[60]

Initial Appraisals. Depending on an individual's specific belief system, stressful events can be interpreted in different ways, and religious beliefs offer many alternative interpretations of an event. For instance,

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[58] Park, Crystal L. 'Religion and Meaning,' in: Crystal L. Park and Raymond F. Paloutzian (eds.) *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* (New York 2013), 357–361
[59] Ibidem, 366–367.
[60] Idem.

conceptions that there is a larger plan, that events happen for a reason, or that suffering can result in personal growth can imbue a stressful event with a specific meaning. Some individuals may believe that God would not mistreat them, while others may believe that God is communicating an important message through the event, or that the event is a punishment from God.[61] This also holds true for individuals who are dealing with the loss of a loved one. For example, some people are convinced that the deceased continue to exist and that the deceased and the bereaved will be reunited after death, while others believe that there is no afterlife or that it is unpleasant or painful.[62].

Event appraisals also include causal attributions. Attributions for negative events can be either naturalistic or religious. Naturalistic explanations for illnesses focus on natural causes such as stress, injury, or a weakened immune system. In contrast, religious attributions can include God's attempts to teach the person something that results in self-development or to punish the afflicted. It is important to note that most individuals focus on both naturalistic and religious attributions.[63] Gray and Wegner assert that religious individuals are more likely to turn to God for relief and comfort during stressful events, since God serves as the "emissary of suffering."[64] Thus, suffering evokes more attributions to the divine.

Religion and meaning-making coping. Following the initial appraisal of an event, individuals determine the extent to which that meaning is compatible with their global beliefs and goals. This process is not always deliberate or sequential, and it might take place on an unconscious level. Discrepancies between global and situational meaning produce distress and stimulate efforts to restore balance through meaning-making coping. Here, Park argues that meaning-making coping involves

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[61] Idem.

[62] Ibidem, 368.

[63] Idem.

[64] Gray, Kurt. and Daniel M. Wegner. 'Blaming God for Our Pain: Human Suffering and the Divine Mind,' *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2010), 11–12.

changing the appraised meaning of the stressor to make it less aversive or changing global beliefs and goals. These meaning-making coping strategies can have a religious aspect. Religious individuals employing meaning-making coping strategies use religion "to redefine the stressor as benevolent and potentially beneficial."[65] Park also mentions that "these types of religious reappraisals of both the meaning of the stressful event and one's global meaning are fairly common and may facilitate changes in meaning as well as powerfully influence adjustment to stressful events."[66]

To describe the dynamic process of meaning-making coping, Park has referred to her Meaning-Making Model as a Meaning-Making Coping Model, thereby focusing on the concept of meaning-making as a form of coping.[67] The Meaning-Making Coping Model posits that a discrepancy between situational and global meaning leads to a highly uncomfortable state, involving a loss of control and comprehension of the world. For individuals to recuperate, the discrepancy between situational and global meaning must be reduced by "changing the appraised meaning of the situation, changing their global beliefs and goals, or both. Such changes (…) facilitate integration of the appraised meaning of the event into their global meaning system."[68] This process is based on meaning-making mechanisms such as positive reappraisals. In addition, meaning-making coping involves many intrapsychic cognitive processes. According to Park, the meaning of a stressful event can only be transformed through cognitive adaptation.[69] I do not dispute this, but recent theories of embodied cognition propose that cognition or cognitive processing is dependent on the physical body of an agent, as well as the agent's physical, social, and cultural environment.[70]

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[65] Park, Crystal L. 'Religion and Meaning,' in: Crystal L. Park and Raymond F. Paloutzian (eds.) *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* (New York 2013), 369.

[66] Idem.

[67] Park, Crystal L. 'Religion as a Meaning-Making Framework in Coping with Life Stress,' *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 61, No. 4 (2005), 708-709.

[68] Ibidem, 710.

[69] Ibidem, 708–709.

[70] Wilson, Robert A. and Lucia Foglia. 'Embodied Cognition.' Website: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/embodied-cognition/#EmbVsTraCogSci.

Thus, meaning-making might be dependent on more factors than cognitive adaptation alone.

Religion and meanings made. The outcomes of religious meaning-making coping can be changes in situational meaning or changes in global meaning. When changing the situational meaning of a stressful event, religion provides individuals with positive reappraisals or reattributions that are consistent with their global belief system.[71] After a diagnosis, an individual's pre-illness religion may affect the situational meaning he or she assigns to the illness. A study of patients in treatment for different forms of cancer found that those with "higher religious beliefs had a higher sense of efficacy in coping with their cancer, which predicted better adjustment."[72] Survivors may reappraise their illness as an opportunity for religious growth or come to see God's purpose in it.[73] This is what Park refers to as stress-related growth, which is one of the outcomes of the religious meaning-making coping process.[74] When changes are made in global meaning, some individuals may come to view God as less powerful or cease to believe in God, while others may find comfort in conceptions of God as mysterious and unknowable or become convinced of their sinful nature, thereby transforming their understanding of themselves, God, and the world.[75]

By focusing exclusively on meaning-making coping, Park disregards other religious coping strategies that can be considered equally important. Moreover, not all aspects of the Meaning-Making Model have been validated. It remains unclear to what extent global meaning undergoes change. Furthermore, the assumption that discrepancies between global and situational meaning underlie processes of meaning-making has received minimal validation. It also remains unknown to what extent

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[71] Park, Crystal L. 'Religion and Meaning,' in: Crystal L. Park and Raymond F. Paloutzian (eds.) *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* (New York 2013), 370.
[72] Park, Crystal L. 'Meaning, Spirituality and Health: a Brief Introduction,' *The European Health Psychologist*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2014), 44.
[73] Idem.
[74] Park, Crystal L. 'Religion and Meaning,' in: Crystal L. Park and Raymond F. Paloutzian (eds.) *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* (New York 2013), 371–372.
[75] Idem.

distress (arising from a perceived discrepancy between global and situational meaning) fuels meaning-making.[76] Finally, Park does not elaborate much on her views of meaning-making as a form of coping. Nevertheless, Park's meaning-making coping model provides a fruitful theoretical approach for the investigation of the specific religious coping strategies within the Science of Mind movement. The model addresses the different aspects of religion and meaning-making coping and can be applied to the context of Science of Mind, considering that Science of Mind members are likely to employ strategies that may result in positive reappraisals of stressful events. In the next section, I will outline the similarities and differences between the theories formulated by Pargament and Park, and I will explain my own position with regard to meaning-making as a form of coping.

2.3 The relationship between the theories presented by Pargament and Park: religious coping and the Meaning-Making Model

Pargament and Park created two similar yet different theoretical models of religious coping and meaning-making. First, the theoretical models proposed by Pargament and Park are both based on the Transactional Stress and Coping Model introduced by Lazarus and Folkman. This model suggests that an adaptation to a stressor is influenced by the coping processes in which people engage following that stressor.[77] It mainly focuses on cognitive appraisals of the situation and the coping strategies that arise as a result of this appraisal. Cognitive appraisal occurs when individuals make initial attributions about why a certain event has taken place. During this process, the individual determines if the event is threatening, controllable, and predictable (primary appraisal), and whether something can be done to change the situation (secondary appraisal). These

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[76] Park, Crystal L. 'Making Sense of the Meaning Literature: An Integrative Review of Meaning Making and Its Effects on Adjustment to Stressful Life Events,' *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 136, No. 2 (2010), 290–291.

[77] Park, Crystal L. 'Religion as a Meaning-Making Framework in Coping with Life Stress,' *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 61, No. 4 (2005), 708–709.

appraisals affect the specific coping efforts that are made by an individual. Two forms of coping can be distinguished: problem-focused coping strategies (efforts to directly change the problem) and emotion-focused coping strategies (attempts to regulate the distress).[78] One can even distinguish a third coping strategy: meaning-focused coping (attempts to change the meaning of an event or "reappraisal"). Like Lazarus and Folkman, Park and Pargament assert that appraisals are informed by global meaning. Lazarus and Folkman argue that reappraisal is one of many different coping strategies. Similarly, Pargament understands benevolent religious reappraisal as one of multiple important religious coping strategies. Park, however, focuses solely on the coping strategy of reappraisal or meaning-making.

Moreover, Pargament and Park both focus on how people deal with stress by making use of religious practices and ideologies, which inform global meaning. Thus, both theories suggest that religion is an important source of meaning-making coping. Pargament highlights this by stating that religion is a "search for significance in ways related to the sacred."[79] In a similar way, Park defines religion as a useful meaning-making framework by focusing solely on the process of reappraisal, which is a form of meaning-making coping.[80]

Not all forms of religious coping lead to meanings made. For this reason, the processes of religious coping and meaning-making can be viewed as two separate processes. In my view, however, these two processes are linked. Both processes are shaped by a special form of interactional dynamics: meaning-making can inform religious coping strategies, while religious coping can affect the meanings made. For instance, a bereaved individual might come to view God as powerless. This attribution of meaning may affect the religious coping strategies that he or

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[78] Idem.

[79] Pargament, Kenneth I. *The Psychology of religion and coping: theory, research, practice* (New York 1997), 32.

[80] Park, Crystal L. 'Religion as a Quest for Meaning,' University of Connecticut lecture, 1–10.

she will employ. Now imagine a religious individual who has been recently diagnosed with cancer. At first, this individual might understand the situation as a punishment from God (initial appraisal). After some time, however, this individual may turn to religious coping strategies that enable her to gain comfort and closeness to God (seeking spiritual support, spiritual connection), thereby influencing the original meaning he or she assigned to the event. This individual now understands the event as beneficial, since suffering can lead to spiritual growth (benevolent religious reappraisal). From this perspective, it is possible that both theories are correct. This is not to say that all religious coping strategies fit the meaning-making coping paradigm, but that some forms of religious coping strategies might result in meaning-making coping and vice versa. Furthermore, the religious coping strategy of benevolent religious reappraisal, as defined by Pargament, can be understood as meaning-making coping. However, since there is no consensus on the question of whether and how religious coping and meaning-making are linked, the issue remains unresolved. I suggest we view meaning-making coping as a separate form of coping that can be of special importance within religious contexts and that exists on a continuum with other religious coping strategies.

Having discussed the relationship between the theories formulated by Pargament and Park, the specific religious coping strategies within the Science of Mind movement can be examined. In the next chapter, I will examine the Science of Mind movement in its historical context in order to gain a better understanding of the notions that underlie the movement. This is important because the ideology proposed by Holmes has influenced the usage of certain religious coping strategies by Science of Mind members. Although it is unusual to focus on the historical development of certain movements within a psychological research paradigm, it is common within the academic field of esotericism. Therefore, I have decided to dedicate the next section to this approach.

3. The historical development of the Science of Mind movement

3.1 Ernest Holmes and the Science of Mind movement

Ernest Shurtleff Holmes was born on January the 21st, 1887, in a rural section of the state of Maine, to a poor family. He was the youngest of the nine children of William N. and Anna C. Holmes. According to his brother, Fenwicke L. Holmes, Ernest Holmes his intellectual inquiry began in infancy and fully developed at the age of fifteen, when Ernest Holmes left school and his family in Maine for Boston. During this time, Ernest Holmes lived with his aunt and joined her to attend a Baptist church service. Afterwards, he was filled with wonder and unsolved questions.[81]

He sought knowledge from every source and enrolled in an education programme at the Leland Powers School of Expression. He began studies in English, Latin and mathematics, but his "head and heart wouldn't work in unison. The only time they worked as a team was when he was pondering life, reading and communing with nature."[82] Ernest Holmes had a passion for reading poetry, as well as reading religious books including the Bible, *The Story of the Bible* and Henry Drummond's *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*. He reflected on them and tried to answer questions such as: "Who am I? What am I? Why am I here? Who is God?" It was a "prophetic forecast of the inquiries that would one day expand into the philosophy of religion that made him famous."[83]

There were three major contributors to Ernest Holmes' early development of consciousness, and the most important one is Ralph Waldo Emerson. After discovering Emerson's *Essays*, Ernest Holmes would not be the same again. He was inspired by Emerson's use of terms. Examples include "the soul becomes" and "inasmuch as the soul is present, there will

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[81] Holmes, Fenwicke L. *Ernest Holmes: his life and times* (New York 1970), 1–5; 52–54.
[82] Ibidem, 58.
[83] Ibidem, 59.

be power not confident but agent," emphasizing agency, autonomy and immanence and transcendence.[84] In Ernest Holmes his view, Emerson's law of cause and effect pointed to something very important: "creative thought produces an effect in exact measure with the cause."[85] It was his study of Emerson that convinced him that life itself had a purpose and meaning or Truth, and he was determined to find it. This was the turning point in "the stream of consciousness that flooded out into the river of his writing and teaching in the coming years."[86] Due to his heavy reliance on Emerson's writings, it is plausible to assert that *Creative Mind*, the first book written by Ernest Holmes, was the direct result of this inspiration.

In 1912, Fenwicke Holmes moved to Venice, California and started the Congregational church in that city. Ernest Holmes made a trip to visit his brother in California. He was enamoured with California and he eventually decided to spend his life there. He started to help his brother in his church in Venice. At the age of eighteen, Ernest Holmes continued reading and got acquainted with Christian Science. Christian Science is a New Thought religion that was developed in 19th century New England by Mary Baker Eddy. In 1875, Eddy published her book *Science and Health*, in which she argued that sickness is an illusion that can be corrected by prayer alone. To clarify, both Christian Science and Science of Mind were founded on the New Thought movement—a religious movement that developed in the United States in the 19th century, based on the writings of Phineas P. Quimby (1802–1866). Holmes became fascinated with the similarities between Christian Science and New Thought. For the first time, Holmes was introduced to an important facet of New Thought practice: employing mental healing techniques through prayer.[87]

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[84] Ibidem, 75.
[85] Ibidem, 81.
[86] Ibidem, 77–79.
[87] Braden, Charles S. *Spirits in rebellion* (Dallas 1963), 287–288.

Throughout his life, Ernest Holmes never lost his fascination with the techniques of mental science healing and the metaphysical New Thought religion. In 1917, Ernest and Fenwicke Holmes established the Metaphysical Institute and proliferated themselves as full-time teachers of their individual interpretation of mental science. During this time, they founded a magazine called *Uplift.* In 1919, they merged this with *Truth Magazine* published by A.C. Grier of the Church of Truth. During the subsequent years the brothers gave lectures in the Grand Theater, Los Angeles and other locations. Also, in 1919, both Fenwicke and Ernest Holmes published their first books: *The Law of Mind in Action* and *Creative Mind.*[88]

During the years of 1920–1925, Ernest Holmes and Fenwicke Holmes gave a series of public lectures. As founders of the Metaphysical Institute, they gave lectures on topics such as "The Meaning of the New Movement," (Fenwicke Holmes), "The One Law of Mind and Matter," (Ernest Holmes), "The Law of Wholeness," (Ernest Holmes), "Beating the Law of Karma," (Fenwicke Holmes), "The Thought and the Thing," (Ernest Holmes) and "Our View of God," (Fenwicke Holmes). These lectures were successful as well as profitable. Fenwicke and Ernest Holmes quickly rose to prominence. In 1923, Ernest Holmes started lecturing in the Philharmonic Theater. He was a great speaker and teacher and his following grew. In 1925, however, the brothers decided to disband. There was no disagreement between the brothers. Fenwicke Holmes went east to continue his work as lecturer and writer, while Ernest Holmes stayed in Los Angeles to broaden the scope of his readings.[89]

This is the time when Ernest Holmes discovered the writings of Emma Curtis Hopkins. Hopkins was now of old age, but she continued to teach. Ernest studied under her and became her pupil. Every time a lesson ended, he signed up for his next lesson and soon, Hopkins and Holmes became

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[88] Holmes, Fenwicke L. *Ernest Holmes: his life and times* (New York 1970), 288–290.
[89] Idem.

great friends.[90] According to him, Hopkins' teachings were of high value, because she experienced the consciousness of the mystic and she had a way of teaching that expanded his consciousness.[91] The first thing Hopkins taught Holmes was that one can only acquire the consciousness of the mystic by directing the attention toward the Deity. Moreover, she taught him that lifting the thoughts to a higher level of consciousness–that is to become God-consciousness–will help to achieve one's full potential.[92]

In 1926, Ernest Holmes published his *Science of Mind*, the book that was created for study by all who desired to follow his teachings seriously. This book is still regarded as the basic formulation of Holmes' ideology and practices, containing principles and laws that are followed by all Science of Mind groups. Science of Mind became the epitome of Holmes' "synthesis of the great ideas of the founders of the world religions and the philosophers of the past, including the philosophers of New Thought."[93] The core of his teachings can be found in the first four chapters of *Science of Mind*.

The study of Science of Mind is a study of First Cause, Spirit, Mind or that invisible Essence or Intelligence from which everything comes, the power of creation.[94] He argues that this Divine Mind, Spirit or Causation is impossible to understand to full extent. In his view, there are not two minds (dualism), there is one.[95] The objective is the conscious, the subjective is the subconscious. The latter is that part of the mind which can be employed as a creative force by the conscious state.[96] Thus, humans have limitless power, because he is one with the whole, he is one with the Divine Mind. Here Holmes states that: "It is his Unity with the Whole, or God, on the

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[90] Ibidem, 290–291.
[91] Ibidem, 199–200.
[92] Ibidem, 200–201.
[93] Braden, Charles S. *Spirits in rebellion* (Dallas 1963), 292.
[94] Holmes, Ernest. *The Science of Mind* (New York 1926), eds. unknown, *The Science of Mind* (Guilford 2012), 21–24; 25–27.
[95] Ibidem, 45.
[96] Ibidem, 61.

conscious side of life, and is an absolute guarantee that he is a Center of God-consciousness in the Vast Whole."[97]

Furthermore, Holmes mentions that "Man's thought falling into his subjective mind, merges with the Universal Subjective Mind."[98] This means that every time we make use of our own minds we make use of the creative power of the Universal Mind. Holmes asserts that: "Man, by thinking, can bring into his experience whatsoever he desires, if he thinks correctly and becomes a living embodiment of his thoughts. This is not done by holding thoughts, but by knowing THE TRUTH."[99] Significantly, becoming a living embodiment of your thoughts also means that you become a living embodiment of God-consciousness or the Divine Mind, since there is no duality, only unity. Thus, human beings are inherently divine. Equally important is Ernest Holmes' emphasis on right thinking and how it affects our life: by conscious thinking we make use of the Universal Law of Mind and cause it to do things for us through us.[100]

Finally, Holmes argues that mental treatment is real. He defines his spiritual mind treatment as follows: "Treatment is the act, the art and the science of inducing thought within the mentality of the one treating [practitioner], which thought shall perceive that the body of the patient is a Divine, Spiritual and Perfect Idea."[101] The patient, now an embodiment of a Divine, Spiritual and Perfect Idea, recognizes the Living Spirit (Infinite, Ever-Present, and Active) and is healed. On page 109, Holmes suggests another definition of mental treatment, asserting that it "is a direct statement in Mind of what we wish to have done and a complete realization that it is done."[102] In other words, in changing outward events or conditions such as illness, the only thing that needs to be changed is one's mind. We live in a spiritual world as opposed to a material world. The material world

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[97] Ibidem, 60.
[98] Ibidem, 61.
[99] Ibidem, 61.
[100] Braden, Charles S. *Spirits in rebellion* (Dallas 1963), 293.
[101] Holmes, Ernest. *The Science of Mind* (New York 1926), eds. unknown, *The Science of Mind* (Guilford 2012), 106.
[102] Ibidem, 109.

is only a manifestation of the spiritual world. Thus, all change begins inwardly first, in our own minds and consciousness.

The ideas formulated by Holmes quickly spread through his textbook, his lectures, and his many other writings. In 1927, the Institute of Religious Science and Philosophy was founded. The same year, Holmes started the publication of *Science of Mind* magazine.[103] According to Holmes, the purpose of this magazine is "to promote that universal consciousness of life which binds together all in one great whole… to show that there is such a thing as Truth, and that it may be known (…) to enable the one knowing to live a happy useful life, wholesome, healthful, and constructive; (…) to feel certain that his future is in the hands of an eternal Power and Goodness."[104]

The following years, the Science of Mind movement expanded quickly. Many people who trained under Holmes, started centers of their own. Their way of teaching was similar to that of Holmes, they used his textbook *Science of Mind* and distributed his magazine and other writings. Each of the local institutes seems to have been independent of the control of the original institute, although Holmes his teachings were used.[105] In a short time there were multiple Religious Science churches. The organization was growing and the International Association of Religious Science Churches was formed.[106]

In 1949, the organization was reorganized as the Church of Religious Science under a Board of Trustees. This church would later be called the Founder's Church which carried on the educational work of the original institute: training ministers and practitioners as well as informing the general public.[107] In the 1950s, the organization split into two organizations: the United Church of Religious Science and Religious Science International. The latter was formerly known as the International

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[103] Braden, Charles S. *Spirits in rebellion* (Dallas 1963), 295.
[104] Holmes, Ernest. *Science of Mind*, Vol. 1, No 1 (1927), 21.
[105] Braden, Charles S. *Spirits in rebellion* (Dallas 1963), 296–297.
[106] Ibidem, 298.
[107] Ibidem, 300–301.

Association of Religious Science Churches.[108] Both organizations have continued founding new churches in new areas, and the relationship between both groups is cordial and co-operative. They continue to study *Science of Mind*. Ideologically, these two organizations do not differ. The main difference is in the degree of central or authoritarian control.[109]

On April 7, 1960, Ernest Holmes passed away. Funeral services were held in the Founder's Church. During the day, more than five thousand people paid their respects. Dr. Hornaday, a good friend of Holmes and leading minister of the Founder's Church, drew attention to Holmes' emphasis on immortality and he said: "Just one year ago, Ernest wrote, 'Man is born of eternal day, not because he wills or wishes it, not because he labors or strives toward it, not because he earns it as a reward, but simply because Spirit has breathed life into him and the Spirit which has breathed life into him cannot be taken away!"[110] Dr. Hornaday resumed: "The great movement of Religious Science–with its ministers, its teachers, its practitioners, its thousands of members–stands today as a living memorial to the insight, love, givingness, faith and conviction of this great, great man."[111] Holmes his legacy was perpetuated in the formation and growth of new Religious Science congregations—now called *Centers for Spiritual Living*—that continue to be inspired by Holmes' original Science of Mind teachings. They still teach what he taught: "Our time should be devoted to knowing the Truth that sets humanity free from the problem of ignorance; that Truth which alone can bring enlightenment to the world, that war should cease, that people should live in harmony, because they have recognized the Divinity within each other."[112]

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[108] Idem.

[109] Ibidem, 302.

[110] Holmes, Fenwicke L. *Ernest Holmes: his life and times* (New York 1970), 300–301.

[111] Idem.

[112] Author unknown, 'The Life of Ernest Holmes.' Website: http://scienceofmindarchives.org/flippingbooks/ernest_holmes/10_lesson_on_spiritual_healing_by_ernest_holmes_u/.

3.2 Science of Mind as an esoteric current

In this section, I will discuss my view on Science of Mind as an esoteric current. Until recently, there has been very little scholarship in the field of esotericism. There were books and articles on aspects of esotericism, such as alchemy, Rosicrucianism or Freemasonry, but there was no consensus among scholars about the field of esotericism as a whole.[113] There are three major authorities in the field of esotericism, advocating three different research paradigms: Faivre, Hanegraaff and Von Stuckrad.

Faivre identified six characteristics of esotericism: correspondences, living nature, imagination, transmutation, praxis of concordance and transmission. However, not all of these can be found in esoteric currents, and some of these characteristics can be found in other religious traditions such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. Therefore, Faivre's theory does not hold true in all contexts, and his categories might be too broad to be of any use to describe the field of esotericism.[114] Dutch professor Wouter J. Hanegraaff—who holds the first university chair for the study of esotericism at the University of Amsterdam—defines esotericism as "rejected knowledge."[115] His definition of esotericism comes close to how esotericism has been originally described: as a secret or hidden knowledge that is only available to an elite of initiates. I reject the original definition and the one formulated by Hanegraaff, because it enforces assumptions about esotericism as rejected, occult, secret and marginal. However, in ancient times as well as during the Middle Ages, esotericism was widely accepted by the majority. Moreover, in recent times, esoteric currents have been popularized in mainstream culture.[116]

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[113] Versluis, Arthur. 'What is Esoteric? Methods in the Study of Western Esotericism.' (Website: www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeIV/Methods.htm).

[114] Idem.

[115] Hanegraaff, Wouter J. *Esotericism and the academy: rejected knowledge in western culture* (Cambridge 2012), 1–4.

[116] Granholm, Kennet. 'New Age or the Mass-Popularization of Esoteric Discourse.' Website: http://www.cesnur.org/2008/london_granholm.htm.

Both Hanegraaff and Faivre fail to acknowledge the salience of the search for absolute knowledge in esoteric currents. Most adherents of esoteric currents are focused on finding the truth and gaining knowledge of the cosmos and transcendent realities. Kocku von Stuckrad's approach focuses on this aspect of esotericism. His theory was first formulated in the monograph *Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (2010). Von Stuckrad's approach is discursive, meaning that it deals with communication and interaction. Therefore, he does not provide a definition of esotericism, but employs the concept of the esoteric as a methodological tool to draw attention to the communicative and interactional processes within the European history of religions.

According to von Stuckrad, we should approach the esoteric as a structural element of Western culture, composed of specific types of knowledge claims.[117] In line with this, he prefers the term 'the esoteric' to 'esotericism,' as we are examining an element of cultural processes rather than coherent doctrine or tradition. Von Stuckrad's approach focuses on the esoteric element of discourse that consists of "claims to real or absolute knowledge and the *means* of making this knowledge available."[118] Although the means to acquire absolute knowledge may vary, claims of mediation by higher entities and personal experience are common.

Thus, in esotericism, the source of absolute knowledge can be found within the individual. As such, esoteric currents differ from other religious traditions, because they have a strong inward focus and do not rely on external sources. This does not mean that we should make a distinction between esotericism and religion, because esotericism is generally acknowledged as a form of religion. Although secular forms of esotericism exist, the esoteric is based on the belief that there is a higher power that governs the universe. In contrast to other religious traditions, however, the

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[117] Von Stuckrad, 'Western Esotericism: Towards an Integrative Model of Interpretation,' *Religion*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (2005), 80.
[118] Ibidem, 93.

esoteric also advocates the belief that each human being is divine in nature, carrying a divine spark.

Although von Stuckrad did not provide a definition of esotericism, his understanding of esotericism as a cultural element that focuses on specific knowledge claims and personal experiences, has informed my understanding of the Science of Mind movement. The American Science of Mind movement is largely based on the quest to find the Truth—which is another way of referring to absolute or higher knowledge. Seen in this way, Science of Mind is an esoteric current. Ernest Holmes himself has stated that his lessons on the Science of Mind reflect the "great truths known to the enlightened of all ages," and that the purpose of Science of Mind is to find that Truth within yourself.[119] During my visit at the Center for Spiritual Living Clear Lake in Houston, Texas, I had an interesting conversation with one of the members. She told me that many Science of Mind members, including herself, follow their leader [Ernest Holmes] in the appropriation and synthesization of different esoteric teachings. This ranges from the ancient esoteric teachings of Gnosticism and Hermeticism to medieval forms of Kabbalah and Christian mysticism. The reason Science of Mind members are endowed with such freedom is that Ernest Holmes held the strong belief that: "the Truth comes to us from all sources."[120]

New Age teachings are used as an inspiration for contemporary practitioners. Nevertheless, I would not define Science of Mind as a New Age movement. New Age is often used as an umbrella term referring to different contemporary spiritual or religious beliefs and practices, including channelling, astrology, Yoga, aura reading, reiki, shamanism and so on. Many of these traditions were influenced by older esoteric currents, and the movement's strongest supporters were followers of esotericism who

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[119] Holmes, Ernest. *The science of mind* (New York 1926), eds. unknown, *The science of mind* (Guilford 2012), xxxi.
[120] Ibidem, xxxii.

advocated a religious perspective based on the acquisition of higher knowledge.[121]

Furthermore, Olav Hammer asserts that New Age doctrines can be viewed as "a kind of imitation of other styles or discourses [the Esoteric Tradition]."[122] Thus, New Age can be regarded as a form of contemporary esotericism. Moreover, New Age ideologies focus on the coming of a new age. Science of Mind adherents do not emphasize this aspect in their doctrines. In addition, Science of Mind originated in 1926, while New Age originated in the 1960s and late 1970s as a counter-cultural movement, opposing materialism, repression and "disenchanted" worldviews. If anything, Ernest Holmes heavily influenced the New Age movement, not vice versa.

Science of Mind is part of the New Thought movement. Jeremy Rapport views New Thought as a variety of religious expressions and movements with common roots in the mid-nineteenth century United States. New Thought movements are founded on the idea that humans are capable of connecting with a higher force. Central to this connection with a higher intelligence, is the power of mind that all humans possess.[123] It is the power of the mind that allows humans to heal themselves of mental or physical illness. It also helps them to deal with unfortunate economic and social situations, realizing that all humans can be redeemed or saved by creating a happy, healthy and untroubled life. Although New Thought is often conveyed through the use of Protestant Christian language, New Thought movements presented American mainstream cultures with esoteric elements by focusing on how thought creates reality.[124]

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[121] Melton, J. Gordon. 'New Age movement.' Website: https://www.britannica.com/topic/New-Age-movement.
[122] Hammer, Olav. *Claiming knowledge: strategies of epistemology from theosophy to the new age* (Leiden 2004), 11.
[123] Rapport, Jeremy. 'New Thought Traditions,' in: Christopher Partridge (ed.) *The occult world* (New York 2015), 207.
[124] Ibidem, 216.

Significantly, Rapport mentions that the contemporary forms of New Thought have important implications for esotericism as a religious practice. First, members of contemporary society feel drawn to esotericism, because of its inward focus, which leaves the participants with the freedom to shape their own religious praxis. Second, he argues that "because esotericism's focus is the individual and the individual's mind, it lends itself to being described and being taught through easily marketable and sellable goods (…). Thus esotericism, in its New Thought forms, is an example (…) of the contemporary notion of 'spiritual, but not religious,' in which people with problem-solving mindsets eschew institutional religions for ideas, philosophies, and practices available in a literal spiritual marketplace."[125] This also holds true for the Science of Mind movement: its inward focus, its emphasis on individualism, and its reliance on the spiritual marketplace is what contributed to its success, reaching millions of people worldwide through different media.[126] The New Thought movement consists of at least twenty-six different denominations, including Science of Mind. The latter is an organization of more than four hundred spiritual communities around the globe.[127]

4. The prescription of religious coping strategies within Science of Mind teachings

In his main teachings, Ernest Holmes prescribed different spiritual methods of how to cope with stressful events. According to him, what helps Science of Mind members deal with difficult situations is spiritual mind treatment or affirmative prayer. In Science of Mind philosophy our imagination [a spiritual faculty- JV] is limitless. Holmes points out that we live in a spiritual world, and he does not view the material world as a physical and separate

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[125] Rapport, Jeremy. 'New Thought Traditions,' in: Christopher Partridge (ed.) *The occult world* (New York 2015), 217–218.

[126] Ibidem, 214.

[127] Centers for Spiritual Living, 'Spiritual Community.' Website: http://csl.org/en/spiritual-community.

entity. Rather, the physical world is an extension and manifestation of the spiritual world. The one constant of the material world is change. For Holmes and for those who follow his teachings, if they wish to change the appearance of some condition in the physical world, they need only do so in their mind. By changing it in their mind, they change its reality in the physical world.

For Holmes, merely reading affirmative prayers is insufficient. Affirmative prayers are only effective when they are put into practice. Affirmative prayer is focused, directive as well as commanding. Moreover, Holmes would add that the efficacy of prayer has been substantiated by scientific evidence, thereby authorizing his position. In his view, the results of affirmative prayer have been found consistent and repeatable. Adherents and practitioners truly believe that their affirmative prayers will manifest. According to Holmes, that is the key to understanding the Science of Mind movement. Therefore, in the next sections, Holmes' prescription of the methods of spiritual mind treatment or affirmative prayer as well as other religious coping strategies will be examined and analyzed in further detail.

4.1 Spiritual mind treatment as religious coping strategy

According to Holmes, most men who believe in God believe in prayer; but our idea of prayer changes as our idea of God changes; and it is natural for each to feel that his way of praying is the correct way. But we should bear in mind that the prayers which are effective—no matter whose prayers they may be—are effective because they embody certain universal principles which, when understood, can be consciously used."[128] Holmes took prayer very seriously, especially the forms of affirmative prayer or spiritual mind treatment he advocated. In his view, these spiritual methods are tools to live a better life and he believed that all prayers can be answered, as long as the person praying knows how to pray correctly and effectively.

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[128] Holmes, Ernest. *Prayer: how to pray effectively from the Science of Mind* (New York 2008), xi.

According to Holmes, praying correctly will help the individual to establish a connection with the divine. In a way, the section in Holmes' book *The Science of Mind* that deals with prayer, can be read as a guide to prayer as well as a book of prayers.[129]

Praying correctly relates to Holmes' view on right thinking, since affirmative prayer or spiritual mind treatment is a method of directing one's thoughts on the spirit of God that lies within and asserting positive beliefs about the desired outcome. According to Holmes, right thinking emphasizes God's omnipresence: the realization that we are surrounded by an Infinite Mind—which reacts to our thought—and that this higher presence lies within the individual.[130] In contrast, wrongful thinking or malpractice is the "wrong use of mental power and will never be indulged in by anyone who understands the Truth (…). There could be innocent, ignorant and malicious malpractice. Innocent malpractice, in the form of sympathy with disease and trouble, thereby accentuating these conditions, is (…) prolific of dire results. Ignorant malpractice would be about the same thing; for instance, when one sees a criminal, thinking of him as such helps to perpetuate the state in which he is manifesting. Malicious malpractice would be an act of centering thought for destructive purposes."[131] Therefore, one can conclude that Holmes his idea of rightful thinking is an act of centering thought for healing purposes by focusing on the truth: that humans are divine in nature and that "no evil can live in this Presence."[132] Moreover, Holmes argues that it is not enough to simply abstain from wrongful thinking, rather there must be active right thinking: "we must become actively constructive and happy in our thinking (…). New and wholesome ideas of life, vitality and hope must be accepted and incorporated into the sub-stratum of our mental life, so

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[129] Ibidem, xii–xiii.
[130] Ibidem, 2.
[131] Holmes, Ernest. *The science of mind* (New York 1926), eds. unknown, *The science of mind* (Guilford 2012), 84–85.
[132] Holmes, Ernest. *Prayer: how to pray effectively from the Science of Mind* (New York 2008), 7.

that a more wholesome externalization may manifest in our bodily condition and environment."[133]

Holmes views health and sickness as externalizations of one's dominant mental and spiritual state. Worry, fear, anger, jealousy, sadness and other emotional conditions are mental in nature, and as such, Holmes recognizes these conditions as the hidden cause of a large part of all physical suffering. In his view, a normal healthy mind reflects itself in a healthy body, while an abnormal mental state will manifest as an illness.[134] Holmes assumes that all mind activity tends to create its physical correspondent. According to Holmes, a "realization of the Presence of God is the most powerful healing agency known to the mind of man."[135] So, in order to live a happy and fulfilled life, Holmes notes that we must control all thoughts that denies the "real, (…) divine presence within us; then, as the mist disappears before the sun, so shall adversity melt before the shining radiance of our exalted thought!"[136]

Finally, Holmes asserts that spiritual mind treatment or affirmative prayer "opens up the avenues of thought, expands the consciousness, (…) it clarifies the mentality, removes the obstruction of [negative- JV] thought and lets in the Light; it removes doubt and fear, in the realization of the Presence of the Spirit, and is necessary while we are confronted by obstructions or obstacles. We already live in a Perfect Universe, but It needs to be seen mentally before It can become a part of our experience."[137] Importantly, this quote supports my assumption that most of these methods are employed in times of stress, when we feel doubt and fear, when we are confronted with stressful situations that are hard to overcome.

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[133] Ibidem, 8.
[134] Ibidem, 10.
[135] Ibidem, 11.
[136] Ibidem, 13.
[137] Ibidem, xiv.

In his book *The Science of Mind*, Holmes gives many examples of how spiritual mind treatment can help individuals deal with certain afflictions that cause stress. Holmes provides mental cures for feelings of doubt, fear and sadness, pain, headaches, weariness, insanity, lung trouble, constipation, throat trouble, congestion, paralysis, nervousness, stammering, loneliness and so on.[138] For instance, according to Holmes, insanity can be healed by employing this affirmation: "One Mind, which is God, and is Perfect. (…) This Mind, being a Complete, Perfect and Indivisible Whole, cannot labor under a delusion, cannot, for one moment, lose Its Self-Consciousness. (…) Knowing that there is just the One Mind [and knowing that your thought is perfect- JV], there will be no doubts or confusions; and your mentality will cease to be deranged."[139] Healing the different physical ailments described above can be done by focusing on the following affirmation: "There is one body; this body is the body of God; and it is Perfect; it is never depleted; its vitality is never lowered. There is no wasting away of substance or burning up of substance; for substance is eternal, changeless and perfect."[140]

Holmes also asserts that feelings of doubt and fear can be removed through one's individual use of the affirmative prayer *I shall not doubt nor fear:* "I shall not doubt nor fear, for my salvation is from On High, and the day of its appearing is now at hand. I shall not doubt nor fear, for my whole being responds to the realization of Life within and around me. I shall not fear, for the Hosts of Heaven are waiting upon me and the Law of the Universe is my Salvation. *I shall not fear*!"[141] Finally, to overcome sadness, one can focus on the affirmative prayer *Sorrow Flees From Me:* "As the Great Joy of Life comes into my Soul, flooding me with its wondrous light, all sorrow and sadness flee from me. I shall not grieve, for nothing is lost nor gone from me. My own cannot be kept from me. My own knows me and

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[138] Holmes, Ernest. *The science of mind* (New York 1926), eds. unknown, *The science of mind* (Guilford 2012), 115–132; 279–319.
[139] Ibidem, 121.
[140] Ibidem, 123–124.
[141] Ibidem, 292.

will follow me wherever I go. I am filled with the Joy of living and the Great Peace that comes to all who believe. *I am made glad forevermore*."[142]

All of the affirmations above, are ways of coping with negative emotions, pain or suffering. As evident, most of these strategies are based on religious or spiritual ideas concerning the universe and God, emphasizing that there is one "Perfect Mind" [God- JV], one "Perfect Body" [the body of God- JV], that this substance is eternal, that God and his "Hosts of Heaven" will redeem us, save us [God as Saviour- JV]. By emphasizing that salvation comes "From On High" [Heaven- JV] and focusing on the theme of salvation, Holmes implicitly refers to the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. In *Words that Heal Today* (1949), Holmes states that Jesus "believed in a heavenly Kingdom forever established in the Mind of God, a Kingdom all men must enter. (…) He said that it is to be entered into now, for it is at hand. (…) The central theme of his [Jesus'] thought was that there is a spiritual prototype or pattern in the Mind of God which is the true cause and equivalent of our physical universe. Man is a spiritual being now, he is an immortal soul now as much he ever can become, he already *is* a spirit, he lives in God now, and the nature of God flows through him at this moment. Man has already inherited the Kingdom of God."[143] Thus, by focusing on certain religious and spiritual concepts, I think it is plausible to classify Holmes' methods for spiritual mind treatment as religious coping strategies.

As discussed in chapter two, there are many different coping strategies. Lazarus and Folkman distinguish between two forms of coping: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Pargament focuses on three religious coping styles: the self-directing, deferring and collaborative coping styles. Pargament identified several subcategories of religious coping: religious methods of coping to find meaning (reappraisals), religious methods of coping to gain control (self-directing coping), religious

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[142] Ibidem, 306.

[143] Holmes, Ernest. *Words that heal today* (1949), eds. unknown, *Words that heal today* (Deerfield Beach, 1994), 79–80.

methods of coping to gain comfort and closeness to God (seeking spiritual support, religious focus, spiritual connection, spiritual discontent), religious methods of coping to gain intimacy with others and closeness to God (seeking support from clergy or other members, religious helping, interpersonal religious discontent), and religious methods of coping to achieve a life transformation (seeking religious direction, religious forgiving). Park, however, drew attention to the strategy of meaning-making coping that occurs when a person tries to restore congruence between situational and global meaning.

In my view, the techniques of spiritual mind treatment consist of problem-focused strategies and emotion-focused strategies. In Science of Mind, there is no distinction between both strategies, they are fully merged. According to Holmes, regulating and expressing your emotions is the way to change any situation. This means that the methods proposed by Holmes are focused on discovering the cause of the problem, trying to solve the problem, and regulating the intensity of negative and distressing emotions after the occurrence of a stressful event.[144]

Holmes views suffering [mentally or physically- JV] as the result of one's state of mentality. It is mental in origin.[145] Holmes gives a clear description of what causes the problem and he also provides a practical solution to solve the problem: spiritual mind treatment or affirmative prayer. Holmes asserts that: "As we learn to listen to this [divine- JV] inner Presence, getting our impulse from It, we shall create our prayer, our spiritual mind treatment, (…) and our increased awareness of Perfection will restore our body and affairs after a Divine pattern."[146] Holmes states that our strongest emotions are often tied to [mental- JV] ideas of fear, hate and grief and that "uncontrolled" or "bottled up" emotion creates "chaos,"

[144] Schoenmakers, Eric C. et al. 'Problem-focused and emotion-focused coping options and loneliness: how are they related?,' *European Journal of Ageing*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2015), 153–156.

[145] Holmes, Ernest. *Love and* Law, Marilyn Leo (ed.) *Love and Law: the unpublished teachings* (New York 2004), 160–161.

[146] Holmes, Ernest. *Think your troubles away* (1963), Willis Kinnear (ed.) *Think your troubles away* (New York 2010), 116.

and "pressure that is the cause of much damage to the physical man, and produces most of our nervous disorders."[147] For this reason, Holmes asserts that it is good to express one's emotions and to control them with the intellect.[148] Regulating our negative emotions can be done by employing spiritual mind treatment. Finally, Holmes describes his method as a form of meditation that has the power to heal physical and mental afflictions [emotions].[149]

There has been no indication for religious discontent. According to Pargament religious discontent falls under the category of self-directing coping. This does not mean, however, that the self-directing style is absent within the teachings of Science of Mind. Holmes argues that the Divine Presence lies within the individual and that there is no duality: "we are One with the Spirit of God."[150] In other words, God is not a separate entity that can help us to solve problems. Instead, we are divine beings and therefore, we can solve our own problems. For this reason, Holmes advocates the self-directing coping style. In a self-directing style, the individual affirms the presence of the divine, but is self-reliant. The entire Science of Mind philosophy is based on the premise that the individual can change his or her circumstances by realizing or acknowledging his or her inner divinity [spiritual mind treatment- JV]. This means that the individual is responsible for the coping process. Thus, Holmes emphasizes the individual's personal autonomy and control. This becomes even more evident when one reads the following passage: "Know this: there is no power from without, yourself must answer every feat and meet all doubt, with some divine indwelling power, which you yourself, upon yourself, shall shower."[151]

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[147] Holmes, Ernest. *The science of mind* (New York 1926), eds. unknown, *The science of mind* (Guilford 2012), 263.
[148] Idem.
[149] Ibidem, 279.
[150] Ibidem, 63.
[151] Ibidem, xxxiii.

Additionally, in the context of esoteric movements like Science of Mind, Pargament's definition of the self-directing coping style may not be adequate. According to him, the self-directing style entails solving problems without relying on God, meaning the individual does not rely on divinity at all. The methods of Holmes do entail that the individual relies on some form of divinity: "Spirit is omnipresent, therefore It is within me. I think, therefore, God thinks through me. My Creative Spirit is independent of any circumstance, condition or situation (…). It is, therefore, possible for me to recreate my life. First I must learn how to recreate my thought. In order to do this (…) I must merely create a new experience through a new order of meditation [spiritual mind treatment- JV]."[152] Hence, within Science of Mind, a self-directing coping strategy exists that emphasizes individual autonomy and personal control, without renouncing divinity.

Holmes implicitly refers to forms of seeking spiritual support and spiritual connection. Methods of spiritual support and spiritual connection focus on God as loving and caring. Pargament views these two strategies as part of the collaborative style of religious coping. The idea of an active collaboration with God is based on the presupposition that God is a separate entity. Holmes, however, believes that God lies within the individual. In times of adversity or when one feels unloved, Holmes suggests that we employ spiritual mind treatment by meditating on affirmative prayers that focus on divine love, including the affirmative prayer *The Mantle of Love*: "Like a cloak His love is wrapped around me. Like a warm garment it shelters me from the storms of life. I feel and know that an Almighty Love envelops me in Its close embrace. O Love Divine, My Love how wonderful Thou art. I am open to receive Thy great blessing. *Love envelops me.*"[153] Affirmations such as these suggest that spiritual mind treatment can be

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[152] Holmes, Ernest. *Lessons in spiritual mind healing*, eds. unknown, *Lessons in spiritual mind healing* (Whitefish 2013), 9.

[153] Holmes, Ernest. *The science of mind* (New York 1926), eds. unknown, *The science of mind* (Guilford 2012), 311.

viewed as a religious coping strategy that centers on seeking spiritual support and spiritual connection.

Within the main body of Science of Mind teachings, there is an indication for the coping strategies of seeking support from clergy or members as well as religious helping. Pargament understands seeking support as a collaborative style, while he considers religious helping as a deferring style. Spiritual mind treatment, however, is not a strategy of deferral. A healing session focuses on the healer as well as the patient, and by healing the patient the healer is also cured. Spiritual mind treatment can be done individually or one can go to a practitioner—a Science of Mind member that is trained in Holmes' spiritual mind healing techniques. When a Science of Mind member decides to visit a practitioner, this means that he or she is turning to the Science of Mind community for help to cope with their problems. Here, the individual is supported by other members of the Science of Mind movement. In his book *The Science of Mind*, Holmes provides very clear examples of situations in which a person may contact a practitioner. This includes situations where a person has contracted a disease and is experiencing pain. Thus, spiritual mind treatment as a religious coping strategy can involve seeking support from clergy or members. Moreover, Holmes emphasizes that it is our duty to help others: "So let each of us endeavor to heal himself and help to heal others of infirmities, troubles and problems."[154]

The mental healing techniques advocated by Holmes involve redefining the stressor as something benevolent and potentially beneficial. This is what Pargament refers to as *benevolent religious reappraisal*. Park, however, describes this process as *meaning-making coping*. She argues that *meaning making coping* involves changing one's appraised meaning of the stressor to make it less aversive and changing one's global beliefs and

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[154] Holmes, Ernest. *Think your troubles away* (1963), Willis Kinnear (ed.) *Think your troubles away* (New York 2010), 116.

goals.[155] With her Meaning-Making Coping Model, Park assumes that humans actively engage in constructing meaning, especially when faced with stressful situations such as death.

In *Love and Law,* Holmes explains what happens after death, and gives a mental cure for grief: "We pass into one mind and one consciousness. We can't get outside of it; therefore, we are in it."[156] He also asserts that: "there is always presence in Mind. Never entertain a thought of absence. When you realize this and your consciousness realizes there is no separation [only Unity], the grief disappears."[157] To cope with death and grief, Holmes suggest that we give a new meaning to death [the stressor-JV]: death is not perceived to be the end of everything. Instead, the dead are thought of as being ever-present in the Infinite Mind. This idea is strengthened by Holmes' view on immortality: "immortality means that the individual shall persist after the experience of physical death, carrying with him a complete remembrance and an unbroken stream of consciousness."[158] As a consequence, Holmes has transformed the individual's situational meaning, changing negative thoughts into positive ones. Imagine an individual who recently embraced the Science of Mind ideology, and is unaware of the global beliefs held by Science of Mind members: after reading Holmes' passages on death, grief and immortality, this person might change the situational meaning of the stressor as well as his or her global meaning or global beliefs [*meaning-making coping*]. Therefore, the Science of Mind philosophy is a potential catalyst for processes of *meaning-making coping*.

Meanings made within the Science of Mind paradigm can lead to stress-related growth. After the process of positive reappraisal or *meaning-making coping*, some individuals come to view suffering as an opportunity

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155 Park, Crystal L. 'Religion as a Quest for Meaning,' University of Connecticut lecture, 13–14.

156 Holmes, Ernest. *Love and* Law, Marilyn Leo (ed.) *Love and Law: the unpublished teachings* (New York 2004), 244–246.

157 Idem.

158 Holmes, Ernest. *The science of mind* (New York 1926), eds. unknown, *The science of mind* (Guilford 2012), 238.

for personal growth. Holmes maintains that "the world is beginning to realize that it has learned all it can through suffering and pain. (…) We should have no intellectual difficulty in realizing that even God Himself could not make an automatic individuality, and this explains why man must suffer on the road to self-discovery. He must suffer, (…) because he must have experience in order to become individualized."[159]

In conclusion, within the teachings of Science of Mind there is a tendency to prescribe spiritual mind treatments that evoke different coping efforts and religious coping strategies. As discussed, there is no indication for religious discontent (self-directing style). Nonetheless, the self-directing style is present within Science of Mind teachings and is not directly linked to a particular coping strategy. The strategies seeking spiritual support, spiritual connection, and seeking support from clergy or members are present. These strategies are collaborative, but not how Pargament envisioned this strategy. Holmes does not view God as a separate entity or collaborator. This means that the category of collaborative coping advanced by Pargament does not necessarily fit all collaborative coping strategies within the context of Science of Mind. I also found that Holmes prescribes the religious coping strategy of religious helping (deferring style). Conversely, spiritual mind treatment is not a strategy of deferral. Spiritual mind treatments heal the patient, while simultaneously curing the healer of his or her afflictions. Pargament constructed a hierarchical relationship between three coping styles and their corresponding coping strategies. In the context of Science of Mind, however, these styles and strategies can be regarded as separate concepts.

Spiritual mind treatment can be understood as a religious coping strategy that engenders problem-focused as well as emotion-focused coping, self-directing coping, spiritual support, spiritual connection, religious helping, seeking for support from clergy or members and *meaning-*

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[159] Holmes, Ernest. *The science of mind* (New York 1926), eds. unknown, *The science of mind* (Guilford 2012), 51.

making coping. This implies that most of the religious coping strategies described by Pargament and Park are coexistent and can be employed simultaneously. In reality, however, Science of Mind adherents may employ more religious coping strategies than the ones prescribed by Holmes. An examination of what Science of Mind members report on their usage of certain religious coping strategies, may produce different results. Therefore, in the next chapter, I will investigate the extent to which different religious coping strategies are used, based on the data generated by my survey research.

5. Self-reported contemporary religious coping strategies within the Science of Mind movement

Science of Mind is a contemporary, religious orienting system—a system that provides individuals with the means necessary to reattribute meaning to a specific event, and to redefine their life as significant. In the previous chapter, I have discovered the importance of spiritual mind treatment, which can be regarded as a religious coping strategy that continues to influence how Science of Mind members cope with and give meaning to stressful events. I also mentioned that the Science of Mind philosophy has meaning-making coping potential. However, further research was required to unveil the different religious coping strategies that are most prevalent within the contemporary Science of Mind movement. Therefore, the next sections will focus on the self-reported religious coping strategies within contemporary Science of Mind congregations in United States.

5.1 Qualitative Analysis

Recorded stressful events include: the long illness and death of one's mother or life partner, drug addiction within the family, separation from one's life partner or divorce, the loss of one's daughter [illness- JV] or son [suicide- JV] and unemployment. There is one instance where the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York was reported as the cause of the individual's unemployment. Surprisingly, there was no mention of the devastating effects of hurricane Harvey in Houston, Texas. During the stressful events described above, most respondents reported feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, intense sadness, frustration, fear and anger.

In order to cope with these negative emotions, religion was employed as a general meaning system. All fourteen respondents reported that they rely on their spiritual or religious beliefs to assign meaning to highly stressful events. Relatedly, ten of the respondents described Science of Mind as the most important source of meaning in their life. Other respondents understand Science of Mind as an important and "spiritual" source of meaning, albeit not the only one. Nonetheless, 11 respondents reported that they have a better understanding of the world around them, and of themselves [Peter Williams: "I have a better understanding of the truth of who I am"]. The majority also stated that Science of Mind provides them with a purpose in life [Yvette Richards: "We are here to use our skills to make this world a better place," Bailee Gibson: "my purpose is to serve a greater community," Yvette Richards: "my purpose is to love and create"] and that Science of Mind makes their life feel meaningful, because it gives them "an understanding of God in and as the world," [Peter Williams] that lets them know that "everything is spiritual" [Peter Williams] and that there is "order and direction in the universe" [Abigail Wright]. Therefore, it is plausible to state that most Science of Mind members assign meaning to

stressful events based on what they perceive as an important source of meaning.

The answers to the question: "How did you give meaning to this event based on your religious/ spiritual beliefs?," further supports my assertion that Science of Mind influences the ways in which individuals attribute meaning to stressful events. In instances involving the death of a loved one, many respondents drew attention to ideas of immortality, the afterlife, and oneness [there being One Creative Intelligence to which the deceased will return, meaning that relationships are never severed, but continue to exist after death- JV]. For instance, Abigail Wright commented that "we are eternal" and "there is not death, but transition." Relatedly, Kaycee Miller answered that she could see in retrospect how she was living in Grace all the while. In cases where the individual dealt with separation, divorce or unemployment, most respondents understand the event as "an opportunity to make a new choice" [Liam Watkins]. Others reported that "it allowed me to pursue the path that I truly wanted to take" [Liam Watkins] and "your deepest pain provides your greatest growth" [Sophia Clarke]. All of the descriptions above are reminiscent of Science of Mind teachings, in which ideas of the Infinite Mind [understood as immortal and ever-present- JV], human divinity, personal choice and individual growth are central.

Continuing the theme of Science of Mind as an important source of meaning, the respondents were asked to report on how Science of Mind helps them to make sense of stressful situations. Two respondents answered that their belief in oneness [Diane Brown and Yvette Richards: "We are One"] and "Infinite principles" [Diane Brown] is what helped them deal with a stressful situation. Other respondents emphasized that "we are never alone or without support," [Yvette Richards] and that "we are all aspects of God" [Daphne Parker]. Most respondents, however, reported that they mainly focused on their personal autonomy and control of the situation, while also affirming the presence of the divine: "Science of Mind assists me in taking responsibility for my actions in any situation. I know that I can

create a different outcome going forward, because I am co-creating with Spirit. I trust the Universal Good and that I am part of it" [Bailee Gibson]. The belief that "we can change any situation," [Liam Watkins] that "we create our own experience" [Patricia Adams] by changing our minds and having faith that all is in "divine order," [Sophia Clarke] is most prevalent among this population. This leaves Science of Mind members with a strong will to change the situational meaning of an event (see figure below).
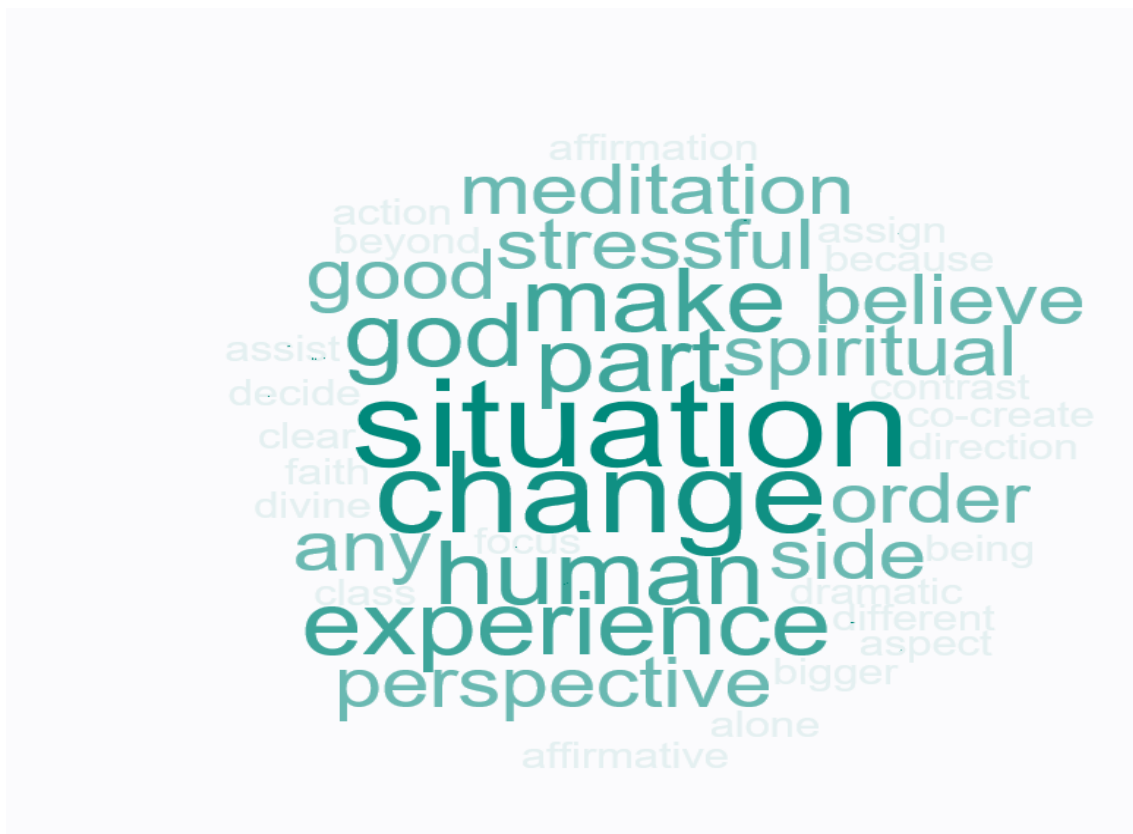

Figure 3. The importance of changing the situational meaning of an event[160]

In addition, this belief in personal autonomy is reflected in the specific rituals that Science of Mind members perform to deal with their stress. All members (n=14) answered that they employ "spiritual mind treatment" or affirmative prayer [sometimes referred to as "positive prayer" or simply

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[160] Word Cloud visualizations show the most repeated words found in the results of the survey.

"prayer"- JV], combined with techniques of meditation and visualization (see figure 4). Examples include: "As you pray, believe it is so" or "As we pray, believe it is done," [Yvette Richards] "all things work together for good," [Kaycee Miller] "all is well and Good is in and through all things," [Diane Brown] or "Nothing but good can come from this" [Kaycee Miller]. Significantly, these affirmations concur with the belief that there is "one God and this power is within us all" [Rachel Carpenter].
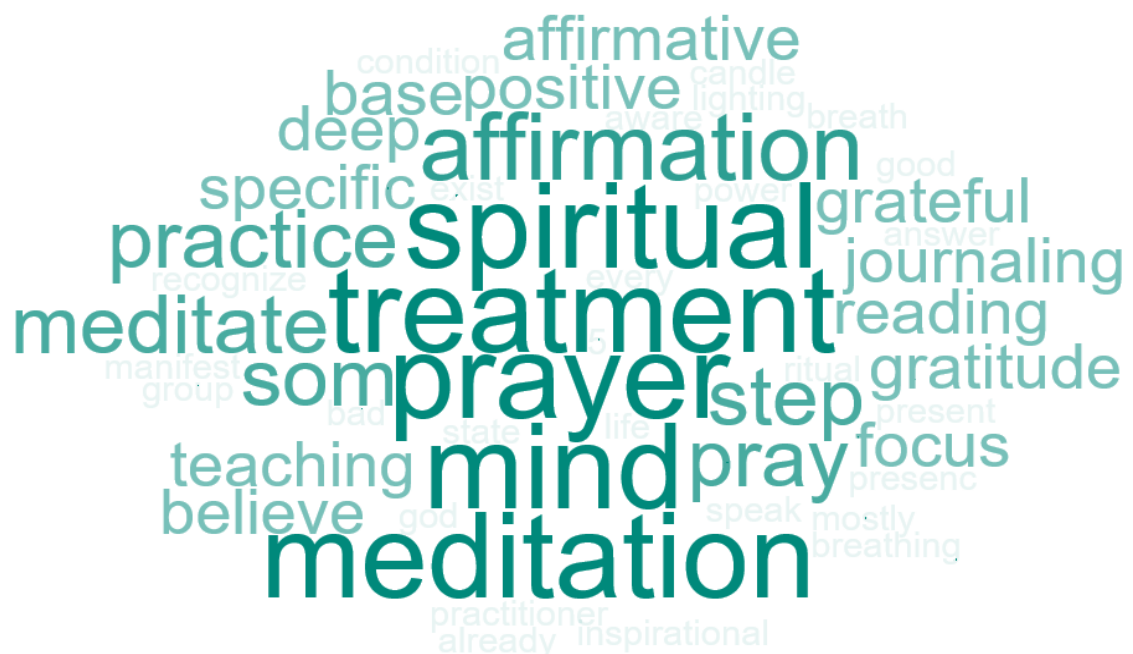

Figure 4. The salience of spiritual mind treatment, prayer, meditation and affirmations

Other religious coping strategies were also recorded. First and foremost is the self-directing coping strategy [while simultaneously affirming divinity- JV] to which all Science of Mind members seem to adhere by focusing on the ability to change the situation themselves. There has been no mention of strategies in which the individual works together with God to solve a problem [collaborative religious coping]. This is due to the fact that Science

of Mind members do not view the divine as a far-away, external entity. There has been one instance of active religious surrender, a religious coping strategy where all control is transferred to God. Beatrice Collins said that she often turned to the affirmation: "Let Go and Let God." Furthermore, there have been instances where the following religious coping strategies have been employed: spiritual connection, religious focus, and seeking religious direction. A good example of spiritual connection is provided by Bailee Gibson who states that: "there is both an inner God and Outer God and they are both One (…) and this provides me with a sense of trust in myself knowing that I am divinely led. (…) This has reframed my life from one of being fear-based to a love-based reality." The majority of respondents reported employing religious coping strategies that shift the focus from the stressor, and aim to gain comfort and closeness to the divine by reading inspirational texts, focusing on affirmative prayer, meditating, and visiting their Science of Mind community [religious focus- JV].

Some respondents mentioned that they attended regular church services as well as seeking support from other Science of Mind members. This is a form of religious coping that helps the individual to gain intimacy with others and closeness to God.[161] Searching for religious social support, many members reported that they felt supported by other members of their Science of Mind community. The majority of respondents feel supported and loved by their community members: "my community is always willing to listen to me," [Kaycee Miller] "we are very supportive of one another," [Rachel Foster] "they made sure I was not alone" [Yvette Richards]. They understand their community as an "ongoing space of welcome, love and listening," [Diane Brown] emphasizing a sense of community and belonging. More importantly, Science of Mind members pray for each other: "my community is always willing to pray with me for happy outcomes," [Kaycee Miller] there is "lots of love and prayers," [Rachel Foster] "we pray for each

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[161] Pargament, Kenneth I. 'The Many Methods of Religious Coping: Development and Initial Validation of the RCOPE,' *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (2000), 519–524.

other and help when it is needed," [Yvette Richards] "they are there when I need them… through talking, meditation, visioning and prayer" [Sophia Clarke]. Thus, Science of Mind members mainly focus on religious social support through joint prayer and religious helping.

Figure 5. The importance of religious social support and prayer

There is also evidence that suggests the presence of secular coping strategies. For instance, Daphne Parker mentioned that she "joined online groups of other parents of deceased children" and that she is seeing a grief counsellor. In my view, this is a form of active coping [actively analysing-JV]. Another respondent, however, employed passive coping strategies, searching distraction and avoiding the problem: "I (…) avoided visiting my mother. Made all her plans. Arranged her care. Paid bills. (…) Traveled some. (…) It was mostly activity seeking versus seeking spiritual support" [Abigail Wright]. In contrast, most members sought support and care from friends and family, which is a form of secular coping that is referred to as social support.

In addition to my qualitative analysis of the open-ended survey questions, I employed quantitative methods to analyze the results of the RCOPE (Religious Coping Survey). The RCOPE is a 29-item survey containing fifteen different categories of religious coping strategies: benevolent religious reappraisal, punishing God reappraisal, reappraisal of God's powers, collaborative religious coping, self-directing religious coping, seeking spiritual support, religious focus, religious purification, spiritual connection, spiritual discontent, seeking support from clergy or members, religious helping, interpersonal religious discontent, seeking religious direction and religious forgiving (see Appendix I for a full overview of RCOPE subscales and definitions of religious coping strategies).[162]

In the figure below, I present the group average per religious coping strategy, giving an overview of the religious coping strategies that were employed by Science of Mind members, using a four-item scale: 4 (very often), 3 (often), 2 (seldom), 1 (not at all). These results demonstrate that spiritual connection, religious helping, seeking spiritual support, collaborative religious coping, seeking support from clergy and members, and benevolent religious reappraisal are frequently used by Science of Mind members, whereas self-directing religious coping, religious purification, interpersonal religious discontent, spiritual discontent, punishing God reappraisal and reappraisal of God's powers are employed less frequently.

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[162] Pargament, K.I. 'The Brief RCOPE: Current Psychometric Status of a Short Measure of Religious Coping,' *Religions*, Vol. 2, No. 51–76 (2011), 51–57.
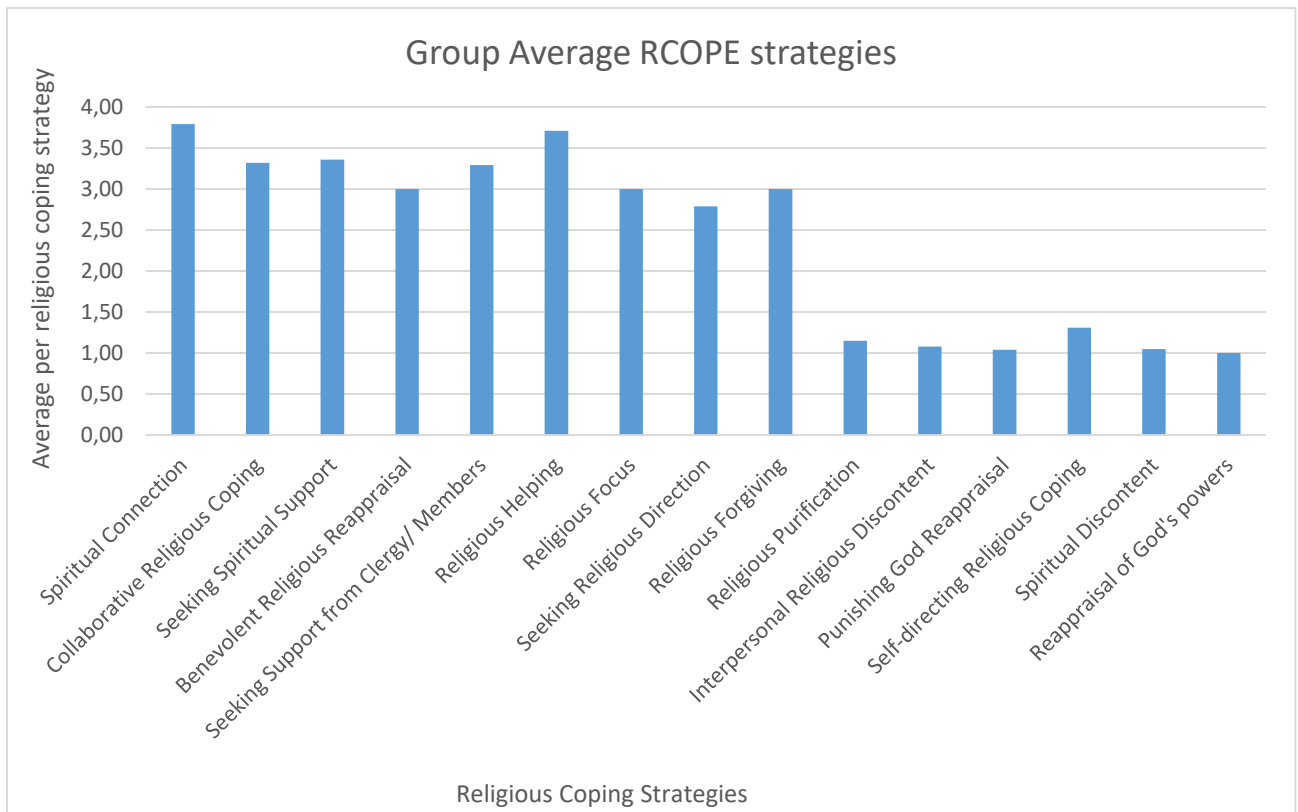
Figure 6. Group Average per Religious Coping Strategy

6. Discussion

6.1 Meaning-making coping within contemporary Science of Mind congregations in the United States

This thesis focused on the question: "To what extent do members of contemporary American Science of Mind congregations employ religious meaning-making strategies in order to cope with stressful events?" After the examination of religious coping strategies as prescribed within the writings of Ernest Holmes in chapter four, I can conclude that Science of Mind is an important source of meaning. Through the attribution of meaning, Science of Mind provides its members with meaning-making coping potential. In addition, the method of spiritual mind treatment is an effective form of religious coping that engenders meaning-making coping and other religious coping strategies [spiritual connection, religious

helping, seeking spiritual support, seeking support from clergy or members and self-directing coping].

The results generated by the examination of self-reported coping strategies support this conclusion, albeit to a moderate extent. In relation to meaning-making coping [benevolent religious reappraisal], the evidence suggests that there are five religious coping strategies that can be considered equally important, if not more important, within the context of Science of Mind. Spiritual connection, religious helping, seeking spiritual support, collaborative religious coping and seeking support from clergy or members were frequently used. Notwithstanding the evidence, meaning-making coping can still be considered a significant religious coping strategy within the context of Science of Mind. Religious coping strategies such as spiritual connection and seeking spiritual support can spark meaning-making coping efforts. Searching for comfort and reassurance through God's love and care, and experiencing a sense of connectedness with forces that transcend the individual, imbue life with a sense of meaning. Meaning-making coping [benevolent religious reappraisal] coexists with other religious coping strategies. These strategies may be employed independently from each other or they may be employed simultaneously. Therefore, it is a possibility that religious coping and meaning-making are shaped by a special form of interactional dynamics.

6.2 Theoretical implications

The conclusion above holds special implications for the theories as formulated by Pargament and Park. Park places a high value on the process of meaning-making coping or reappraisal, without considering other important religious coping strategies. Pargament focuses on benevolent religious reappraisal as one of many important religious coping strategies. On the other hand, Pargament emphasizes the process of reappraisal by defining coping and religion as a search for significance.

In light of my results, religious coping strategies such as spiritual connection, religious helping, seeking spiritual support, and seeking support from clergy and fellow congregation members are just as important, and might even contribute to processes of meaning-making coping. This is interesting, because it highlights the social dimension of religious coping, and demonstrates the prevalence of religious social support. Thus, religious social support might be more prevalent than meaning-making coping. This is not to say that the theories as presented by Pargament and Park should be disregarded. On the contrary, the present study extends and clarifies what Pargament and Park already discovered: that meaning-making coping is a prevalent form of coping, and that meaning-making coping and religious coping often coincide.

The results in chapter five [quantitative analysis] demonstrate that the collaborative coping style was employed more often than the self-directing style, thereby supporting assertions with regard to the social dimension of religious coping. In contrast, the evidence based on the qualitative analysis in chapters four and five, points to the utilization of a self-directing coping style. Based on this information, one can conclude that both styles are present among the members of contemporary Science of Mind congregations.

Nonetheless, Pargament's definitions of the self-directing and collaborative styles are not adequate in the context of Science of Mind. Science of Mind members employ a self-directing style, but it does not entail solving problems without relying on God; they use a collaborative style and yet they do not view God as a separate entity with whom they collaborate. Additionally, Science of Mind members do not relate the self-directing style to any particular coping strategy. The category of the collaborative style does not necessarily fit Science of Mind strategies such as spiritual connection, seeking spiritual support, seeking support from clergy or fellow congregation members, because these strategies do not result in an active partnership with God. In conclusion, the distinction

between styles and strategies proposed by Pargament is untenable. These styles and strategies should be viewed as unrelated concepts.

6.3 Strengths, limitations and future research directions

This thesis is significant as it is the first to give an overview of the different religious coping strategies that can be found within an esoteric current such as Science of Mind. Correspondingly, it is the first study that reveals that Science of Mind may serve as an important source of meaning within which an individual can reframe a stressful event, look for more benign interpretations, employ meaning-making coping methods, and achieve personal growth. When self-reported religious coping strategies were examined, a more complex picture emerged. Meaning-making coping is a prevalent form of coping—a form of coping that coincides with different religious coping strategies that also engender religious social support. The interdisciplinary nature of this thesis, and the combined use of literature analysis and survey research [qualitative + quantitative analysis], are the strengths of this study.

Conversely, several caveats should be noted with respect to interpreting the findings of this study. First, the results are based on cross-sectional data, meaning that data was collected by observing many subjects at the same point of time or without regard to differences in time. This is a problem, because the extent to which religious coping strategies are employed can change over time, and depends on the specific cultural and situational context that is examined. For this reason, future work with longitudinal data is needed. This would add more consistent data with regard to the utilization of different religious coping strategies within contemporary Science of Mind congregations.

Second, the results generated are based on information that I acquired from a small survey sample. This means that the results are less representative of the entire Science of Mind population. Having a larger survey sample may lead to different results. Also, two respondents stated that some RCOPE-items cannot be applied to the Science of Mind context, since they do not view God as an external source or separate entity. One respondent even stated that she does not use the term God.

Third, the majority of survey participants (n=14) described their ethnicity as "White/Caucasian." Respondents were primarily female (n=11). With regard to age distribution, adults between the ages of 61 and 76 are over-represented in this survey sample, while adults between the ages of 49 and 59 are under-represented. The majority of survey participants identified as "spiritual, but not religious" (n=12), while the minority (n=2) of survey participants identified as "both religious and spiritual." When asked how they describe their spiritual or religious identity, eight respondents described their identity as a Religious Scientist or "Science of Minder." Six respondents used other religious or spiritual denominations: "New Thought minister serving at a Center for Spiritual Living," "Oneness," "Center for Spiritual Living," "I believe God or Spirit is within all," "I believe in direct communication with Spirit" and "New Thought." Lastly, 10 participants reported that they have been part of this religious or spiritual community for more than ten years. The other four participants reported that they have been part of this community for 6–10 years (n=2) and 1–5 years (n=2).

This background information raises the question whether or not individuals who identify as "White/Caucasian" and female, between the ages of 61 and 76, are more susceptible to Science of Mind as a form of religion. Studies have found that more women than men describe and express their identity as spiritual. Furthermore, men have been found to be more action oriented. This can explain why women appear to be more

spiritual than men.[163] Moreover, data collected for a recent study found that women are generally more religious than men in several ways.[164] In the United States, religious communities have become increasingly populated by elders. Recent surveys have found that elders tend to be more religious than young adults, and are more likely to identify with a religion, believe in God or engage in a variety of religious practices.[165] In addition, 61% of individuals in the United States who identify as "White/Caucasian" report that they belief in God, and that they are absolutely certain when it comes to their belief.[166] Finally, the familiar phrase "spiritual, but not religious," has become more widespread in the United States. Approximately 27% of U.S. adults now report that they think of themselves as spiritual, but not religious.[167] These conclusions explain why the majority of respondents in my survey sample are primarily "White/ Caucasian" females between the ages of 61 and 76 who identify as "spiritual, but not religious."

Fourth, most survey participants did not report using Pargament's so-called "negative coping strategies." Although I did not indicate which statements were positive or negative, the way the statements were phrased made it easy for participants to categorize the strategies as such. For instance, the statement "I sought God's love and care," can be easily opposed to "I expressed anger at God for letting such a terrible thing happen." The writings of Holmes do not advocate views of God as an angry, punishing or powerless God. Instead, Holmes understands God as loving and caring. Accordingly, ideas of "rightful" and "wrongful" thinking

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[163] Rich, A. "Gender and Spirituality: Are Women Really More Spiritual?" PhD diss., Liberty University, Lynchburg (2012) 23–25.

[164] Murphy, C. 'Q & A: Why are women generally more religious than men?' Website: http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/03/23/qa-why-are-women-generally-more-religious-than-men/.

[165] Pew Research Center, 'The Age Gap in Religion Around the World' Website: http://www.pewforum.org/2018/06/13/the-age-gap-in-religion-around-the-world/.

[166] Pew Research Center, 'Religious composition of whites.' Website: http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/racial-and-ethnic-composition/white/.

[167] Pew Research Center, 'More Americans now say they're spiritual but not religious.' Website: http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/06/more-americans-now-say-theyre-spiritual-but-not-religious/.

may lead members to think in terms of positive or negative. Finally, Science of Mind members understand their philosophy as inherently positive, meaning that they understand the ideology as a foundation for constructive and optimistic thinking. When conducting future research on this topic, the RCOPE-items need to be adjusted and refined, or a new, context-specific survey should be created. In addition, many respondents argued that Science of Mind practices, such as spiritual mind treatment, are not just applied during highly stressful situations, but also in daily life. Therefore, future research is needed that explores how different religious coping strategies are applied in the context of everyday life.

In chapter five I mentioned that there is evidence that reveals the presence of secular coping strategies. Some respondents reported that they utilize active and passive coping strategies [seeing a grief counsellor and seeking distraction or avoiding the problem]. Hence, in general, religious coping strategies and secular coping strategies concur. This and the fact that some individuals do not employ the term God may lead to the conclusion that Science of Mind congregations might be of a more secular nature than I originally thought. In daily life, religion and secularity are intermingled. For this reason, future research is needed on the complex relations between religious and secular aspects of Science of Mind as a meaning system, and the connection between religious coping strategies and secular coping strategies.

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Appendix I

Religious Methods of Coping to Find Meaning

Benevolent Religious Reappraisal
1. I tried to find the lesson from God in this crisis (S04- PRC)
2. I tried to see how God might be trying to strengthen me in this situation (S14- PRC)
Punishing God Reappraisal
1. I felt that the event was God's way of punishing me for my sins and lack of spirituality (S03- NRC)
2. I felt punished by God for my lack of devotion (S09- NRC)
Reappraisal of God's Powers
1. I questioned the power of God (S11- NRC)

Religious Methods of Coping to Gain Control

Collaborative Religious Coping
1. I worked together with God as partners to get through this hard time (S02- PRC)
2. I tried to put my plans into action together with God (S13- PRC)
Self-Directing Religious Coping
1. I tried to make sense of the situation without relying on God (S05- NRC)

Religious Methods of Coping to Gain Comfort and Closeness to God

Seeking Spiritual Support
1. I looked to God for strength, support and guidance in this crisis (S03- PRC)
2. I sought God's love and care (S11- PRC)
Religious Focus
1. I read religious/spiritual books for encouragement and guidance (S09- PRC)
2. I focused on my faith in God to stop worrying about my problems (S15- PRC)
3. I focused on religious rituals to stop worrying about my problems (S16- PRC)
4. I sang inspirational songs (S17- PRC)
5. I listened to inspirational music (S18- PRC)
Religious Purification
1. I confessed my sins and asked God for forgiveness (S01- NRC)
Spiritual Connection
1. I thought about how my life is part of a larger spiritual force (S01- PRC)
Spiritual Discontent
1. I wondered whether God had abandoned me (S04- NRC)

2.	I questioned whether God exists (S06- NRC)
3.	I expressed anger at God for letting such a thing happen (S07- NRC)
4.	I thought about turning away from God and living for myself alone (S08- NRC)
5.	I questioned God's love for me (S10- NRC)

Religious Methods of Coping to Gain Intimacy with Others and Closeness to God

Seeking Support from Clergy or Members
1. I looked for spiritual support from the CSL community in this crisis (S05- PRC)
2. I asked others to pray for me (S07- PRC)
3. I contacted or had someone contact a prayer chain on my behalf (S08- PRC)
Religious Helping/ Good Deeds
1. I tried to give spiritual strength to other people (S06- PRC)
Interpersonal Religious Discontent
1. I disagreed with the way how the CSL community wanted me to understand and handle the situation (S02- NRC)

Religious Methods of Coping to Achieve a Life Transformation

Seeking Religious Direction
1. I asked God to help me find a new purpose in living (S10- PRC)
Religious Forgiving
1. I sought help from God in letting go of my negative emotions (S12- PRC)

Religious Coping Survey

CNSNT **INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

UNIVERSITY OF GRONINGEN
FACULTY OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES- OUDE BOTERINGESTRAAT 38
9712 GK GRONINGEN
PHONE: +31503638017
E-MAIL: faculteit.ggw@rug.nl

PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER: JOSYANNE VISSCHER
RIJKSSTRAATWEG 147
9752 BD HAREN
THE NETHERLANDS
j.visscher.7@student.rug.nl
+31651256990

RESEARCH STUDY: Religious Coping Strategies within Science of Mind/ Centre's for Spiritual Living

 If you wish to decline or withdraw at any time, you may do so. The location of the research study is in Groningen, the Netherlands (Europe). If you agree to participate in the study, please complete this consent form. When you have completed this form, you can go on and answer the survey questions. All participants will need to complete this Informed Consent Form in order to get access to the online survey. Once the online survey is completed, the researcher will utilize the data only for the purposes of this study. Data will be stored securely without any names associated. THEREFORE, NO NAMES WILL BE WRITTEN ON THE SURVEY. This is to ensure anonymity (privacy/confidentiality).

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to determine to what extent religious coping strategies are used within Science of Mind communities or Centre's for Spiritual Living. Therefore, this research is explorative. This means that this research is conducted in order to get a better understanding of what Science of Mind is, what it is not and how people cope with stressful events within Centers for Spiritual Living. This study is conducted for the completion of the master program *Concealed Knowledge: esotericism, mysticism and Gnosticism* (faculty of Religious Studies at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands). With this research I hope to contribute to our understanding of the role that religion and spirituality play in the lives of believers.

For the purposes of this research, you will be asked to complete a survey in which you will be asked to provide some background information on yourself and you will be asked several questions about how you respond to difficult situations in your life. The survey takes only about 30 minutes to

complete. The results of the survey will be reported anonymously.
Encryptions are in place to protect the information from being accessed by unauthorized users.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Any information that you provide will be kept strictly private, confidential, and anonymous. Your name will not be attached to your survey responses in any way. Taking part in this research is voluntary. You may discontinue participation at any time during assessment or prior to the completion of the project.

Please do not hesitate to call or e-mail me if you have any questions as you read over this material. My contact information is listed above.

STATEMENT BY PERSON AGREEING TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY: I freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this study. I have read and understood the above information. I have been invited with an introduction letter and I am completely informed of the general nature of this study.

 I agree to voluntarily participate:

◯ Yes, I consent

◯ No, I do not consent

End of Block: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Start of Block: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

ETHNIC What is your ethnicity?

◯ White/ Caucasian (1)

◯ Hispanic or Latino (2)

◯ Black/ African American (3)

◯ Native American or American Indian (4)

◯ Asian (5)

◯ Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander (6)

◯ Other (7)

◯ I'd rather not specify (8)

AGE What is your age?

_____

GENDER What is your gender?

○ Male (1)

○ Female (2)

○ Other (3)

○ I'd rather not specify (4)

RELI 1 Do you identify as...

○ Religious, but not spiritual. (1)

○ Spiritual, but not religious. (2)

○ Both religious and spiritual. (3)

○ Neither religious nor spiritual (4)

RELI 2 How do you describe your religious/spiritual identity?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

RELI 3 How long have you been part of this religious/ spiritual community?

○ Under 1 year (1)

○ 1-5 years (2)

○ 6-10 years (3)

○ More than 10 years (4)

SOM1 There are different ways to search for meaning in your life during stressful events. Take a few moments to remember one of the most stressful events in your life. Please provide a description of this situation:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

SOM2 Please provide a list of words to describe the emotions you felt at the time of this event:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

SOM3 What did you do to try to make yourself feel better?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

SOM4 What helped you to make sense of this event?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

SOM5 Did you rely on your spirituality/ religiosity to give meaning to this event?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

SOM6 How did you give meaning to this event based on your religious/spiritual beliefs?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

SOM7 How does Science of Mind help you to make sense of stressful situations?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

SOM8 Would you say that Science of Mind is the most important source of meaning in your life?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

SOM9 How do other members of this CSL community provide you with help and support?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

SOM10 What rituals do you perform in stressful situations that are specific to the Science of Mind movement?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

SOM11 How do you feel after performing these rituals?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

- -

SOM12 Is there anything else you would like to say about how you handle stressful situations in your life by using Science of Mind ideology/ practices?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

End of Block: SCIENCE OF MIND

Start of Block: RECOPE SURVEY (PRC)

X→ X→
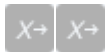
PRC There are specific things that people can do to cope with stressful events such as you described earlier. Please indicate how often you responded in the following ways:

(Keep in mind that the term God does not only refer to the orthodox notion of God, it can also refer to another conception of the divine, such as the Infinite Intelligence, a higher force of nature or even another deity).

[Continues on next page]

	Very often (4)	Often (3)	Seldom (2)	Not at all (1)
I thought about how my life is part of a larger spiritual force (1)	◯	◯	◯	◯
I worked together with God as partners to get through this hard time (2)	◯	◯	◯	◯
I looked to God for strength, support and guidance in this crisis (3)	◯	◯	◯	◯
I tried to find the lesson from God in this crisis (4)	◯	◯	◯	◯
I looked for spiritual support from the CSL community in this crisis (5)	◯	◯	◯	◯
I tried to give spiritual strength to other people (6)	◯	◯	◯	◯
I asked others to pray for me (7)	◯	◯	◯	◯
I contacted or had someone contact a prayer chain on my behalf (8)	◯	◯	◯	◯
I read religious/ spiritual books for encouragement or guidance (9)	◯	◯	◯	◯
I asked God to help me find a new purpose in living (10)	◯	◯	◯	◯
I sought God's love and care (11)	◯	◯	◯	◯
I sought help from God in letting go of my negative emotions (12)	◯	◯	◯	◯

I tried to put my plans into action together with God (13)	○	○	○	○
I tried to see how God might be trying to strengthen me in this situation (14)	○	○	○	○
I focused on my faith in God to stop worrying about my problems (15)	○	○	○	○
I focused on religious rituals to stop worrying about my problems (16)	○	○	○	○
I sang inspirational songs (17)	○	○	○	○
I listened to inspirational music (18)	○	○	○	○

End of Block: RECOPE SURVEY (PRC)

Start of Block: RECOPE SURVEY (NRC)

NRC	Very often (4)	Often (3)	Seldom (2)	Not at all (1)
I confessed my sins and asked God for forgiveness (1)	○	○	○	○
I disagreed with the way how the CSL community wanted me to understand and handle this situation (2)	○	○	○	○
I felt that the event was God's way of punishing me for my sins and lack of spirituality (3)	○	○	○	○
I wondered whether God had abandoned me (4)	○	○	○	○
I tried to make sense of the situation without relying on God (5)	○	○	○	○
I questioned whether God really exists (6)	○	○	○	○
I expressed anger at God for letting such a terrible thing happen (7)	○	○	○	○
I thought about turning away from God and living for myself alone (8)	○	○	○	○
I felt punished by God for my lack of devotion (9)	○	○	○	○
I questioned God's love for me (10)	○	○	○	○

I questioned the power of God (11)	○	○	○	○

CON1 Are there any other responses to this stressful situation that were not covered in this survey?

○ No, the survey covered my responses

○ Yes, I had additional responses

CON2 Please describe those responses:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

CON3 After a CSL meeting, do you feel like you have a better understanding of the world around you?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

CON4 Please describe how Science of Mind provides you with a sense of purpose in life:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

CON5 Does Science of Mind make your life feel meaningful?

◯ Yes (1)

◯ No (2)

CON6 In what ways does Science of Mind make your life feel meaningful/ significant?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

CON7 Thank you for sharing your time and attention with me! If you would like a summary of my research when it is completed, please provide your contact information here:

◯ Name _____

◯ Email _____

◯ Phone _____

End of Block: CONCLUSION