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# Coping with Critical Life Situations

Perspectives from Pentecostal Christians and Secularists About Coping  
with Critical Life Situations

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## **Abstract**

Few studies have been done on religious coping among the Pentecostal Christian movement in Norway. The aim of this study is to explore how a small sample of Norwegian Pentecostals and Secularists cope with critical life situations. This qualitative study includes data collected through semi-structured interviews with six Pentecostals Christians and six Secularists (defined as a person who has no religion or religious beliefs) coping with their problems. The most central theory used in this thesis is Kenneth Pargament's coping theory based on the role of religion in sustaining meaning and hope in the face of adversity. The findings from the study show that the central difference between the two groups is who they turn to in the face of adversity. Pentecostal Christians exhibited positive religious coping by turning to God in times of difficulty. Religious coping was characterized by: Faith in God in whom they found security and strength, and through which they attributed significance and sources of meaning during adversity. The Secularists turned to family and friends, to enhance their capacity for self-regulation and stress management. Both groups differed in their ways of facing their problems, but at the same time they also had other similar ways of facing adversity which included turning to their loved ones such as family and friends and introspection (personal reflection) when faced with adversity and critical life situations.

## **Abbreviations**

CP W1      Christian Pentecostal Woman 1

CP W2      Christian Pentecostal Woman 2

CP W3      Christian Pentecostal Woman 3

CP M1      Christian Pentecostal Man 1

CP M2      Christian Pentecostal Man 2

CP M3      Christian Pentecostal Man 3

S W1      Secularist Woman 1

S W2      Secularist Woman 2

S W3      Secularist Woman 3

S M1      Secularist Man 1

S M2      Secularist Man 2

S M3      Secularist Man 3

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## CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

*Even though I walk through the valley  
of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me*

Psalm 23:4 (New International Version Bible)

### 1.1 Personal Motivation

As a private counseling psychologist, I have seen clients struggle with faith and beliefs when faced with critical and painful situations. I have seen patients who, in the face of adversity, have managed the situation in a positive way. They transformed an adverse situation into an opportunity, while other patients have sunk deeper into adversity. I have seen patients cope with anger, questioning God and I have also seen patients praise and thank God in the midst of pain.

Some time ago I did research investigating the relationship between purpose of life and religious belief among elderly believers and non-believers, I used the PIL (Purpose of Life) test. One of the findings from that investigation was that the elderly believers had better psychological and emotional quality of life due to their faith and hope in God.

Before I began the research presented in this thesis study, I was already convinced that the big difference between believers and non-believers was the word “hope.” It has been my belief that the world needs to have hope because life itself is difficult for everyone.

Another thing which motivated me to write this thesis is the book of Job. Job is a testimony to the mystery of human suffering in the context of fervent religious faith. Job went through the depth of suffering in our world, the death of a family member, loneliness, poverty, discrimination, and depression. Job, a prophet who knew that God could do everything and that in the midst of the pain he did not understand many things, but he never questioned what he was going through, he only continued to trust Him who could do everything.

Yet, there are some Christians who think that they are exempt from suffering moments of adversity because God would not allow bad things to happen to his children. While in contrast, there are some Christians, who in the face of adversity, do not know how to face these critical moments in life. Though the range of coping perspectives may differ depending on the severity of the situation faced, it is in these moments where thoughts and questions emerge. For some, any type of doubt or questioning of the hardship can be translated as lack of faith, and some may come to think that their suffering is a punishment from God. From this perspective, guilt is added upon the suffering itself. But there are also others who try to find the meaning and purpose of adversity, and their faith grows stronger instead of weakening.

Now, what about the non-believers i.e. secularists (for this study secularists are defined as people who do not believe in any divinity and do not practice any type of religious ceremony). How do they face critical moments in life? What or who contains them in moments of pain and loss. There is a saying, *all are atheist until the plane starts to fall*, describing how many who after a painful event converted to Christianity. Religion tends to appear or be turned to in the most remarkable and painful moments of people's lives.

The premise for my current research project described in this thesis was my supposition that Pentecostal Christians who have a mature faith, know that critical situations can happen to everyone, would have different coping skills than secular people who do not have a God to turn to when they are faced with critical life situations. I wanted to explore the difference in how these groups work and try to overcome adversity.

## **1.2 General Introduction**

Coping is a process that we, as individuals, use in all critical day-to-day situations and in general throughout our lives. These critical situations can be expected or unexpected, of short or long duration. The ability to cope with adversity and the strategies used are related to many internal and external factors that vary from person to person and are unique. Some trying situations can be solved successfully and others with some difficulty. Many will see adversity as an opportunity to improve and grow, and others will sadly turn it into a larger more consuming problem. Adversity usually pushes us beyond our capabilities, but it also positively or negatively affects our psychological, physical, and

spiritual health. Lazarus and Folkman (1984), often considered one of the most influential theorists of coping and stress, define stress as the result of an imbalance between perceived external or internal demands and the perceived personal and social resources to cope with them.

More recently, the role of religion in the coping process has been considered. Religion is intimately related to human life and is frequently turned to as a way of responding to negative events. Kenneth I. Pargament is the primary theorist of religious coping and defines religious coping as “*efforts to understand and deal with negative life events that are related to the sacred*”. These efforts may involve faith, prayer, congregational support, and spiritual care (1997, pp. 7). Pargament indicates that this relationship is not surprising, because aspects of humanity, such as conflict, suffering and difficulties, are predominant themes in different religions. Several empirical studies showed that religious people who face psychological crises often turn to their religious faith while trying to cope with the stressors caused by the crisis. Other studies have linked psychological crises to increase, decrease, or simply change in people’s religious faith (Pargament 1997 pp. 6-8).

Religious coping has been studied using both quantitative and qualitative research design in the fields of psychology and religion, and particularly among Christians. Pargament (1997) defines positive religious coping as a secure relationship with God which includes the collaborative style, benevolent reappraisal of stressor and seeking spiritual support from God. Pargament (1997) defines negative religious coping as spiritual discontent, punishing God reappraisals and interpersonal religious discontent.

Particular studies have focused on the implications of positive and negative religious coping for health and well-being. Most, if not almost all, have had positive conclusions regarding their results. Wang Hongshan et al. (2014) in their study: “The Impact of Stressful Life Events on Highly Religious Chinese Christians Living in Belgium”, indicates that for many highly religious Chinese Christians, stressful life events may represent a faith-growth opportunity.

The study "The Use of Religious Coping Methods in a Secular Society" carried out by Ahmadi Nader and Ahmadi Fereshteh (2006) in Sweden showed that gender, age, and

area of upbringing played an important role in almost all the religious coping methods in their respondents. used. In general, people in the oldest age-group, women, and people raised in places with 20,000 or fewer residents had a higher average use of religious coping methods than did younger people, men, and those raised in larger towns.

In contrast to other studies, the results of the study "The Psychological Outcome of Religious Coping with Stressful Life Events in a Swiss Sample of Church Attendees" by Winter Urs, Hauri Deimitrei et al. (2012) suggest that positive religious coping impacts only marginally, psychopathology, i.e., anxiety and depressive symptoms. They indicate that positive religious coping might serve as a strong promoter of stress-related growth, which, in turn, is consistent with previous findings. Negative religious coping was associated with stress-related growth and poor psychological outcomes. These findings were in line with other studies which have demonstrated that negative religious coping can be associated with stress-related growth, but with negative outcomes as well. (Carpenter, T. P., Laney, T., & Mezulis, A. (2012), Ahles, J. J., Mezulis, A. H., & Hudson, M. R. (2016))

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem and Research question**

Religious coping has been studied mainly among Christians in North America and many parts of Europe. I did not find any research in English conducted in the Norwegian context, so my curiosity was piqued to conduct this study in Norway. I chose Pentecostal Christians and secularists as my study population for the following two reasons. First, I personally think that the Pentecostal movement is characterized by a focus on the emotional experience of God and by proclaiming a pragmatic gospel that addresses both practical and spiritual needs in relation to other Christian movements. With the aim of conducting a comparative study, I chose to contrast this group with an opposite or antagonistic one, so I chose the Secularists. My main goal is to understand how people with extremely different beliefs about the existence of God navigate critical life situations.

This research will be answering by the main research question:

How do Pentecostal Christians and Secularists cope with critical life situations in Norway?

This question will be addressed by trying to answer these questions:

- How does each group differ in their coping strategies when faced with critical life situations?
- How consistently do both groups cope?
- What similarities in coping styles does each group utilize when faced with critical life situations?
- How do Pentecostal Christians and a Secularist cope with different types of critical situations in Norway?

The main objectives of this study will be:

- To identify the way of coping that Pentecostal Christians and Secularists use most frequently with critical situations.
- To explore the experience of Pentecostal Christians and Secularists, with critical situations.
- To find out there are similarities between Pentecostal Christians and Secularists, in their way of dealing with critical situations.
- To find out if there are differences between Pentecostal Christians and Secularists, in the way of dealing with critical situations.
- To identify the role of religion plays in dealing with critical situations.

#### **1.4 Material and Methodology**

This study is exploratory in nature and the main interest is how Pentecostal Christians and secularists cope with critical life situations in Norway. To answer the research question, my unit of analysis will be case studies of Pentecostal Christians and Secularists who have faced critical situations in their lives. Please note that while I seek to understand the similarities and differences in the coping styles of these two groups, one cannot exclusively generalize about large groups of people based on limited case studies.

This research done as a part of this thesis is qualitative in nature, emphasizing individual experience and perceptions in religious behavior rather than making the statistical generalizations or quantification of variations that may be found in quantitative thesis

(Bryman, 2012). Yin observes that in general case studies are preferred when answering the “how” or “why” questions and secondly, when the researcher has limited control over the events, and finally when “the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context”. (Yin, 2009, p. 9). For this study (set in Norway), I interviewed six Pentecostals Christians (three women and three men) and six Secularists (three women and three men).

The interviews were semi-structured and conducted in English. The reason why I choose semi - structured interviews is because they are more flexible, as it “emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis data” (Bryman, 2012). By this I mean that my respondents used their own ways in defining and answering the questions asked of them. Semi-structured interviews also allowed me the flexibility to elaborate and raise more important and valuable issues which may not be included in the interview guide (Bryman, 2012, pp. 471). The participants were asked to share their life histories and personal experiences with the hope that they would provide rich and detailed answers. Initially the interviews were conducted in-person, but due to the global pandemic caused by Covid-19, the high rates of infection per day and the restrictions of meeting, it was necessary to add one more resource to this research, which is technology. Some participants were interviewed online using Zoom. Due to the stress of the changing times and technological issues with Zoom, respondents were offered the possibility to answer the interview questions via email.

This research was conducted to ensure that the ethical aspects required during all the research to be carried out. Confidentiality and proper handling of information was emphasized at all times to respect the dignity of each participant. Ethical permission was from the Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD) for responsible protection of participants' data. A written and oral letter of consent was presented to the participants and data collected was handled in accordance with the established rules of ethics before, during and after the research. As a researcher, I took my responsibility seriously.

## **1.5 Research Outline**

The thesis is organized as follows: The first chapter involves the introduction and presents the personal motivation, general introduction, the research design and methodology.

The second chapter intends to explore the background context by presenting a brief history of Christian religion in Norway, with emphasis on Pentecostals Christian Movement (Pinsebevegelsen). I also present the background and definition of secularism AND secularization in Norway.

In chapter three, I present and define key terms used in this study, the term “coping” as defined by Lazarus and Folkman will be featured. In this chapter, I also present a brief survey of different coping strategies and coping styles. In addition to the discussion of the role of religion in coping processes, I focus specifically on K. Pargament's religious coping theory. Religious coping theory discussed in this chapter includes: the difference between the concepts of spirituality and religiosity and religious coping styles.

Chapter four focuses on the research design and methodology used in this study. Challenges and limitations encountered during the study will also be presented.

Chapter five presents analysis and findings from the interviews conducted.

Chapter six expands on the discussion of the findings as they emerged from empirical data, research questions and the literature used in relation to the theoretical framework of this research.

I conclude with Chapter seven, where I present my conclusions and final thoughts about the thesis project.

## **CHAPTER TWO - CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND**

This chapter focuses on the historical background of Christian religion in Norway which serves as our inception of understanding the genesis and development of Pentecostals Christian Movement and secularization in the Norwegian context.

In current times, Norway is considered a country that allows people full religious freedom. This means that you can practice any religion you wish, without having to fear persecution or any kind of punishment. It also means that you can choose whether or not to register your belonging to any religion. In Norway you can make such choices after you have reached the age of 15, but before that age, it is the parents who decide to which religion the child should belong.

### **2.1 A brief history of Christian religion in Norway.**

Missionaries brought Christianity to Norway from the British Isles in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, and since then Christianity has been the dominant religion in Norway. The missionaries were monks, bishops accompanied their kings and Vikings who had been converted. Christianity was firmly established in Norway by the end of the 12<sup>th</sup>. King Christian III established the Evangelical-Lutheran faith as the official religion of Norway and Denmark in 1537. In 1600, Lutheranism became the official State Church and had taken over the church structure of the whole country. (Church of Norway: A Brief History, 2016)

#### **2.1.1 Pentecostals Christians Movement (Pinsebevegelsen)**

The first European country that was introduced to Pentecostalism was Norway. In 1906, the Pentecostal movement first arrived in Norway. It was Thomas Ball Barratt, a Methodist minister, who had brought this inspiration from his trip to the United States. Barratt was inspired by Auza Street Revival where The Holy Spirit was in the center of attention (Anderson, 2004, p. 39). After his return, Barrett started spreading the word, and in a few years, several thousand Norwegians had been struck by his message. He wanted revival in the already existing churches in Norway. (Stensvold, 2018, p.25-26).

Pentecostal Christianity has a few aspects of practices and beliefs that contrast with other forms of Christianity. For instance, Pentecostals believe baptism should take place when

a person is mature enough to take an independent standpoint for what one personally believes in. Additionally, they emphasize and focus on The Holy Spirit in everyday life. Their most distinctive trait is the belief in the practices of “spiritual gifts” such as practice of speaking in tongues and healing through faith. (Lie, 2007; Ski, 1981, pp.117-125). Pentecostal congregations were established in almost every town in Norway. (Bloch-Hoell, 1956). Geir Lie, (2007), a Norwegian researcher, states that even though there are relatively many Pentecostals in Norway, Pentecostalism is only a subculture in Norway. While on a worldwide level, Pentecostalism is growing enormously, often having significant influence in various spheres of society, such as the incorporation into the political arena or the growth of Pentecostal churches in South America.

In Norway there are more than 340 local Pentecostal congregations today, most of which are independent and self-governing churches. While there is estimated to be around 500 000 000 Pentecostals in the world, there are around 50 000 members in Norway, including both adults and children. Most Norwegian Pentecostal churches have democratically and congregationally elected leaders. (<https://pinsebevegelsen.no/pinsebevegelsen/om-pinsebevegelsen>)

Today there is no official state religion in Norway. As of 2020, Just over 70 percent of the Norwegian population belongs to the Church of Norway, which practices Lutheran-Protestant Christianity. Therefore, many Norwegians are Protestant Christians. Approximately 2.5 percent of Christians in Norway belong to the Catholic Church and are called Catholics. The second largest religion in Norway is Islam. Just over 2.5 percent of Norway's population are Muslims. In addition to Christians and Muslims, there are several small religious communities that practice, for example, Buddhism, Hinduism or Judaism. 1.6 percent of Norway's population, or almost 90,000 people, are members of the Human-Ethical Association, a non-religious organization that focuses on humanist values. (<https://www.ssb.no/kultur-og-fritid/faktaside/religion>)

Sociologist Grace Davie wrote that the Scandinavians do not believe in Christianity but “almost all continue to pay tax to their state churches, but relatively few either attend their churches with any regularity or subscribe to conventional statements of belief” saying in other words they “belong without believing”. This shows that the cultural identity of

Norwegians may be connected to belonging to the church regardless of whether the person believes in what the church professes in addition to that religion does not have an important place in their daily lives. (Davie, 2000, p. 3-4).

The number of members in the Church of Norway decreases from year to year. (In the last five years, 149,258 people have changed their affiliation), and statistics show that very few go to church more often than once a month, and many say they do not believe in God. Nevertheless, most Christians in Norway will consider the Church important both at Christmas and at ceremonies such as baptism (28011 people in 2019), confirmation (34513 people in 2019), weddings and funerals (6412 people in 2019).

## **2.2 Background of Secularism**

George Jacob Holyoake considered the father of English secularism, a great activist for secularization coined the term secularism to “describe his views of promoting a social order separate from religion, without actively dismissing or criticizing religious belief.” (Zuckerman 2010, p. 73). Secularity is not static rather it is shaped by cultural and social forces.

For a better understanding I distinguish between the following three terms: Secularism, secularity and secularization. I want to distinguish what is meant by Secularity and Secularization. According to the Encyclopedia of Science and Religion, secularity is “a condition where is absent from specific areas of society” and secularization means that “the overarching and, as it often seems, the transcendent religious system is reduced to a subsystem or a marginal dimension of cultural identity in a functionally” (Iversen Hans R., 2013).

### **2.2.1 Definition of Secularism.**

There are many definitions of the term secularism presented in different studies, often scholars define secularism from their area of study such as social, cultural and political, among others. I will mention these three quotes from Steve Bruce and Bryan Wilson and Alan Aldridge, as they are closer to the objectives of my thesis. Alan Aldridge defines secularization “as the process by which sectors of society and culture move away from the domination of religious institutions and symbols”. On the other hand, Steve Bruce

interprets secularization as a social condition that manifests itself in the decline of non-religious functions and institutions, such as the gaze and the economy, among other aspects of life. Finally, Bryan Wilson describes secularization “as a process by which the practice of religious thought and institutions lose social significance”. (Aldridge 2013, p. 49).

### **2.3 Secularization in Norway.**

During the recent decades, Europe has been experiencing two scenarios in the religious landscape. One can observe traditional religion has been declining in relation to the waning of church attendance and church affiliation (Beckford 2006 p. 32-35) while at the same time alternative spirituality associated with various New Age practices has been on the rise (Demerath 2001, Heelas and Woodhead 2005).

Norway has also experienced a shifting in its religious landscape. The past few decades have been a time of structural changes in Norwegian society as well. Some of these changes are closely related to modernization, multiculturalism and secularization. These changes have also affected the level of religiosity of its population, such as increasing religious diversity, weakening ties with religious institutions, combined with increasing private religiosity (Furuset 2006).

To conclude I would like to highlight the findings from the doctoral dissertation "Non-religious Norwegians. Sociological analysis of individuals without religion" by Sivert Skålvoll Urstad, (2018). I found the author's sociological approach important as well as the fact that his was the first systematic study of non-religious people in Norway. Urstad concluded that:

Only 2% of the Norwegian population attends church regularly, and about 70% are members of the Church of Norway. Up to 25% of the population is non-religious and does not believe in God or other higher powers, and has no daily rituals related to religion.

According to the researcher, many of those who do not have a religious belief in Norway were still members of the Church and used the church for ceremonial events such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals. “The church is important as a tradition for the non-

religious people” Surprisingly Urstad found that "there are still more, men than women who do not have any sort of religious faith, yet in the group of people that are not a part of a religious community, it is equal between the sexes," He considers this fact unique to Norway.

His thesis showed that “the non-religious people are not a uniform group, but they do have some recurring commonalities.” First, the secular young adults are primarily men, with higher education. Second, they are often influenced by non-religious family and close friends. Third, everyone relates differently to religion and themselves being non-religious. Finally, the researcher concluded that the “most non-religious Norwegians are members of the Church of Norway.” By non-religious, they mean (a person who has no religion or religious beliefs).

In addition, Urstad sorted non-religious people into three groups: negative, neutral or showing great interest in religion. Those considered negative were “strongly opposed to having an official state church, and have no problem expressing negative views on Christianity and other religions.” For the neutral, religion is not an important theme at all. On the opposite side is the group that is “passionately interested in discussing religious matters, “says Urstad.

Although Norway has long been identified as a Christian country, various faith beliefs have originated throughout these years and for the most part, have peacefully coexisted in the country.

## **CHAPTER THREE - THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

In this chapter, the concept of coping will be introduced. I will also briefly describe coping styles and coping strategies used by people facing difficult situations. At the same time, I will discuss religiosity and spiritually oriented coping in general, with an emphasis on factors important to this study.

### **3.1 An introduction to Coping**

#### **3.1.1 What is coping?**

Over the past 30 years, a great deal of research has been conducted on stress and coping. This research has focused on how people generally cope with stress in their lives, how people differ in their coping strategies, how people cope consistently, and how people cope with different types of stressful situations. For the most part, these studies have focused on major stressors, such as the death of a loved one, job loss, financial problems, illness, or a serious accident and a recent factor such as the pandemic that the whole world is going through now.

The concept of coping is part of the study of psychology. In a simple and general way, coping could be defined as a response to a difficult situation we face in our lives, - process that can alter the stressful problem or regulate the emotional response. As stated by Lazarus and Folkman (1984, p.141), leading scholars on the subject, coping is “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person.” These cognitive and behavioral efforts are, as they write in later work, “constantly changing as a function of continuous appraisals and reappraisals of the person-environment relationship, which is also always changing” (Folkman & Lazarus, 1991, p. 210).

Lazarus and Folkman, (1984) have presented a psychological theory of coping, where they identify two components for coping with stressful situations, one is cognitive, and the other is behavioral. However, there are some major life stressors, such as the death of a loved one, that can pose an enormous challenge to individuals' fundamental worldviews and generate a spiritual, existential or identity crisis.

Thus, coping can also be defined as the process through which individuals attempt to understand and cope with the *significant* demands in their lives (Park, 2010) or as a search for *significance* in times of stress (Pargament, 1997, p. 90). Park and Folkman (1997) have alluded to Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress and coping and identified the creation of *meaning* as a key component of the coping process. They defined *significance* as a process of reconciling interpretations of major life events with foundational beliefs about the world. By *significance*, Pargament refers to, “what is important to the individual, institution, or culture – those things we care about” (1997, p. 31). It includes “life’s ultimate concerns – death, tragedy, inequity” (ibid ). The concept of significance in Pargament’s theory of coping is noteworthy especially in relation to religious coping.

### **3.1.2 Coping Strategies**

Coping strategies are as numerous and as varied as the stressors that precede them. Many factors influence the choice of one type of strategy over the other including type of stressful event and personal characteristics. Coping strategies generally refer to the efforts, both behavioral and psychological, that people facing a difficult situation employ to master, reduce, or minimize critical life events. One of the objectives of this research is precisely to identify the coping strategies that an individual uses to navigate various difficult life situations.

Coping involves a set of cognitive, behavioral and emotional strategies that threaten or exceed the subject's resources. Avoidant forms of coping may include fantasizing or not thinking about the problem whereas active forms of coping may include seeking instrumental support. Lazarus and Folkman (1980) recognized two general coping strategies: Problem-focused coping and Emotion-focused coping. Emotion-focused forms of coping such as hiding or suppressing feelings and problem-focused forms of coping such as developing a plan of action are differentiated. (Lazarus & Launier 1978; Billings & Moos 1981). Problem - focused coping strategies are actively efforts to alleviate stressful circumstances. In emotion - focused coping strategies, involve efforts which are directed toward regulating the emotional consequences of critical or potential events. Research (ibid.) has shown that people practice both types of strategies to combat critical events; for example, when people deal controllable problems such as family-

related problems, people employ problem-focused coping, whereas when people face less controllable situations, such as serious health problems, people mainly employ emotion-focused coping.

Problem-focused coping strategies might include an individual thinking about how they can deal with or remove the stressor from their life, seeking advice from others on how to cope with their stressor, and avoiding distractions to deal with the stressor. Emotion-focused coping focuses on how an individual attends to and interprets stressful situations and their emotional reaction to it, seeking out emotional support from others, effectively managing the stressor, and thinking about the stressor in a way that would make it more positive for the individual.

The purpose of coping strategies is to reduce or manage emotional pain and distress, help adjust to stressful events, and at the same time maintain their emotional well-being. Researchers (Lazarus & Launier 1978; Billings & Moos 1981) divide coping strategies into the categories active and avoidant (or passive) based on the way a person faces the loss, stress or illness. Active coping involves doing something to affect the stressor, while avoidant coping might manifest in one becoming escapist and passive.

Active coping strategies are behavioral and psychological responses designed to change the nature of the stressor itself or how one thinks about it. Active coping strategies can be seen when one chooses to do something to affect the stressor and impact a person's attitude toward the event. By contrast, avoidant coping strategies are characterized by ignoring the issue, often resulting in activities (such as alcohol use) or mental states (such as withdrawal) that keep a person away from directly addressing stressful events. Researchers Holahan & Moos (1987) consider that active coping strategies (whether behavioral or emotional) constitute better ways to deal with critical situations, and avoidant coping strategies constitute adverse responses to critical life situations.

Other researchers, such as Pargament (1997, pp. 86-87), believe that coping is a process that involves employing different possibilities and making choices to handle difficult circumstances. Of course, the options and possibilities are more restricted in some situations than in others. Since "even if a passive, avoidant, or reactive stance is taken

toward problems, this does not erase that, at some level, the stance was chosen. In this very basic sense, coping is an active process involving difficult choices in times of trouble” (Pargament, 1997, p. 86).

### 3.1.3 Coping Styles

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), *coping styles* is a broad term used relating coping actions to particular stressors that people encounter. Research carried out by Greer and Watson (1987) have identified categories of prevailing coping styles breast cancer patients used to cope with their cancer. These styles listed below have the potential to be applied to other situations. They include:

**Fighting Spirit**, Individuals perceive the disease as a challenge and face it with a positive attitude. They respond with flexible cognitive strategies. This coping style has been associated with better psychological morbidity (a combination of anxiety and depression), increased sense of control and they present low levels of anxiety and depression.

**Hopelessness and Helplessness:** This coping style is characterized by high levels of anxiety and depression, along with the belief of low control over events, abandonment or giving-up.

**Fatalism** Individuals are characterized by low levels of depression and anxiety, low sense of control, resignation and passive acceptance of fate.

**Anxious Preoccupation:** This coping style has high levels of anxiety and worry about the situation. The patient is either seeking constant tranquility and/or is distancing herself from the healthcare environment.

**Avoidance:** This style of coping indicates the tendency to minimize the cancer event and refrain from seeking information.

Each of the five styles listed above gives the person a way to deal with uncomfortable thoughts and feelings. People may use all or some aspects of these five categories at different times during the initial adjustment period. Certainly, there are many factors that influence the patient's choice of coping style.

## **3.2 Modes and Burdens of Coping**

In the face of adversity in life, people will always have “modes” of coping with the adversity. These modes guide the people with their process of coping and are the forms of how they see the world. Pargament (1997) writes about modes, as the way people look at the world, informed by historical, cultural, social, and personal events and beliefs, including religious affiliations. Pargament (1997) defines these modes as an "orienting system" that will help or hinder us in the coping process. This orienting system is composed of, among others, resources and burdens. Resources are attributes that generally help in stressful situations and burdens are those attributes that do not help when facing difficult situations. (Pargament, 1987, p.99-101)

### **3.2.1 The Resources of Coping**

The resources that people usually bring to the coping process come in different shapes and sizes. Pargament (1997) describes resources as: material (e.g., money), physical (e.g., health), social (e.g., interpersonal skills, supportive social systems) and spiritual (e.g., feeling of closeness with God). Through some of the research conducted, it has been possible to identify and examine some coping resources. Problem-solving skills constitute one such resource. It has posited by Dubow & Tisak (1989) that people with good problem-solving skills have fewer behavior problems than those with less developed problem-solving abilities. According Noris & Murell (1988), prior experience with stressors can be an effective coping resource. Social support constitutes another resource in times of stress (Cohen & Wills 1985). Another resource for coping with adversity can be found in those who exhibit a tendency toward pursuing goals tenaciously and adjusting goals (Pargament 1997, p. 101). People bring resources and burdens to coping. A resource is generally helpful in coping, burdens are considered something that is generally unhelpful, as I explain below.

### **3.2.2 Burdens of Coping**

Burdens of coping could also be material, physical, psychological, social or spiritual. Examples of such burdens are a history of failure, a physical handicap, a destructive family, a personality problem, financial debt or dysfunctional beliefs about oneself or others (Pargament, 1997, p. 101). Several studies have been carried out to determine the

effects of burdens of coping. A longitudinal study of the relationship between pessimism and physical health (Peterson et al. 1988) shows that a pessimistic explanatory style was predictive of poorer physical health among certain sub/groups of the study population. A study carried by Wheaton (1983) indicates that fatalistic beliefs and inflexibility in coping may function as a burden.

People bring both resources and burdens to coping. Both contribute to an orienting system, i.e., a material, psychological, biological, social and spiritual frame of reference for dealing with critical life situations. Some orienting systems have their points of weakness and limitation, are not static and change over time (Pargament, 1997, p. 102-103).

### **3.3 Stressful Events and Psychological Health**

Coping often occurs in the context of stressful life events and is associated with higher levels of psychological distress. Below I present two key studies that focus on how coping strategies influence the level of stress an individual may experience and its effect on overall psychological health. (Eby, 1996; Lee, 2005)

Eby (1996) examined the effect of experiences of abuse and levels of stress on women's psychological and physical health. The study found that high levels of stress resulted in poor overall psychological health and negative physical health symptoms, but at the same time they found that healthy coping strategies and social support had significant positive direct effects on the women's psychological health.

Lee (2005) completed a study of Caucasian and Asian women who had experienced domestic violence and their psychological outcomes. The study focused on the mediating effects of social support and coping strategies on the relationship between violence and psychological outcome. Lee (2005) found an indirect effect of violence on psychological outcomes through mediating variables of perceived social support and passive coping. The study provided information on the role of social support in coping strategies. On the one hand, social support can help one to cope with problems actively because it provides people with strength. On the other hand, it can help people passively because it prevents them from coping with their own problems, leaving the responsibility to others.

Stress and coping are closely related. Possible ways of reacting to how we respond to a critical situation in our lives include many external and internal variables. Part of our response can be influenced by aspects of our biological inheritance and characteristics of the social and physical environment over which we have little or no control. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) have noted that, both in the field of biology and in medicine, stress is usually defined as the increase in intensity of the response of an individual who is faced with a situation that is considered threatening. The authors refer to the different characteristics of the subject, on the one hand, and the nature of the environment, on the other. Lazarus and Folkman (1986, p.164). explain:

Psychological stress is a particular relationship between the individual and the environment that is evaluated by the latter as threatening or overwhelming its resources and endangering his or her well-being. Coping involves a constantly changing set of cognitive and behavioral efforts that are developed to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as exceeding or overflowing the individual's resources.

From a relational perspective, psychological stress is the result of the relationship between the subject and its environment: depending on the subject's evaluation of the situation as threatening or beyond its own resources, she may or may not feel that the situation may endanger its personal well-being. For Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping is a process through which the person manages the demands of the individual-environment relationship that they evaluate as stressful, and the emotions that the situation generates.

The aforementioned authors point out that the coping process has three key features: a) what the individual actually does, b) the given context, and c) the ways in which behavior may change as the stressful situation develops or as one moves from one situation to another.

### **3.4 Gender and Coping**

The purpose of this thesis is not to investigate whether there is a relationship between gender role and coping strategies. However, I consider it interesting to consider whether there are similarities or differences between women and men when facing difficult

situations in life. Culturally and generally women are associated with emotion-focused coping strategies, while men are often associated with problem-focused coping strategies. According to Matud M. Pilar (2004) in her research "Gender Differences in Stress and Coping Styles" concluded that the women scored significantly higher than the men on the emotional and avoidance coping styles and lower on rational and detachment coping styles. The men were found to have more emotional inhibition than the women whereas the women scored significantly higher than the men on somatic symptoms and psychological distress. Although the effect sizes are low, the results of this study suggest that women suffer more stress than men and their coping style is more emotion-focused than that of men.

### **3.5 Religious Coping**

Pargament (1997) points out that religion is often present in the most remarkable times of life, expressing itself in many ways. At the same time, religion is not reserved only for times of crisis, nor is it the only way of coping with negative life situations. But it is interesting to know how religion works in the lives of people in adversity but even more interesting is how people face their most difficult moments.

The question I explore is whether faith in God can help in times of crisis and why? It has been observed that many people who have not been religious turned to religion after going through a crisis situation, a personal illness, the illness of a family member, the loss of a loved one, a social or natural catastrophe, having sought answers and methods that would allow them to alleviate and mitigate their pain and discomfort. There are those who, although they had been believers and practitioners of a religious creed, faced with some negative life situation that they considered difficult to overcome, went through moments of distrust or doubts about their religious faith, distrust towards God, towards their religious congregation, towards the clergy or about the efficacy of their religious coping.

For a variety of reasons, some religious people abandon religion or their creed in the midst of problematic situations when they feel that religious resources do not provide meaningful or satisfactory answers. Other people, after doubting and going through conflictive moments, return to trust in their faith, in God, in some higher power or divinity and emerge stronger from their religious crisis, affirming themselves more fully in their

creed and in their spiritual religious feeling. While some, not finding meaning within their creed of origin, go through processes of religious conversion to another creed or spiritual tradition that provides them with other beliefs, methods, rituals and systems of attribution of meaning that are of greater significance and effectiveness for the confrontation of the negative situation they have to face.

### **3.5.1 Coping, spirituality and religiousness.**

In the varied literature on the psychology of religion, scholars often use the concepts of spirituality and religiosity interchangeably (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005). For the purposes of better understanding the objectives and results of this study, it is imperative to separate and define these terms. To do this, I relate the definition of these terms to the Theory of Religious Coping presented by Kenneth I. Pargament

Pargament (1997) defines *Religion* as "a process, a search for significance in ways related to the sacred", *Significance* is understood as "those things that matter to us", and *Sacred* is defined as "any aspect of existence that can be seen through the sacred lens as a manifestation of God or as the container of sacred qualities." (p. 31). He concludes that religion is basically restricted to institutional dogma, rituals and traditions. (Pargament, 1997, pp. 31-32, p. 48). While Pargament and other scholars define *spirituality* as a search for the sacred, the term *spirituality* is reserved more for a personal process than a public one. (Pargament K., 1997, Schnell, 2012). Pargament (1997) emphasizes that spirituality belongs to a critical dimension of life "cannot and should not be explained" and can be conceived as "a higher dimension of human potential."

### **3.5.2 Definition of Religious Coping**

In recent years, there has been an increase in research on the role of religion in coping with difficult situations. Such studies include themes that address the way individuals use their faith in dealing with adversities or critical life situations, such as the death of a loved one, illness, divorce, financial problems, and infertility. Different approaches to coping processes have been found to be influenced by religious motivations, conceptualizations of God, and psychological adjustment (Abdulaziz Aflakseir & Mansoureh Mahdiyari (2016), Benedict Francis & Jesjeet Singh Gill & Ng Yit Han & Chiara Francine

Petrus & Fatin Liyana Azhar & Zuraida Ahmad Sabki & Mas Ayu Said & Koh Ong Hui & Ng Chong Guan & Ahmad Hatim Sulaiman (2016)).

Pargament (1997) developed the concept of religious coping based on the coping theory of Lazarus and Folkman (1984), giving special importance to the worldview and belief system that people possess and in the specific situations experienced on a daily basis. He builds upon Frankl's concepts (1994, 2004) on the meaning of life as something deeply religious and transcendental that must be discovered by each person. In sum, Pargament defines religious coping as the "ways of understanding and coping with negative life events that are related to the sacred." (Pargament K. & Raiya, 2007, p. 23)

### **3.5.3 Religious Coping Style**

Pargament (1997) describes three styles of spiritual religious coping that religious people of different faiths may use: autonomous, avoidant, and collaborative. These strategies diverge according to the sense of control that individual attributes to itself and or divine, so the following possibilities can be observed:

Perceptions of support and guidance by God in times of trouble appear to be a helpful form of religious coping. Religion provides distinctive methods to responsibility and control in process coping. As Pargament explained, control may be centered differently. Four approaches are identified (1997, p. 293 - 295):

- a) Control may be centered in God: The person assumes a passive attitude in difficult moments, leaving the situation "in God's hands" without doing anything for itself.
- b) Control may be centered in the self: The individual assumes that God will help him by giving all the tools and resources that allow to overcome or resolve conflicts or the difficult situations by himself.
- c) Control may be centered in the relationship between the individual and God: The individual feels a sense of partnership with God, he may feel that he is working together with God to solve the adversity. He feels that he is not alone, nor that God acts by itself, since he trusts in the possibility of a joint work of collaboration between both. He shares the responsibility with God.

- d) Control may be centered in efforts to work through God: The individual may attempt to influence God and the course of events through pleas for divine intercession. The person may ask for divine guidance and intervention, seeking to influence the situation in such a way that his request or desires are fulfilled. (Pargament (1997), p. 293-295)

Based on these different approaches, Pargament et al. (1988) have developed the concept of “religious coping style”. By coping style, they mean “relatively consistent patterns of coping in response to a variety of situations” (Pargament K. et al, 1988, p.91). Pargament studies described three broad styles of religious coping:

***Deferring:*** A “differing” coping style is related to a big sense of control by God. Individuals wait passively for solutions from God. The emphasis of this style was on dependence on external authority, rules, and beliefs. Research conducted by Pargament (1997, p.182) indicated that a differing coping style is associated with poorer competence, such as a lower sense of personal control, a greater sense of control by chance and a less planful problem-solving skills.

***Collaborative:*** A “collaborative” coping style is associated with a greater frequency of prayer, higher religious salience, and intrinsic religion. This coping process involves an active give-and-take between the individual and God. In his study, Pargament (1997, p.182) showed that a collaborative coping style is associated with a greater sense of personal control, a lower sense of control by chance, and greater self-esteem.

***Self-directing:*** In a “self-directing” coping style the individual does not lean on God. In this style the individual’s responsibility to solve problems through the freedom God gives people to do so. Pargament (1997, p.181) found that an individual has a greater sense of personal control in living and higher self-esteem. Compared with the other two styles, the connection to traditional religiousness is very weak.

In addition to the religious coping styles proposed by K. I. Pargament et al. (1988), Wong-McDonald and Grouch proposed an additional coping style, which is called "Surrender

to God." The "surrender" coping style is not about passively waiting for God to take care of everything but involves an active choice to give up one's own will in order to submit to God's rule. (Wong-McDonald & Grouch 2000:149) According to Wong-McDonald and Grouch (2000, p. 149), a study of 151 Christian university studies concluded that they could delineate "surrender as a separate factor from the other coping styles."

### **3.6 Positive and Negative Effects of Religion**

Pargament (1997) discusses Freud's (1927/1961) argument that religion is simply a defense that acts against the confrontation of reality. Even today, this proposition is held by many psychologists, psychoanalysts, and mental health professionals. There is agreement that religion can act negatively in cases where it is used to deny reality, to act in an avoidant and passive way in solving problems, or in cases of individuals who maintain passive postures in front of God, hoping for some kind of miracle or magical resolution of their difficulties. However, as Pargament and Parks (1995) point out, the conception that religion only produces negative effects is part of a stereotype since both religion and spirituality can operate as multidimensional and complex systems influencing coping strategies. Both religion and spirituality are directed towards the sacred, towards the promotion of ethical and moral values, towards the search for meaning and significance for such mysterious subjects as the origin of life, suffering, illness and death. Science cannot provide final answers to such liminal questions.

Koenig et al. (2001) argue that religion can sometimes produce pathology, particularly when it refers to denials promoted by various orthodox or fundamentalist religious groups of various faiths. Religions can produce distortions or contradictions in their followers in terms of ways of acting, thinking, feeling and/or the expression of their feelings. In this sense, religion can act in a negative way by promoting or supporting beliefs or ways of processing reality (a) when an illness is seen as a divine punishment for sins committed; (b) when the help of medicine is not sought or not accepted for the treatment of illnesses, and instead, one wants to solve situations by exclusively religious or spiritual means; c) when personal conflicts are interpreted as being due only to the intrusion of the devil or the devil in a person's body, so that one stops resorting to proper medical diagnoses and treatments that can improve health; d) when one leaves the solution in God's hands alone

and resorts to passive, avoidant or denial of reality modes of coping (Koenig (2001), p. 65).

Pargament (1997) notes that those who refer to the negative effects of religion in times of crisis emphasize that religion has not been beneficial but rather harmful; and in general, the accusations tend to be directed toward members of the congregation or the spiritual group and/or its representative. Frequently, people who have suffered a negative situation often feel that they have been abandoned at critical moments in their lives, so their complaints usually refer to having been abandoned, to not having been heard by God, and/or that the divinity did not answer their prayers, etc. Such complaints may be accompanied by feelings of great dissatisfaction, resentment and/or religious discontent directed toward peers or toward the representative of one's own creed, toward God or toward any form of deity previously believed in. These individuals may present mental health problems, negative moods, or faulty resolution of critical situations. Anger towards religion is the first reaction of religious coping, although sometimes the effects of religious dissatisfaction may be longer lasting and not integrated as a moment in a process of personal change. In these situations, the negative effects suffered are usually attributed to God, as if they were a kind of divine punishment for the sins committed or for having badly solved the problems that had to be faced. (Pargament, 1997, pp. 45-50)

### **3.7 Positive and Negative Religious Coping**

Pargament, Koenig et al. (2000) distinguish 22 modes of religious/spiritual coping within which they differentiate positive and negative behaviors. Positive religious coping included items such as: appreciating God as benevolent, trying to collaborate with God, seeking a more intimate relationship with God, seeking spiritual religious support from the religious congregation and/or its representative, trusting in God, offering spiritual help to others, religious purification through prayers, asking for and granting forgiveness to others.

Negative religious coping included beliefs about: God as a being who punishes through illness, demonic forces related to poor health, experiences of emotional discontent, and feeling of interference in the relationship with God.

Pargament and Brant (1988) have suggested conducting some kind of analysis that can determine whether religion acts as a positive, negative or simply irrelevant force when considering adaptation to negative, stressful and/or traumatic life events. When referring to health effects, the authors mention physical health related to factors such as: the absence of symptoms, the number of times the person was hospitalized, mortality rates, among others. In the positive effects related to mental health, they refer to the effectiveness of the types of coping, satisfaction with life, levels of depression and anxiety. In terms of religious and/or spiritual health, they include changes in the individual, in the perception of contact with God and in spiritual growth as a result of an effective coping process of the negative life event that has had to be confronted.

Pargament (1997) asks whether the type of spiritual religious coping has some unique element that acts as a factor that may contribute to coping, beyond the non-religious coping methods and activities used. Pargament, Smith, and Koenig (1996) created a brief scale to measure religious coping called the BriefRCOPE (Brief Religious Coping Scale), based on two types of religious coping patterns:

1. Positive coping methods: including spiritual religious support, collaborative style, reframing or benevolent religious resignification.
2. Negative coping methods: referring to dissatisfaction with the congregation, with religious peers and/or with the representative of the creed and with negative religious resignification.

Positive Religious Coping groups items including spiritual support, collaborative style coping, reframing and positive religious resignification. Negative Religious Coping includes spiritual pain, discomfort and frustration. A subscale integrates dissatisfaction with the church and/or God, resignification of the event as a type of divine punishment, and prayers as a mode of divine retribution. (Pargament K; Smith, B.; Koenig, H. G., 1996).

Pargament (1997) points out that the most important thing is to be able to observe whether the person is moving in a positive direction through the coping mode that allows him to

achieve positive effects, and whether the individual is using resources that help him to cope with the stressful situation. Suffering becomes more tolerable if the person is able to find explanations that make sense of the difficult moment he is going through. Religious beliefs allow reaffirming that life has some meaning, in spite of all the negative things that must be faced. Situations of loss due to the death of a loved one can represent a threat to the beliefs and value system of each person, even in the case of believers and practitioners of a religious creed; and can raise questions and raise questions about what they believed about themselves, about the event in question and about the nature of the sacred on which they had placed their faith. Several empirical studies show how religious people persevere in maintaining their religious beliefs and practices in times of great stress and that, after having gone through the critical moment of their lives, they maintain their religious faith and feel it strengthened (Pargament, 1997).

Many times, religious people, when faced with negative situations, turn against their religious creed, against their God or their congregation, rejecting their religious beliefs altogether, becoming atheists, agnostics or anti-religious. They constantly ask questions as to why negative or bad things happen to good people (Rabbi Kushner (1981). Others are able to rebuild their belief system by going through processes of profound spiritual transformation and/or religious conversion to another religious creed in which they find more answers that give meaning and significance to their life and to their life in general (Pargament, 1997).

## **CHAPTER FOUR - METHODOLOGY**

In this chapter, I describe the methods and processes undertaken to carry out this thesis. Riis defines methodology as the “practical technique for selecting, collecting and analyzing information” in a systematic way, combining the theory with the method (2009, p. 229-230). Therefore, the methods used in this research are approached within the understanding of methodology as defined above. Primarily, the research design will be presented. Secondly, the research strategy and method will be discussed before continuing with the researcher’s methodological challenges and limitations, with emphasis on how the material was collected. Thirdly, the research ethics and limitations will be discussed, followed by the quality of the research. Finally, I will summarize.

### **4.1 Research design**

The research design is the structure that is being used when evaluating social research because it “provides the whole framework for the collection and the analysis data” (Bryman, 2012, p. 46). Yin states that a research design is the “a logical sequence that connects the empirical data to study a study’s initial research and ultimately, to its conclusions.” In the most elementary words, a research design is “a logical plan for getting from here to there” (Yin, 2009, p.26). In other words, Research design should hold all the elements of the research together.

In this thesis I have chosen to use a qualitative research strategy. As it emphasizes individual experience and perceptions in religious behavior rather than making the statistical generalizations or quantification of variations that may be found in quantitative thesis (Bryman, 2012, p. 36). I have chosen case study research design to address the research questions of the study. As Stake states, “case study research is concerned with the complexity and particular nature of the case in question”. (Stake, 1995, p. 66)–A case study of Pentecostals Christians and secularists facing critical life situations in Norway is employed in this thesis, because the method enables a comprehensive understanding of the Christians and Secularists experience of the process.

## **4.2 Research Strategy and method**

I have chosen to conduct a case study in Oslo, Norway using semi-structured interviews as my method. Bryman states that, “a case study is not a sample of one drawn from a known population. Similarly, the people who are interviewed in qualitative research are not meant to be representative of the population” (Bryman, 2012, p. 406). Different research projects can have different approaches. It may for instance be deductive, which means that the research is grounded in one specific theory that shall be tested. My research, however, takes an inductive approach, which means that the research often can lead to theory (Bryman, 2016, p. 375).

This research will present an analysis of Norwegian Pentecostal Christians and Norwegian secularists’ experiences when they face critical life situations in Norway. For this, I have chosen qualitative research interviews to collect data, Qualitative research aims to understand the social world through its participants. According to Bryman (2016) “language is bound to be of importance for social research. It is, after all, through language that we ask people questions in interviews, and through which the questions are answered” (Bryman 2016, p. 25).

The empirical data was gathered over five to six weeks in Oslo, Norway, from February to April 2021. The interviews were conducted within the terms of the same theoretical framework. This implies that the use of semi-structured interviewing was a balance between predetermined and follow-up questions during the interviews.

### **4.2.1 Semi-structured interviews**

Rubin and Rubin define qualitative interviews as, “conversations in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion” (Rubin and Rubin, 2005, p.4). Semi- structured interviews were used because it allowed a more open and flexible form of interview. According to Bryman, a semi-structured interview typically refers to: “a context in which the interviewer has a series of questions that are in the general form of an interview schedule but is able to vary the sequence of questions” (Bryman, 2012, p. 212). Moreover, I had the possibility to add more important issues which were not scheduled in the interview guide, because semi-structured interviews give rich detailed data from different perspectives and give the researcher more freedom to ask

further questions in response to what the researcher regards as significant replies. (Bryman, 2012, p. 471). Another advantage with semi-structured interviews is that the interviewees could share openly and use their own ways in defining and answering the questions. This was applied since the participants will talk about their innermost experiences and feelings of facing critical life situations.

The interviews in this thesis are built and shaped based on the research question. The questions I asked were open ended (questions without limits or suggestions). According to Roulston argues, open ended questions “provided broad parameters within which interviewees can formulate answers in their own words concerning topics specified by the interviewer” (Roulston, 2010, p.12). In this study, interviewees were allowed to bring up new ideas which further I find being very important and helpful to the research questions. For this reason, I had to be mindful that those I interviewed, and their opinions could not be generalized in a way where I would say that "all Pentecostals" or "all secularists" feel as the respondents do, but perhaps their experiences might shed light on the possible similarities and differences in coping strategies.

Researchers have primarily conducted face-to-face interviews (Polit & Beck, 2014); but with advances in technology, multiple options such a telephone, videoconference, email, and text message interview methods for data collection now exist (Oltmann, 2016; Redlich-Amirav & Higginbottom, 2014). Email exchanges are emerging as an alternative method for conducting interviews in qualitative research (Gibson, 2010; Walker, 2013) especially in this time of pandemic. According to Hawkins “while email has been established as a viable alternative to face-to-face or phone interview, there are benefits and drawbacks to this method of interviewing, as there are with any others” (Hawkins, 2018, pp.495-496).

The interviews in this research were planned to be carried out between February and April 2021. Right at the worst moment of the COVID-19 pandemic, since the average contagion was increasing day by day. In these two months, many meetings or social restrictions began, many activities were canceled and finally the business closed. At the request of many participants, I had to change the interview from face to face to interviews via email or Zoom. I am convinced that without the actual technology used, this thesis would

practically not have been possible, due to the current situation. Throughout the process, the participants showed an open and collaborative attitude.

#### **4.2.2 Selection of informants**

Getting in touch with informants in a foreign country can be quite the challenge. The first preparation involved finding participants for the interview. I chose to reach out to the informants based on personal networking. According to Roulston "personal networking involves researchers relying on family members, friends, work colleagues, and acquaintances to recommend people who fit the criteria for the population identified for study" (Roulston, 2010, p. 98).

This study focused on two groups of participants, one consisting of six Pentecostal Christians and the other consisting of six Secularists, to compare the different results. The people who were interviewed in qualitative research are not meant to be representative of the population. (Bryman, 2012, p. 406). The research contains twelve interviews conducted one-on-one, divided into two groups of six Pentecostals Christians: three women and three men, and six Secularists: three women and three men, a minimum number of three which should represent each category. All of them ranged in age from 30 to 50 years old.

The criterion for selecting Pentecostal Christians informants was based on whether they met the criteria of being moderately to highly committed to their religious beliefs and frequently involved in religious behaviors as church attendance in Norway. The criterion for selecting Secularists was based on the condition that those selected did not have religious beliefs, were not involved in religious behavior, and do not believe in any god.

#### **4.3 Researcher in the field – methodological challenges and limitations.**

In qualitative research there are ethical principles and limitations that the researcher must be aware of especially when investigating the behavior of individuals. (Black, 2002, p. 2). Thus, the researcher should act at all times with ethics and confidentiality. (Bailey, 2007, p. 24). According to Black, the aim of research ethics is, "to protect all persons concerned with or involved in a piece of research" (Black, 2002, p. 6). Particularly when dealing with interviews and the evaluation of the content. All interviews were conducted

in English, all interviewees spoke English as a second language. The Master's program also requires that the research work be in English. So, I wanted to avoid translating from Norwegian to English which might have resulted in losing some relevant information or not being able to find the precise word when translating.

#### **4.3.1 Positionality and the role of the researcher**

I define myself as a Pentecostal Christian, but for me that is not an obstacle to meeting and communicating with people with different beliefs than my own. At the same time, I am an outsider to Norwegian culture, although I am married to a Christian Norwegian. I have lived here for five years and from the first year I arrived, I attended a Norwegian Pentecostal church, where 98% of the attendees are Norwegian. I was mindful to not allow my spiritual beliefs interfere with my investigation because I know the role and responsibility that it should play in an investigation. My responsibility as a researcher is to lead the interview and make sure that the topic was made clear from the beginning of the conversation. I tried to interfere as little as possible with the contents revealed (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015, p. 110). I aimed to be receptive and empathetic and demonstrate respect for the emotionality of the participants, but at no point directed the interviewee as to what to say (Ellis and Berger, 2003 pp. 469-470). According to Rubin and Rubin qualitative interview is defined as “conversations in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion” (2005, p.4).

First, I explained to them about the research and its objectives, then I mentioned how the interview would be. I also mentioned the letter of the Data Protection Official for Research at Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD) and how I would handle the information of the interviewees. I explained that their answers would be anonymous, and that all information would be discarded after the presentation of the work. Many of them already had the NSD letter to refer to.

#### **4.3.2 The interview processes**

The first phase in the interview process was to elaborate the interview guide. I developed the questions from the theoretical and conceptual framework. This in-depth guide was formulated with the help of my supervisor Professor Schnell. The questions centered upon

how the interviewees cope with critical life situations in their lives with the aim of obtaining answers on a specific topic that I want to be covered. At the same time focusing on a phenomenon from the human experience, it is important to give space and reliability to the interviewees' own experience and where they can share their thoughts, feelings and experience. According to Bryman the unstructured nature of the semi-structured interviews can be strength because "it provides insights into how the research participants view the world" (Bryman, 2012, p. 471)

The second phase involved finding informants for the interview. Getting in touch with informants in a foreign country can be a challenge. To obtain informants, I contacted acquaintances from my personal network, who helped me to find the possible informants.

The process of approaching the informants was as follows: I contacted the possible informants by telephone. I explained to them the topic of the research and the aim of conducting an interview. To ensure that all information provided is confidential and that all informants are anonymous. All the interviewees could choose the environment for the interview. Participation was voluntary, I did not provide them monetary compensation.

All of them agreed to participate in the research. Initially, the interview had to be face to face, but due to global COVID-19 pandemic and high infection rates, five of them preferred to answer it in writing and seven via zoom. Scheduling zoom interviews was challenging because it was difficult to coincide the time of the interview. Email ended up being the most viable alternative, since the interviewees could respond at their convenience. Many of the interviewees accepted to be contacted if I need to deepen a topic or clarify answers. The resources of technology helped to carry out this research work. At the beginning of the interviews, I read to all of them the "letter of information" then I explained the objective of the research and cited some examples of what is understood by critical life situations. They all gave their consent to participate and were very enthusiastic about participating. Pentecostal Christians seemed to be more interested in the subject of the investigation.

#### **4.4 Research Ethics**

Social research considers several ethical issues, some are considered below. A first consideration is the ethic of the behavior and role of the researcher during the interview

and with the handling of the data. The researcher must treat informants with respect and dignity throughout the interview and investigation process. The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Science and the Humanities (NESH) has established some research ethics guidelines, which one of a fundamental ethical consideration is that “the researcher must base its work on a fundamental respect for human dignity”<sup>1</sup>(NESH, 1999, Article 102 of the Norwegian Constitution). A second ethical consideration around confidentiality is that according to Bryman aspects such as that the identities and records of individuals should be maintained as confidential (Bryman, 2012, p. 136)

All ethical considerations were made from the first moment I contacted the informants. I underlined my intentions for the project, with the aim of having knowledge about their experience related to coping with difficult situations in life. It emphasized aspects such as voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality from the beginning of the research. It was clarified that they could withdraw from the project at any time during the project period. Finally, it was also explained that at the end of the research all the data will be deleted.

Before I conducted any interview, I was given the required permission from The Data Protection Official for Research at Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD). All the participants have been informed of the letter of consent in writing or orally.

#### **4.5 Quality of Research**

It is important to look at the quality of data, its reliability, which according to Kvale has to do with how “dependable and consistent the data is” (Kvale et al. 2009, p. 250). The quality of data is decisive for the quality of the subsequent analysis, verification, and reporting of the interview findings (Kvale, 2015, p. 192)

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.forskningsetikk.no/en/guidelines/social-sciences-humanities-law-and-theology/guidelines-for-research-ethics-in-the-social-sciences-humanities-law-and-theology/>

#### **4.5.1 Data recording and Storage**

Due to global COVID-19 pandemic and high infection rates, five of the twelve interviewers preferred to answer the interview questions in writing and seven via zoom. All the seven interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. It helped to make the conversations more fluent, without interrupting the informants while they talked. At the same time, it helped me to concentrate on the informants and the dynamics of the interviews. Rubin & Rubin say that even when you use a digital audio recorder it is a good idea to occasionally take notes, because it helps you to listen carefully. (Rubin H. & Rubin I., 2012, p. 100-101). I did not write any kind of annotations to focus more on the interview via zoom and not to draw the attention of the interviewers.

Recording helped me to listen when transcribing what was recorded. Later I stored the recorder data in my personal computer. In order to preserve the anonymity of the participants, they will be not mentioned by names, but rather as informants through the analysis. They were referred to as:” Informant 1, 2, 3, 4, 5” up to “Informant 12”. The order was random. All of this procedure formed the foundation for examining and analyzing the data. Once the research was complete, all the material was deleted.

#### **4.5.2 Data transcription**

Transcription means transformation, from an oral conversation to a written text. (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 210). As Rubin & Rubin points out, the first step in analysis is the transcription of the interviews. (Rubin H. & Rubin I., 2012, p. 100-101). The meticulousness and quality of the transcription will help you remember details and be selective when analyzing the data.

The interviews were conducted in English and were transcribed only by me. I was very careful to transcribe everything as detailed as possible.

#### **4.5.3 Coding**

Coding began from the moment the research question and hypothesis were formulated, and continued throughout the research process (Bailey, 2007, p. 127). Once the data was collected, it was organized and broken into different parts. This process is called coding (Bryman, 2012, p. 13). This helped in analyzing the data in an orderly and systematic way

because it was easier to group it thematically. Strauss and Corbin (1990) explain: “the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data” (p. 61). This was helpful in analyzing the data because it allowed me to group the data according to different themes.

#### **4.5.4 Reliability and Validity**

An important part of the quality of a research is validity and reliability. According to Bryman they propose the two main criteria: trustworthiness and authenticity. Another different kind of measure of the quality is generalizability. (Bryman, 2012, p. 389-391). Kvale shows that reliability relies on whether the data is consistent and if the data can be duplicated.

Thus, validation will depend on the quality and responsibility of how the researcher conducts the research process. (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 210-211). This research satisfied the criteria of quality for the following reasons: primarily it is reliable, because I consider my data to be primary without any interference from a third party or person other than myself. Secondly, in the research process I adhered to all technical and ethical processes from the beginning. Thirdly and last, this research was carried out in a specific context and time, and it is only a part of a complex and entire universe.

Despite the difficult situation that humanity has been going through since March 2020 due to the global pandemic, my intention was to focus on making the interviews feel comfortable and free to share and express their experiences, stories, thoughts and feelings.

## CHAPTER FIVE - ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I will analyze the data that emerged from the participants' responses. These themes were identified as they appeared in the transcribed data. My analytic strategy involved identifying differences and similarities in coping styles between the two groups of respondents. From here on out, when I write about the findings of "Christians" vs. "Secularists", I am referring to my respondents and my analysis of their statements.

This research was designed to collect data from two antagonistic groups: six Pentecostal Christians (3 men and 3 women) characterized as moderately to highly committed to their religious beliefs and frequently engaged in religious behaviors such as church attendance in Norway and six Secularists (3 men and 3 women) predefined as people who claim to have no religious beliefs, are not engaged in religious behaviors and do not believe in any god.

In presenting the data, this chapter is arranged within these guiding themes as subtopics, which are sub-divided further into semi-themes as they emerged from the empirical data. First, I will explain how both groups define a critical situation and present examples that respondents identified as critical life experiences. Second, I study how both groups usually cope with adversity. Third, I will investigate the relationship between faith and coping, whether or not they believe there is a relationship between the two concepts. Fourthly, I explain the ways that God can help people to cope with adversity and why God cannot help people according to the Secularist. Fifth, I analyze faith and vulnerability, using the perspectives of each group. We will see whether faith in God makes a person vulnerable and in what ways. Finally, I will present the relationship between faith and stress. I analyze whether faith in God can make a person more or less resistant to stress and under what premises.

## 5.1 CASES OF CRITICAL LIFE SITUATIONS DEFINED BY BOTH GROUPS.

### Critical Life Situations

Both groups, Pentecostal Christians and Secularists, define a critical situation as a situation in which they have no control, *“When something unexpected happens in your life that you cannot control”* (PC M3) whether it is a big or small situation, *“I feel stress when I cannot control a situation even if it’s the smallest situation. The minute I lose control over any situation, it becomes a threat”*. (S W1). Situations of health, faith, work or love that may affect the future, *“A situation where one is subjected to a trial in health, illness, finances, faith, relationships. Must make an important choice that can affect the future”*. (PC M2).

Three situations have been identified that both groups define as critical or situations over which they have no control.

#### 1. Death

Both groups, Pentecostal Christians, *“If I or someone in my near family would get critically sick or die”*. (PC W1) and Secularist, *“Death of relative, Loss of job, high depression”*. (S M2) consider the death of oneself or a family member to be one of the most critical situations a person could face in life. But at the same time, both groups have different perspectives on death. For the Pentecostal Christians, they assume the death of a loved one is not final and they have the hope that one day they will see them again because they believe that there is life after death, the PC M2 explained, *“My faith keeps me calm that one day we will meet again”*.

#### 2. Disease/Illness

Second, both groups consider disease or illness as a critical situation to face. One respondent added an example of her own infertility as a critical health issue. Participant S W2 said,

*I have to say that it’s been a series of situations related to infertility. When I get négative pregnancy tests, I find ways to cope. What becomes a crisis is that others do not seem to empathize with me as much as I would expect them too. I also think*

*that there's always what seems to be a series of events following one situation that we tend to make the meaning of different happenings into one. For example, I found out that it will be difficult for me to adopt in my country. That's a life crisis Situation where I question my relationship with my partner but also my closed ones. I was angry and at the same time my sister had some internet issues so we couldn't communicate. I planted the seeds of distrust and anger in my mind and convinced myself that she was avoiding me and that I was all alone in my sorrow. Not only I don't control administrative decisions, I lose control where I should have one just to perhaps justify the way I felt with the news I received. Does that make sense?" or finally depression, "... high depression, death of relatives...". (S M2)*

## **2.1 Covid -19**

This thesis was done during the time of the worldwide pandemic of COVID-19, this pandemic brought a lot of concern and mortality among people all over the world and Norway was no exception. The pandemic was considered by both groups as a critical situation to be faced.

The participant S W2 said, *"I do see that things get more intense now especially that we are in the middle of what seems to be a never-ending pandemic"*. Another participant from the Pentecostal Christians (PC W2) also referred to the pandemic and all the fears involved, *"I was quarantining alone in my house and fear about living alone far away thinking that if I got seriously ill, who would take care of me"*.

## **3. Financial and Economics Problems**

Third, both groups see the economic aspect as a critical situation in life, lack of work and financial problems are seen as a threat *"... financial problems..."* (PC W3) or the loss of a job *"...loss of job..."* (S M3)

## **5.2 WAYS IN WHICH BOTH GROUPS COPE WITH CRITICAL LIFE SITUATIONS**

### **Perspective on Coping with Critical Life Situations**

The participants expressed how they cope with the adversity in their lives, at the same time these forms of coping are the ones they usually use in difficult moments

The following are the three main forms of coping used by both groups Pentecostal Christians and Secularists. I will first describe the three main ways of coping of Pentecostal Christians and then those of Secularists.

#### **1. Coping Perspectives of Pentecostal Christians in Critical Life Situations**

The following were the three main forms of coping identified by the Pentecostal Christians. The first form of coping they identified was faith in God, which represents security and peace in times of sadness. Then they explained that they turned to family and friends and found it supportive to spend time with them. However, two of the informants continued by saying that they often prefer to spend moments of solitude to evaluate the situation and rather not to share their feelings with others despite having a strong network of family and friends.

##### **1. Faith in God**

The group described first and foremost, faith and trust in God, in the sense that God is in control of the situation and that no matter how adverse the situation may be, God will always give us the peace and strength necessary to move forward. This first theme has been developed in three sub-themes: 1. Calm and Security in God in adversity, only God can comfort our spirit even if we walk in the valley of death (Psalm 23) 2. Prayer and Pleading to seek timely help from God, as a sign of full confidence in God, and 3. Eternal Life, some of the participants have reported that when a loved one dies, they have the assurance that they will see him/her again. They believe that there is life after death, and this comforts their spirit in the face of the pain of physical loss.

## **1.1 Calm and Security in God.**

Pentecostal Christians have stated that their faith and trust in God helps them to cope in the most difficult moments of their lives. Faith provides the different participants with calm, peace and assurance that God is in control of the situation.

The informant PC M3 said, *“My faith helps me get perspective and not lose my mind. Sometimes I also think about other people that for sure have experienced worse than me. I try to see the positives in a critical situation”*. (PC M3)

Another informant, PC W1 shared that *“I found out 15 years ago that my kidneys were not in good shape, and that I probably have to change kidneys in a grown-up age, just like my mom. My mom has been sick for many years and of course I don't want to end up like her. I didn't feel sick, I just knew about the condition. I decided to put this in God's hands. I can't do anything about it myself. I still think God can use me and do great things through me with or without healthy kidneys. I also know that I don't have to die because of my bad kidneys. I also can die of sadness or in a car accident”*.

Finally, a third informant PC W3 added the following *“Waiting on God, that He has always the control of everything. I can only pray and decide to believe”*.

## **1.2 Prayer - Pleading**

Prayer is one of the ways in which Christians deal with difficult situations in their lives. Prayer gives them peace and assurance that God is in control of the situation.

One interviewee PC W2 said that praying helps her to calm down, *“I started praying or pleading with God to help me breathe and keep me calm, and I called a friend who is also my neighbor, who luckily came right*

*away. She hugged me and prayed with and for me. That turned out to be exactly what I needed". (PC W2)*

The participant PC W3 confirmed that God is in control of everything and that she should only pray and trust in His Omnipotence, *"Waiting on God, that He has always the control of everything. I can only pray and decide to believe."*

### **1.3 Eternal Life**

Many of the participants reported that they have been able to overcome the death of a loved one only by having faith in the promise of eternal life and that they would return to their loved ones in the future, as the participant PC M3 said, *"I spent time with my family and remembered all the time we have spent together. What made them who they are in my eyes. In one case it was hard because of poor health the last few years. You want to remember them when they were on top not suffering mentally or physically. When it comes to sorrow, it passes after the funeral. My faith keeps me calm that one day we will meet again"*.

The informant PC W1 keeps faith that he will see his father again, that this world is not the end of the story, *"Of course, I was sad, but my dad was sick. I know he's better both physically and mental in heaven. I know I'll meet him again...it's not totally over"*.

## **2. Family/Friends**

Family and friends are the second way Pentecostal Christians identify to cope with difficult situations. The participant PC W3 said that family and friends represent a "refuge" for him, *"I spent time with my family and remembered all the time we have spent together. What made them who they are in my eyes. In one case it was hard because of poor health the last few years. You want to remember them when they were on top not suffering mentally or physically. When it comes to sorrow, it passes after the funeral"*.

Proverbs 18 :24 says, *"But there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother"*. In this regard, the informant PC W2 states how the presence of her friend helps her

in an adverse moment. *“I called a friend who is also my neighbor, who luckily came right away. She hugged me and prayed with and for me. That turned out to be exactly what I needed”*.

### **3. Isolation and Introspection**

Isolation is the third way the Pentecostal Christians identified as ways they cope with critical situations in their lives. Solitude allowed them to reflect and also to reorganize themselves after a sad moment.

Participant PC M1 not only faces his sad moments in solitude but at the same time he likes to reflect on what happened and learn from his mistakes. *“I put it behind me eventually and moved on as is required, after some days of dealing with sadness and loneliness (naturally). I usually cope that way, yes, by reflecting and taking notes on the bad experience. Perhaps the experience will make me a richer (not literally) person”*. (PC M1)

Participant PC M2 prefers solitude even though he has a strong network of friends and family. *“It is difficult to compare this situation with other critical situations I have experienced. I'm usually not that good at sharing feelings and thoughts with others even though I have a solid network of friends and family who care about me”*. (PC M2)

#### **5.2.1 Coping Perspectives of Secularist in Critical Life Situations**

The forms in which secularists deal with difficult situations are more varied than Pentecostal Christians. The first form identified was family and friends, the family network and friends provide them the necessary security to be able to face any problem. Then there is loneliness and introspection, they opt for shutting down towards others, they do not want to expose their feelings and thoughts. Others prefer to move on, to face it or live with it, but not to avoid it. Art also represents an option to turn to help one cope, such as song writing. Finally, there is alcohol, others prefer to drink alcohol and avoid the problem.

## **1. Family and Friends**

The family and friends network represents the first way to contain difficult situations for this group. The informant (S W3) says that it is comforting to talk to them, *“Talking a lot about it with loved ones.”* and *“being with them too are a great support in adversity”*, said the informant (S M2). The informants expressed the need to share their thoughts and feelings at this hard time, as stated by the interviewee S W1 *“I talked a lot with my sister, and we shared our thoughts. I also talked to my friends about losing my mother.”*

Finally, the Informant S M3 commented that the containment he received from his girlfriend was very important for him, because it allowed him to express everything he felt and thought at that moment. The ideal is not to keep any of those negative feelings, only in this way can one move forward. *“Nowadays, I talk to my girlfriend about stuff that is hard to process. I think it is essential to talk to someone when you are in a dark place, for instance a grieving process. If you bear all your concerns, grief, or agony inside, you will for sure stay in that dark place longer, if you don’t share your thoughts with someone that you trust”*.

## **2. Loneliness and Introspection**

Loneliness can be seen from two points of view, on the one hand there are people who take it in a positive way, they do it more as an introspection where it allows them to evaluate the situation and reorganize and move forward. On the other hand, others handle it in a negative way, they withdraw from everything and everyone and close in on themselves. They do not express their thoughts and feelings, but rather sink deeper into their problems and loneliness. Here are two examples from the informants.

This participant takes time and at the same time is close to his family *“Giving myself time and being near my family”*. (S W1)

Yet another participant explains that she isolates herself and closes herself off from everyone which leads her to become depressed and bitter. In that loneliness she is only filled with negative feelings. *“I usually shut down and get extra*

*depressed and wait for a trigger to get myself out of any situation. Having said so, I am also very conscious that I have one trigger and that's my father. If any situation affects him, then I use words that I know will hurt the ones who started any situation. For example, when something happened to my father because of my former brother-in-law, I knew exactly what would hurt him and where". (S W2)*

### **3. Face the problem.**

Others face the difficulty with a positive attitude, they do not avoid it or sink into it. They see it as an opportunity for transformation. Informant S M1 explained that he faces the situation that arises and does not avoid it, "*Get up, deal with it, live on*" he says.

### **4. Art.**

Art can be a positive way to deal with difficult situations. Many songs and paintings have originated from the most difficult moments in the lives of many artists. An informant said: "*.....writing songs*" brought her peace of mind (S W3).

### **5. Alcohol**

Many people who experience critical life situations or perceived threats will turn to alcohol to cope with that stress. Drinking alcohol may seem to provide some relief for example positive feelings and relaxation in the short term, but as stressful events continue long-term, heavy alcohol consumption can lead to medical and psychological problems and increase the risk of developing alcohol use disorders. (Rehm J, 2011). Alcohol is one of the most negative ways of dealing with problems. The only thing it does is to avoid conflict and take refuge in alcohol and its consequences. The informant S W3 said about that "*Yes, although sometimes drinking too much wine*".

### **5.3 FAITH AND COPING RELATIONSHIP - DEFINITION OF GOD IN CRITICAL LIFE SITUATIONS.**

#### **Faith and Coping**

Faith and coping are two separate concepts. But they have in common that both appear when we cope with adversity. Religion is an accessible and available resource, and it involves thoughts, practices, feelings, relationships and objects of significance. Some of us will use this resource and others will not.

#### **5.3.1 Definition of God in Critical Life Situations according to the Pentecostal Christians.**

As a researcher I expected as a priori knowledge that Pentecostal Christian informants affirm that faith in God can help them cope in difficult situations, but I was more interested in investigating why.

Of the six participants, four said that trusting in the different attributes and the promise of eternal life help them to face problems without their faith being affected.

##### **1. God is helpful**

The participants affirmed that God helps them in the midst of a difficult situation. God is in control of any situation and allows them to keep the head above the water. *“It is often difficult to see that God is helpful when you are in the middle of a situation. When I look back on situations, I find that my faith in God has helped me. Knowing God's promises makes it easier to deal with difficult things. It helps me keep my head above water”* (PC M2).

##### **2. God is an Anchor**

Participant PC M3 said that God not only helps him in his dark moments, but He is also his anchor that allows him to get through the storms safely, *“I do think that having faith can help me to cope with critical situations. I know that I am loved no matter what and that God always looks after me. He has promised to walk with me even in the darkest times. That makes my heart feel comfortable even when my*

*head is turning. My faith is like an anchor. I can experience storms and turbulence, but if I hold tight to Jesus I cannot drift away.”*

### **3. Eternal Life**

“Life after death” made it easier for PC W1 to handle the death of a loved one. ‘*I think having faith in God will help you through critical situations - I have experienced that myself. Knowing this life is just a little part of everything and believing you will meet someone you love after death, makes it easier to handle.*”

### **4. God is a safe place: Praying and worshiping.**

The last participant PC W2 expressed that she had grown up believing that God would always help her in the darkest moments of her life, “*my relationship with God is my safe place, it is what I have grown up with and so far, it has always worked. All my scariest moments of life, worshiping and praying always help me find some inner peace.*”

Of the other two remaining Pentecostal Christian participants, one said maybe and the other said it was not easy but not difficult.

#### **Maybe**

Participant PC M1 stated that perhaps trusting a higher entity gave him security and comfort, “*Maybe because of the belief in a higher entity, and that higher entity cares about you like no one else. It can be a comfort.*”

#### **Neither easy nor difficult.**

The other participant PC W3 said it was not easy or difficult, but it gave her hope that God was in control of the situation and that gave her hope, “*Easier not but also not so hard. I think it is about hope. Christianity gives you hope, because God is hope and love. Knowing that he is in control of everything and that he loves and cares for me as a daughter encourages me to carry on despite everything.*”

### **5.3.2 Definition of God in critical life situations according to Secularists' perspective**

Following, I will present the information collected from six secularists, of which three of them believe that having faith in God can help in difficult situations.

First, I will develop why secularists believe that God cannot help in difficult times.

#### **1. God is a Distraction**

Participant S MI believes that believing in God in times of crisis is a distraction because it does not allow us to take control of our problems, “superficially: yes, it helps to distract from reality and your own problems. Ignorance is bliss. If you do not reflect on the self, you are pushing the problem away, where it grows and will come back bigger and stronger eventually.”

#### **2. God is an Illusion.**

For participant S W2, God is an illusion. Religion is an imposition of what to believe and how to believe. S W2 felt that there are problems like drug addiction which cannot be solved by prayers and that it is not a thing of the devil. She states that only science can explain and help in these types of problems. “God is an illusion, and it is foolish to think that God represents some universal virtues but then what do we make of the individual values? I don't think that values match mine 100%. Just because there is an imposition of what to believe and how to believe, I simply cannot accept that. Besides I am a firm believer of logic values. Some of the things I learned at bible school are not logical. I don't think that pray a novena (it is a ritualistic devotional pray in where one or more Catholics devotees make requests.) will solve a drug problem. It's a long process and many of the life situations that we experience like my example on drug use can be explained by science. Drug addiction is a sickness and it's proven. It's not a devil thing as strong believers would make it be. Some say that faith will help these addictions. Faith can, but faith in one's own abilities after finding the source of the issue and trying out different solutions.”

### **3. Family and friends provide greater security than believing in God.**

It has become evident in this research that for many participants in both groups, the family and friends network play a fundamental role in dealing with difficult moments. Family and friends represent security and support for them. *“I think talking and being with family and friends is a good way of coping with critical situations”*. (S M2)

Second, I will present these three participants, who think that having faith in God in dark moments can be a positive coping mechanism for a person because “God” can provide them security, strength and solace. They believe in the power of the concept of God in people’s lives, even though they define themselves as secularists.

#### **1. Having faith in God can help coping with critical situations, because it provides security.**

According to this participant S M3, believing in a god in dark moments can be positive. *“Yes, indeed. I understand completely why many people put their trust and faith in a god. It makes it easier to cope with life and perhaps understand things that happen in a critical life situation. It makes it probably easier to cope with critical situations when you feel that your god listens to you”*.

#### **2. Having faith in God can help coping with critical situations, because it provides strength.**

Participant S M1 thinks that believing in God is positive, because that way the person can feel safe to be heard and helped, *“Of course, the person could feel the strength of a superior help. It won’t be harder, however I’m not sure if it will be easier”*.

#### **3. Having faith in God can help coping with critical situations, because It provides solace.**

Eternal life is a theme that recurs several times throughout this research. For participant W3, faith in God gave her mother solace in the face of her father's death, because she believed in eternal life, she hoped that she would see him again.

*“It seems to bring some solace to my mother that she might meet my dad in another life”.*

## **5.4 WAYS THAT GOD CAN HELP A PERSON TO COPE WITH DIFFICULT SITUATIONS**

This part we will develop the ways that God helps us to cope with difficult situations. Problems allow us to learn and progress in many areas of our lives and the spiritual is no exception. Even problems can be transformed into an opportunity for growth, but it will depend a lot on the way we perceive them and the way we are going to face them. Below I will present the data collected first by Christians and then by secularists.

### **5.4.1 Ways that God can help us according to the Pentecostals Christians.**

Each and every one of the interviewees of this study group has stated that God can help them in everything and that for Him nothing is impossible, what varies are the ways in which God can help us to face those critical situations in life. Many have also manifested that although God can help us with any adverse situation, He does not do it in a magical and immediate way, but He gives us certain resources such as strength, peace and hope to be able to go through our problems.

#### **1. Hope.**

The informant PC M2, states that God does not solve problems automatically, but He does provide you with certain resources such as the fruits of the Holy Spirit like peace, hope and intelligence to face your problems, *“I do not think God will automatically solve problems for you. I believe the fruits of faith are peace, wisdom and hope. this will be helpful in dealing with critical situations”.*

#### **2. Faith**

Interviewee PC M3 uses a metaphor to compare his moments of turbulence. He expresses that only faith in God helps him to calm his feelings and thoughts when he

goes through the darkness of problems. Trust in God and His company allows him to cope with his difficulties. Concluding that God is in control of his problems and not his problems, *“Believing in God is like having a house built on a mountain. The ground is solid, stable and reliable. Yes, the walls can tremble and shake from the wind, but below our feet is an everlasting ground that never crumbles. Faith helps to sort the thoughts in my mind and the feelings in my heart. It helps me keep steady even though the storm threatens my boat. It does not solve my problems, but my problems can and will never control me”*.

### **3. Peace**

Another informant said that if we think that God can solve your problems quickly and magically, this thinking can bring frustration and disappointment into your life. We will all go through difficult times, but it will be up to us to choose who to believe in and who to go through these difficulties with. We must trust God to help us and give us peace to move forward. We should not blame Him for anything but trust in Him, *“If you put all your trust into God fixing your problems and solving your critical situation you can end up disappointed and depressed. This world is not just, and bad things will happen to good people. But God is just, and only in Him will we find peace in this world. Situations in this world will make us both happy and sad. In each end there is a God who sees you and looks after you. He is not someone who magically makes all your troubles disappear, but helps you see past your issues and into his loving embrace. I understand people can be angry with God, and that is probably natural if you are a believer and bad things happen. Nevertheless, it is not right nor healthy for a Christian to blame God for what is wrong in this world”*. (PC M4).

### **4. Medical Support**

This topic is very polemic because many churches believe that one should not ask for help from science or health personnel in case it is necessary. In the past it was thought that all psychological problems could only be healed by fasting and prayer. Many churches "demonized" the psychologist and the mental health specialist, even condemning that a Christian should go to a psychologist. Today, more and more

churches see the need to resort to health services. God can heal a person either by a miracle of healing or by the intervention of medics.

This informant stated that God gives us the strength for each day, and that He can help us in different ways, for example in the area of health, He can help us not only through a miracle but also by using medicine to reestablish our health or to heal us, *“I think God can give you strength through the day. I think God can send people in his way to help. I think God can turn meaninglessness into meaningfulness. I don't have any answer to this question, because I think God always will help if we want help from him. Even if I believe I will go to the doctor with a broken leg. I think God created us people with knowledge to help each other with things like that. I also take medication when I have a headache”*. (PC W1)

The PC W2 participant believes that nothing is impossible for God but when a Christian faced with health or mental problems such as depression, with which he has been struggling for a long time, he should seek professional help. God can use science to help us heal, *“In my personal opinion I believe God can help people in everything. However, this does not mean that they have to or should cope with these critical situations alone. If a person is struggling with their mental or emotional health, this could be severe depression, having suicidal thoughts or are suffering a medical emergency. In these cases, I think it is good to seek professional help, and not tell a person they don't have enough faith if they can't get through it alone. Yet in the same way I believe God had allowed science to develop so that we might have professionals like phycologist, doctor, nurses who can help us when we are in need”*.

## **5. His promises in the Bible.**

The promises of the Bible are also a resource of how a person can seek God's help in times of crisis. God can speak to us in different ways, and reading the Bible is one of them. The Bible contains approximately 3565 promises. The participant PC W2 said that the promises in the Bible give her strength and peace to keep her eyes on God and His promises and not focus on her worries, *“There is nothing impossible for God. Through his promises in His word (in the bible, in worship songs, etc.) that becomes like a security to deal with any hardship that meets you. I have also felt inner peace*

*several times in life when I have chosen to focus my mind on God's word and promises instead of the current situation, I might find myself in".*

## **6. Spending time with God – Nature.**

Spending time with God is the ultimate resource collected on how God can help us in times of crisis. Sometimes when we are immersed in our problems, we cannot see solutions, and this only stresses us more. Sometimes in order to reflect and find solutions to our problems, it is necessary to "get out of them" and spending time with God can help us a lot. In this time of intimacy, we can read the Bible, meditate on his promises and admire his creation. These resources will bring us peace, hope and strength to overcome our problems, so was mentioned by the participant PC M1, *"Spending time with God, there are probably many ways to that. I like nature, feel closer to God's godliness in those situations. He is after all, God"*.

### **5.4.2 Ways that God can help us according to the Secularist**

We come to the last part of the analysis, next I will present the results obtained by the other study group, the secularists. The information collected from this group focuses on how they think about the idea that God could help a person to cope with adverse situations. Most of the answers from the respondents point out that God does not exist, but is an ideology invented to manipulate people and achieve political power. They feel that thinking that God exists and can help us is a distracting idea that does not allow us to focus in an objective and real way on our problems.

#### **1. Critical thinking to overcome critical life situations.**

The participant S M1 points out that it would be better to have critical thinking when coping problems, with a real and objective type of coping, so that problems can be overcome, *"Being able to deal with reality allows you to overcome problems, challenges and difficult situations quicker and better. Critical thinking is key in the comparison"*. Maybe God could help if the situation were extreme, when everything is already lost and you only have faith left, *"I think it could help in the most extreme of situations: prisoner of war, being in the desert without*

*water, etc. Basically, where everything is lost, and you have nothing but your belief”.*

## **2. God cannot help in the material world**

Two participants think that God cannot help with material things, perhaps spiritual ones. The participant S W1 affirmed this idea, *“In the material world, God cannot help you perhaps in other areas such as medicines”* the same idea is shared by the participant S M2, *“God cannot help you with material things”*

## **3. God is a distractive idea.**

For informant S W3, God represents a distracting idea, which does not allow us to concentrate on solutions to our problems. As God is somewhat distracting, He makes us irresponsible or makes us feel guilty about our problems. If it were that God could help, maybe it would be through prayer and community, *“God only distracts you from solutions and makes you irresponsible or makes you feel guilty. And if it were that God would help it could be through prayer and community”*

## **4. God is an invented idea**

For the participant S W2, God does not exist directly, and if he does exist, he is doing a very bad job. God is an idea invented with the aim of creating a manipulative ideology. The only one who could help is oneself, *“If he existed, then he’s doing a terrible job. It’s not about how god can help but how one can help oneself. What could be to stop using religion as a political tool. Am sorry for me god is pure invention by a handful of powerful, intelligent and extremely manipulative men who created an idea, transformed it into an ideology, planted it, sold it and always finds tricks to keep the same idea to float around us”.*

## **5. God does not exist**

Finally, participant S M3, when I asked him whether or not God can help a person to overcome a difficult situation, answered that to a spiritual person or a person who believes he can give serenity in problems, *“A religious person find comfort and hope in praying to God, Jesus or the Holy Ghost. This, I think, might help in*

*finding serenity and hope for better days”.* But he personally does not believe that God does not exist, *“In my point of view "God" cannot help a religious person with a particular grant or wish because God does not exist”.*

## **5.5 FAITH AND VULNERABILITY RELATIONSHIP - MEANING OF FAITH IN CRITICAL LIFE SITUATIONS.**

### **Faith and Vulnerability**

Participants in both groups were asked if faith made a person more or less vulnerable in critical situations, and if they could make any kind of relationship between the two concepts. According to Brene Brown (2015), an American author, vulnerability is "uncertainty and emotional exposure". This is the definition that was used to better understand the concept of vulnerability in this research and for its objectives.

#### **5.5.1 Meaning of Faith in Critical Life Situations according to the Pentecostal Christian perspective.**

All participants agreed that having faith does not make a person vulnerable; on the contrary, all agreed that lack of faith makes us more vulnerable. Both "Christians and non-Christians" go through difficult situations but the difference between the two groups is who we trust and "who we turn to" in difficult times. In adversity a secular person is left to their own devices, and how that person deals with adversity depends on the strength of their previous experiences, mental toughness and personality, *"It also depends a lot on your personality and your thought pattern/way of responding to things."* (PC M1). In the face of adversity people always need a place to rest and find support, *"I imagine a secular person is more left to themselves. He depends more on his own mental strength and experience, and the kind of people he surrounds himself with. If you're not prepared for what may come, the situation can hit you like a wall. I wonder what your anchor is. What is your comfort? Secular people rely on people and humanity. Many times, that is enough based on earthly experience, but I guess sometimes even the brightest minds among us fail to come up with all the answers. Human beings need a place to rest and get support when life gets tough. The question is who do we turn to?"*

However, the interviewee PC M2 added that many Christians think that they will not go through difficult situations and that on the contrary they are removed from difficult situations, but unfortunately this is not true, and perhaps this false perception can make them vulnerable to difficult situations, *“I believe that many who believe in God have an expectation of being spared difficult things, everyone will be subjected to trials and this may make people who believe in god more vulnerable”*. To this one of the interviewees commented that it is in the problems where our faith is measured, God never promised that our life would be a comfortable and trouble-free life, PC M3 said: *“I guess your faith is tested when you face critical situations. You believe that God loves you and will keep you safe, but still, you can experience situations that seem completely unfair. How can God allow such terrible things to happen? Why are You doing this to me? Doubt and despair get to you. Nevertheless, God has never promised us a comfortable life. But he promises to provide comfort in our lives. A shelter. A green meadow to rest in. I think it is easy to be angry with God when bad things happen to us, as Christians, but we need to realize that we are not in control of this life on Earth and trust in God's plan. Furthermore, this life is only the beginning, according to The Bible”*.

So, what does faith give us in difficult times? According to the interviewees, faith provides them with the following aspects:

### **1. Purpose and Significance**

Some participants mentioned that finding meaning and purpose in adversity helps to accept problems with hope, that if God allowed that adverse situation it is because he has a purpose for our lives even in that problem, and that at the same time God gives us hope and He will always be in control of the situation, *“I have been working with critical sick people. I found out that vulnerable people without nothing to live for often give up when they are critical sick and people who accept life as it comes and still can find a meaning of life in a critical situation lives longer. When you have faith in God and put everything in his hands, it's easier to find a meaning of life and accept the situation you're in”*. (PC W1). Having meaning in the face of adversity will always give purpose to our existence, *“It also very much depends on your personality and your pattern of thinking/way of*

*responding to things, but if you lack faith in God that can indeed make you more vulnerable regarding there is no higher entity to fall back to who lends meaning and a sense of purpose to the existence". (PC M1)*

## **2. Strength**

Strength is the second resource that faith provides according to the participants, the strength provided by God helps us to go through the different problems that arise in our lives. One participant (PC M3) mentioned that, for example, believing in eternal life helps her to have strength and confidence in God to get through a situation of death of a loved one or a serious illness, *"I don't think your faith will make you more vulnerable, but I think you'll find your strength inn God in these situations. A colleague of mine was afraid of death and said to me: "-It' is easier for you who believe in a life after death, to handle thoughts like this."* Strength involves passing adversity by the hand of God, that security rests in God, since He is in control of all adverse situations. *"I don't think it does, for me personally it has made me stronger, because I don't feel like I have to survive those situations alone, but that I have God on my side to conquer them. I have never not had a faith so I can't really know for sure. But I would think, YES. It must be so much harder having to survive alone". (PC W2)*

## **3. Confidence**

Finally, there is the third and last resource that Faith provides which is confidence, the majority of the participants mentioned that they have conviction in the Mighty God when they are going through problems. God will not leave them, on the contrary, He will walk with them in the midst of difficulty, *"I believe the hope of an almighty God is helpful in dealing with critical situations. Those who do not have this hope can become vulnerable". (PC M2).* In addition, if things do not go as they wish or expect, for example, healing a sick person, God will give them the strength to accept God's will regarding the adversity, *"Faith brings security in God and His mercy. If God cannot help me in a situation, I know that He gives me the strength to keep going despite the difficulty".*

### **5.5.2 Meaning of Faith in Critical Life Situations according to the Pentecostal Christian perspective.**

It is very interesting to present the data collected from the other group which is the secularists. This group believes that faith can make a person vulnerable and even manipulate them and prevent them from seeing their problems objectively. At the same time, faith can absorb the personality of believers, that is to say that we are almost talking about a believer having neither identity nor self-determination, according to the participants.

On the other hand, there are other participants who do not know whether having faith can make a person more or less vulnerable. They did not dare to take a position in favor or against, stating that much depends on the circumstances of the moment.

Finally, there are also the participants who think that faith does not make a person vulnerable, that believing that a person can receive help in a difficult moment can help him/her to overcome these dark moments.

Here are the concepts provided by the participants:

#### **1. Faith is Manipulation**

According to participant S W2, people become believers in difficult situations because they do not know how to handle their problems, that faith is a form of manipulation and that there are people who take advantage of the vulnerability of these people in crisis situations. The participant relates at the same time an experience of her sister. *“Humans have a tendency to turn to faith in critical situations because they don’t know how to deal with them. At the same time there are those who feed on the vulnerable ones. Faith is allowing a form of manipulation from those with the upper hands. I have seen how my sister turned to god when her husband left her and could not get out of her depressed state. It was my aunt who pushed her into God’s arms. Her attitude changed because she had to be in gods’ good graces for her husband to come back. She refused to listen to my thoughts on her sudden need for god. She closed herself instead of meeting her friends who have been through divorces and so forth. It was until the lockdown*

*last year and the distance from church for her to understand that she needed to focus on herself rather than on god. I fear god never helped her.”*

## **2. Faith absorbed personality and identity**

Terms such as personality and identity were exposed by participant P M1. He stated that religion absorbs the person as in a capsule and excludes them from modernity. This prevents the believer from reaching a personal development and this causes vulnerability and lack of self-confidence, *“Religion absorbs your own personality, your identity and you will always be in a defensive position towards the norm of society. You exclude yourself from modernity and live in an echo-chamber with your fellow religious followers. No challenge means no critical reflection, which in turn means that there is no personal development, which makes you vulnerable and lacking confidence within your personality”*.

Another interviewee added that a non-believer is based more on the objectivity of reality rather than the spiritual, *“If anything, non-believers are less vulnerable as they are mostly based in reality rather than spirituality”*. (S M2)

## **3. Faith does not allow believers to see real solutions**

Other participants believe that if a person is alone, they are more vulnerable to believing and expecting help, which prevents them from seeing their problems objectively, *“If the person is completely alone, he/she can feel helpless. He will be more vulnerable and will not objectively see solutions to his problems”*. (S M3). Interviewee S W1 added that placing all hope in God does not allow us to see real solutions to problems, *“The person could potentially put all its problems to God (faith) therefore he/she is not able to see or look for real solutions which can be used”*.

Finally, I would like to mention to these participants, two interviewees stated that faith does not make a person vulnerable, but rather it can help them to overcome their moments of difficulty. On the one hand, I present the first participant S M3 who defines himself as a spiritual person. *“I am a spiritual person that believes that we are reborn. I don't believe that there is a higher power, a God. However, I think that we as humans can live*

*on after this life,”* He stated that if a person has faith in God, God can help him in his hard times and that faith in God does not make a person vulnerable, *“I think that a religious person that has faith in God can help him/ her get through rough times. I do not think that faith does or does not make one more vulnerable than a believer”*. On the other hand, the participant S W2 said that looking at the "positive side" is comforting and generates more peace and acceptance to believe that “if things didn't go as they should it, is for a reason”, and this thinking can generate security, *“It can also be a security that things do not happen for a reason, so you feel less “at affect” and more mindful accepting that it could happen to anyone, not because you’ve sinned”*. The last participant I wanted to mention is S W3, who questioned what if things don't go as a believer expects? It is very discouraging to think that it was “God's plan”, *“It must be really hard to think that when bad things happen "God might have a plan", which sounds heartbreaking”*.

## **5.6 FAITH AND STRESS - STRESS MANAGEMENT IN CRITICAL LIFE SITUATIONS**

### **Faith and Stress**

Coping with difficult situations generally involves changes, tolerating negative events or realities while trying to maintain emotional balance and stress levels. Any change generates stressors because they require us to adjust and adapt to new situations that can be very painful. Coping occurs in the context of life changes that are perceived as stressful. Psychological stress is usually associated with negative life changes, such as losing a job or a loved one. However, all changes require some form of adaptation. Even positive changes, such as getting married or having a child, can be stressful. But what is the relationship between faith and stress, can faith in God help control stress levels or does it increase them?

I will present the data collected from the Pentecostal Christians and the Secularists

### **5.6.1 Stress Management in Critical Life Situations according to the Pentecostal Christians.**

Almost all interviewees agree that faith helps to control stress levels. But some consider that stress is part of being human but that it is up to the individual and who you believe and trust to manage the stress levels in a positive or negative way. Aspects such as prayer, worship and reading the Bible help them to manage their stress levels in a positive to moderate way. Only one of the interviewees does not know if faith in God helped him to manage his stress levels or not, since he usually does not get stressed about anything, he learned to see and solve his problems objectively, *“I don't know if faith in God can help with stress. I learned to find objective solutions”* (PC M1)

The following are the causes which help Pentecostal Christians not to be stressed in stressful situations.

#### **1. Prayer, Worship and Bible reading.**

These three modes, prayer, worship and bible reading, have been the most revealing ways that help interviewees manage stress in times of trouble. One of the interviewees said that as soon as he feels that he is about to get stressed then he starts praying and appropriating the promises of the Bible, *“When I start to feel stress I start to pray more frequently and read the Bible and above all trust in God's promises.”* (PC W3). Interviewee PC W2 states that facing problems alone must be very hard, that it can be more comforting to have God on your side. To better withstand stress or to be able to cope with difficult moments, *“I think that everything one has to go through alone must be very hard, it is better to have God's comfort constantly by your side. I also feel that I am more resistant to stress, for the same reason. I can pray to God to help me resist stress or help me through it in the moment”*. Finally, another interviewee PC W1 thinks that to live day to day you need strength, for her it is comforting to pray and put her day and trust in God who will help her get through any problem of the day. To conclude she believes that if there is a relationship between faith and stress, without faith in God it makes you less resistant to stress, *“As a human I think you need strength every day to handle life and people around. I think you will be more stress*

*resistant when you put your life in his hands every day. I can handle stress at work much better if I pray on my way to work. I always feel protected in stressful situations. I think some people will be less stress resistant not believing in God, as my colleague said.”*

## **2. Peace and Trust in God**

The adjectives peace and hope in relation to God have appeared constantly throughout this research. One of the participants PC M1 stated that in her experience, faith in God gives her peace in the midst of problems, *“I believe that people who believe in God can experience peace and hope in difficult situations and therefore experience the situation as less stressful. This is an experience from my own life”*. Another participant PC M2 stated that he feels stress constantly, but he decides to put his faith in His Savior. Trusting in God gives him peace and walks with him through his problems. He believes that people who do not have faith are less resistant to stress. *“As a Christian I do not feel resistant to stress. I feel stressed all the time, like anyone else. But at the same time, I feel calm knowing that I am not the center of the universe. I have a Savior that keeps me close and keeps my eyes fixed on him and not my own incompleteness. I can only imagine what a non-religious person does in stressful situations. I guess their own experience decides how they react and cope”*.

### **5.6.2 Stress Management in Critical Life Situations according to the Secularist perspective.**

The majority of this study group (Secularist) stated that stress is not related to faith in God. To manage and control stress depends on oneself, on the objectivity with which one looks at one's problems. Only one participant S M3 thinks that a person who believes in God has more resistance to stress in problems. But he does not need to believe in a god to cope with his problems. He finds guidance and help in his family and friends when he goes through problems. *“I think that religious people can find comfort in having faith in god. I do believe that people that are religious are less prone to be stressed out, yes. No, not personally. I don't need a god to believe in order not to be less stressed out in general. I believe in the good in people and support and help from my fellow man. That is to say*

*that I seek comfort, guidance and help from my family and friends. That is more than enough for me”.*

### **1. Stress management depends on oneself**

Participants believe that faith has little or no relationship to being stress resistant or not. Managing stress or controlling it will depend on oneself, and no one else. Participant S W3, said that initially faith in God can give you security but later it does not because you start to see reality objectively. Adding that she was more stressed when she believed than now that she does not believe, *“I think that controlling stress depends on yourself, how you solve your problems based on your past experiences. Maybe at the beginning it can give you security but then you realize the reality and not anymore. I was more stressed when I used to believe, but that is also an age thing”.*

Another interviewee S W2 stated that everyone feels stress and that only one can control it and it will be up to each person to solve his problems, *“Absolutely not. Stress is part of people; it doesn't depend on anyone but yourself. Only I can solve my problems. Only you can control stress in your life. No one will help you like you can help yourself”.*

Finally, another person thinks that if a person is alone, he or she may be vulnerable, which can cause stress in dealing with problems. But in the end it will depend on the person to control their stress. *“If a person is completely alone, you may feel helpless. And that can cause a bit of stress, but it's up to you to feel stress in life. Problems come by themselves and they will just go away, there is no need to stress. Faith in God has nothing to do with it. If we have stress only, we can control it.”* (S W1)

### **2. Objectivity and Reality**

Some of the participants commented that both coping with problems and solving them should be objective and real. Participant S M1 says that it is difficult to group into non-believers and believers, because even within non-believers there are individualities. Moral values are individual and come from different sources. Depending on this we may or may not be resilient to stress and coping. *“No. It is*

*individual. It is impossible to group 'nonbelievers' as one would 'Catholics' 'sunni' etc, as the moral values of non-believers derive from different points. My personal ethics derive from different philosophical schools, laws, and critical thinking. I believe I am more stress resistant as I deal with reality how it is, and not how I imagine it to be”.*

Another interviewee thinks that problems should be faced in a real and objective way, that stress and belief in God are not related. God is a subjective issue. *“Coping and solutions to problems are objective and real, God is subjective, it would only distract us from reality. If you see the targets as they are, real you don't suffer from stress with faith or without. They are two different things”.* (S M2)

In this chapter I have analyzed the findings that emerged during the interviews with three Pentecostals Christians and three Secularists. I categorized them into six parts: the first part explains how both groups define a critical situation and which are the most critical ones from their perspective or their experiences. In the second part, I studied how both groups usually cope with adversity. In the third part, I investigated the relationship between faith and coping, whether or not they believe there is a relationship between the two concepts. In the fourth part, I explained the ways that God can help people to cope with adversity and ways why God cannot help people according to the Secularist. In the fifth part, I pointed out the role of faith and vulnerability and whether there are any type of relationship between both concepts under the perspectives of each group. Finally, I will present the relationship between faith and stress. I analyzed whether faith in God can make a person more or less resistant to stress and under what premises.

In this chapter, I have tried to present the contrasting opinions from the data material where it has been possible, however the informants seem not to agree on most of the topics I asked about. For this reason, it has been challenging to compare the informants' opinions. The degree of difference may be due to the fact that both groups are essentially antagonistic, but even so, degrees of similarity were also found. This can be interpreted as an important finding in this research.

## **CHAPTER SIX - DISCUSSION**

### **6.1 Discussion**

In this chapter, I will discuss the relationship between theory and the empirical data collected from the field. Based on the themes which emerged from the data, I have divided the chapter into three parts of discussion. The topics are Sense of Control, Coping Styles, Religious or Spiritual Coping, Significance and Age and Gender.

Critical situations affect the lives of all people on multiple levels, physical, psychological, social and spiritual, and can often produce significant changes in life. Faced with this, people resort to their different resources that allow them to cope with their problems in a unique and different way. In order to reestablish our balance and our levels of well-being as much as possible.

Some people, after doubting and going through conflictive moments, return to trust in their faith, in God, in some higher power or divinity and emerge stronger from their religious crisis, affirming themselves more fully in their creed and in their spiritual religious feeling. While others, not finding meaning within their creed of origin, go through processes of religious conversion to another creed or spiritual tradition that provides them with other beliefs, methods, rituals and systems of attribution of meaning that are of greater significance and effectiveness for the confrontation of the negative situation they have to face.

Pargament (1997) points out that religion is often present in the most remarkable times of life, expressing itself in many ways. At the same time, religion is not reserved only for times of crisis, nor is it the only way of coping with negative life situations. What should matter is how people come to terms with their most difficult moments by how religion functions in people's lives. It has been observed that many people who have not been religious turned to religion after going through a crisis situation, having sought answers and methods that would allow them to alleviate and mitigate their pain and discomfort. There are those who, although they had been believers and practitioners of a religious creed, faced with some negative life situation that they considered difficult to overcome,

went through moments of distrust or doubts about their religious faith, distrust towards God.

But it should be made clear that, as K. Pargament (1997) theorizes, although religion appears in moments of crisis, problems and adversities, religion and coping are two separate concepts, but they are related to the same phenomenon, which is crisis.

The central objective of this research was to find out How do Pentecostal Christians and Secularists cope with critical situations in Norway? In order to do so, I identified coping styles that emerged from the twelve interviewees, six Pentecostal Christians and six secularists, based on the theoretical framework presented in chapter four.

Afterwards, I will discuss the coping styles found in this work. I also want to emphasize that both groups identified death as the main critical life event nominated by both groups. There were more than three people who had experienced the death of a parent and highlighted it as an irreparable loss.

According to Attig (2007), who highlights the importance of beliefs in relation to their influence on grief coping, since they have a great impact on what people feel, on the evaluation of their feelings, on the choice of the appropriate expression and on the choices of their actions, reactions, and interactions with others. The author considers that spiritual beliefs are the main means of cognitive coping with reality, since the capacities of the mind and spirit orient people within their reality, giving support to the meaning that prevails in their lives. Although both groups have had the same experience, there is a great difference between the two groups, and that is that the Pentecostal Christians cope in a positive way, that is to say, they have a positive spiritual religious coping (Pargament, 1997), in the long term. This group has faith and hope that after death comes the promise of eternal life, they believe in the resurrection. The secular group, when faced with the death of a loved one, seeks support from family or relatives. Endler & Parker (1990) consider the usefulness of social support in bereavement since, through it, the bereaved can seek relief and comfort in others, focusing their attention on the problem they have to face, from the advice they ask for and receive from others. They may also engage in avoidant coping, visiting friends as a way of avoiding confrontation with their grief and with the feelings of despair that may arise in the face of the loss of a family member.

I am not going to delve into the topic because death itself is not the subject of the research work. But I mention it because death represents the most critical life experience for almost all participants in both groups.

## 6.2 Sense of Control

These strategies diverge depending on the sense of control that the person attributes to him/herself and/or the divinity, so the following possibilities can be observed:

1. ***Control can be centered in the self***, is defined on the basis of the belief that she has about the availability of elements, resources and/or tools that allow her to solve conflicts and/or problematic situations on her own. Resolving difficult situations in life implies having critical thinking, an aspect that many of the believers do not have.

In the research, the self-centered form of control was the one that manifested itself most in the secularist group. They believe that coping with life's critical moments will depend solely on the efforts and capabilities that people possess in addition to good self-management of stress and conflict resolution. Faith in God is not a valid coping resource because for them faith absorbs people's personality and identity, which prevents them from having direct control over their circumstances.

For secularists, having faith in God is an illusion and a distraction. Since the believing person breaks with the principle of reality and objectivity. Finally, many of them conclude that God cannot help in material and physical things of this world.

2. ***Control can be centered in God***, is defined by the fact that the person may feel that the ultimate responsibility lies with God or the divinity. In this type of problem solving, it is common to observe a passive attitude where the person tends to leave the situation "in God's hands" or in another external force, without doing anything for him/herself.

This style of control centered in God, is the one that appeared the least among Pentecostal Christians. Within this group it was evident that there are participants who take a passive attitude in the face of adversity, and therefore avoid taking direct responsibility at the

moment of facing any type of adversity. At the same time this can also be interpreted in two alternatives, on the one hand there are problems that only divine intervention could help us to face. That no matter how much effort we can make, it would be of no use, for example death, a terminal illness, infertility problems, etc. For example, in cases of death, many Christians get through the pain, anchoring their faith in the promise of eternal life and that one day everyone will see each other again or meet again, this promise allows them to move forward. In my career as a counseling psychologist, I have seen women "destined for infertility" by science, give birth or sick people with only a few months to live, live longer than predicted. Therefore, there are Christians who strongly believe that only their faith in God and his promises can help them. They cling to the biblical verse "that for God nothing is impossible" and focus on the fact that their only way out and answer can only come from God. Their hope, security and strength are deposited in their faith in God.

On the other hand, there are also Christians who, in order to avoid facing their problems, leave all the burden and responsibility in God's hands or in God's will.

Many of the secular people interviewed, strangely (at least strangely to me, because I would not expect a secularist to talk about the attributes of a God they does not believe in, let alone admit his existence.) stated that they did believe that having faith in God could "somehow" help in coping with difficult situations, for they believed that God "might be able" to provide peace, strength and solace in facing problems to those who believed in Him.

The type of "control centered in God" will also depend a lot on the image and perception that believers have of God. Throughout this research, the adjectives used by the Pentecostal Christian group have always been positive, such as "God is my Anchor", "God is my safe place", "God is my hope" and "God is my strength". This evidence shows the degree of trust on the part of this group towards God and the hope that they will receive timely help in the face of adversity, due to the positive image they have of God.

I think that "control can be centered in God" is very ambiguous to analyze because there are many other external factors that need to be taken into account to give a more adequate

and accurate opinion such as, for example, personality type, circumstances, perception of God and others.

3. ***Control can be centered in efforts to work through God***, who through his practice and religious faith may ask for divine guidance and intervention, seeking to influence the situation in such a way that his requests or desires are fulfilled.

This type of control centered to work through God was also present in the research. It was more prevalent among Pentecostal Christians, who have previously experienced some kind of positive help from God in this way, or who have always done so. Also people who think that God can work through science, for example. A Pentecostal woman said that she prayed a lot for her knee. God did not heal it directly but through medical treatment, because with God's help and the right treatment, she was healed. There is also the case of another woman who was able to become a mother through assisted fertilization treatment, so she believes that God worked in her case through science.

In conclusion, we can say that the religions of the world (the Pentecostal church is no exception) and secularists deal with the most important transitions and crises in the lives of human beings; and they all have something to say about birth, aging, family formation, illness, pain, suffering, accidents, injustice, loss, tragedy and death. Thus, the various events mentioned above are a central part of religious life and generate new forms as situations go through processes of social and cultural change. The new techniques of assisted fertilization, organ transplantation and the practices of "palliative care" are, among others, some of the issues that have arisen in recent decades as ethical and moral questions. Aspects that will have to cope with the system of beliefs and practices.

4. ***Control can be centered in the relationship between the individual and God***. The person will be able to feel that he or she works together with God to solve problematic situations. The religious subject will feel that he/she is not alone nor that the divinity acts by itself, since he/she trusts in the possibility of a joint work of collaboration between both, and in the shared responsibility with God or with another divinity.

The control centered in the relationship between the individual and God, is the one most presented in the research. The data emerged from the Pentecostal Christians, manifested two very interesting aspects. On the one hand, many trust in God and in the goodness and attributes of God the Father in a positive way, they find strength, security and calm in adversity, they have faith that God will help them to cope and face the critical situations of life. But at the same time, they participate with actions such as reading the Word of God, praying with the promises of the Bible, praising God even in spite of diversity. Many also prefer to spend time with God in nature, to enter into intimacy with Him. They seek moments of introspection to evaluate their situation, to know how to face the problem with God's help and to learn from possible mistakes.

On the other hand, many recognize that being a Christian does not imply that they will not go through difficulties, on the contrary, we will all go through adversity, but the difference with non-believers is that even in the midst of problems God will provide us with peace and hope. To think otherwise is not healthy for believers, it will only lead to disappointment and frustration. I consider this a mature faith, the Word of God says that unforeseen events can happen to all of us, but as the Psalm 23 says, though I walk through the path of death, I will not fear, for you are with me.

### **6.3 Coping Styles**

Pargament (1997,) describes three spiritual religious coping styles that religious people of different faiths may use: autonomous, avoidant, and collaborative.

The **collaborative religious coping** style is associated with a higher level of personal competence and various benefits and positive effects such as: fewer symptoms of illness, lower levels of anxiety, and lower feelings of guilt associated with a state of grace and self-forgiveness for one's sins.

This type of collaborative style is the most evident according to the information provided by the participants. Many of the Pentecostal Christians are aware that there is the possibility that everyone, even they, will experience difficult times in their lives, but they trust that God is in control of all adverse situations. At the same time, they believe that they can only collaborate with God by believing, praying and meditating on His Word.

They have faith that God will provide them with the opportune help and the necessary spiritual resources, such as faith, serenity and strength to overcome adversity. For them it does not mean that depositing faith and trust in God is synonymous with passivity in the face of coping. They do not avoid the problem but accept it and work together with God to face the situation in a positive way. They face adversity directly and work together with God.

In contrast, **the autonomous coping style** proved to be more successful in issues associated with abstinence from alcohol; while the avoidant style, in which the individual can leave the problematic situation in the hands of God, is the most used -in general- in negative situations in which religious people feel they have very little control over events such as wars, floods, natural catastrophes, etc.

This style is more present among secularists, this group tends to deal with critical life situations in a personal, direct, objective, and critical thinking style to overcome adversity. God represents for them an invented idea, which absorbs their identity and personality. For them God is only a distraction, and living with an illusion of their existence, and the idea of God's existence prevents people from seeing the problem in a real way and from seeing concrete solutions to their problems.

At the same time, Pargament points out the fact that the **avoidant coping style** has been considered a type of religiosity that has been highly criticized by a significant number of psychologists. Although the author emphasizes that in some cases, religious people use the avoidant coping style without falling into feelings of hopelessness by maintaining their trust in God, in higher powers and/or in themselves, thinking that they will be helped by the divinity for the resolution of problematic situations. It is different to feel alone in the hands of fate, than to trust in God and/or certain divinities, to invoke them, to turn to them for help and to feel that they influence in some positive way the stressful situations one is facing, as well as the resolution of such negative and/or problematic events. Therefore, the avoidant coping style can be beneficial - as long as the person, despite feeling that the situation is beyond his or her control, does not lose faith and hope and trusts in the power of God. This attitude is based on the trust and faith of the religious person who knows that through his spiritual practice, God or higher beings will be able

to guide him and/or help him to think through and/or resolve the negative situations he is going through. According to Pargament (1997), making petitionary prayers addressed to God and/or other higher powers does not imply establishing a situation of dependence towards an external power, nor assuming a passive attitude for the resolution of problems.

Some secularists think that people who believe or trust in God have this avoidant coping, for the reasons already mentioned above. They also state that God is a concept created to manipulate people. Christianity only supports the personality and identity of people and therefore avoids seeing problems in a real and objective way. It is better to receive support from family and friends than from God. God cannot help us because God does not exist, it is an illusion. Religion only serves to distract us and prevent us from facing our problem in a direct and real way. Both stress management and problem solving depend on oneself and no one else.

#### **6.4 Religious Coping**

In their Religion and Coping Project, Pargament, Ensing et al. (1990) assessed spiritual religious support through a scale of coping activities whose items reflect various components of support: a) emotional reassurance such as "trust that God would not let anything terrible happened to me"; b) close spiritual relationship such as "seeking divine love and care"; and c) problem-solving guidance in terms of "God shows me how to handle every situation". People who carried out a type of coping based on the spiritual reported having a better adaptation to the difficult situations they had faced.

In my research, these three elements such as emotional security, close personal relationships and God's guidance in solving problems have been manifested according to the data collected by the participants. I can say that all Pentecostal Christians participating in this research work have presented a type of coping based on spirituality. On the one hand, they are aware that all Christians and secularists can go through critical moments in their lives, that God is in control and even in the midst of adversity God will take care of them, be their strength and security when they go through adversity. God will help them and provide them with the spiritual and material resources to get through. The representativeness and perceptions are very positive at all times in the different interviews

with the secular Christian group. In addition, many of them have manifested a key concept in this analysis as well, which is the meaning and purpose of adversity or critical life situations. I will elaborate on this concept below. On the other hand, interestingly two of the six secularists have identified that having faith in God could positively help them cope with life's critical moments. They believe that God as a concept can provide security and strength.

However, the style of coping based on spirituality and collaboration - in which the person works together with the divine to solve their problems - could be beneficial to the person because it would allow them to feel symbolically accompanied by the sacred and powerful divine presence that does not leave them alone.

#### **6.4.1 Types of Religious Coping**

According to the study of Pargament, Koenig et al. (2000) distinguish 22 modes of religious or spiritual coping within which they differentiate positive and negative behaviors. Positive religious coping included items such as: appreciation of God as benevolent, attempts to collaborate with God, seeking a relationship of greater contact with God, seeking spiritual religious support from the religious congregation and/or its representative, trust in God, offering spiritual help to other people, religious purification through prayers, asking for and granting forgiveness to others. Negative religious coping included beliefs about: God as a being who punishes through illness, demonic forces related to poor health, experiences of emotional discontent, and feeling of interference in the relationship with God.

1. **Positive Religious Coping:** Includes spiritual religious support, collaborative style, reframing or positive religious resignification.

All Pentecostal Christians in this study have manifested a positive type of religious coping. For the following reasons, many of them have a positive image of God, for them God represents protection, security, strength and solace. They all share a strong connection with God. In times of adversity, they seek God's love and care. They place their confidence and control of problems in God, but at the same time they try to place their action plans with

God. Finally, many of them find meaning in adversity which enables them to face adversity with purpose.

2. **Negative Religious Coping:** referred to spiritual pain, discomfort and frustration. A subscale integrates dissatisfaction with the church and/or with God, resignification of the event as a type of divine punishment and prayers as a mode of divine retribution.

In the study conducted, there was no negative religious confrontation, none of the Pentecostal Christians stated that facing adversity is due to God's abandonment nor did they question God's power. Neither did any of the interviewees think that if they have problems it is because they sinned, because of lack of devotion to God, God punishes them because they behaved badly or finally God left them in the hands of evil and to their fate.

Pargament (1997) points out that the most important thing is to be able to observe whether through the coping mode the person is going in a positive direction that allows him/her to achieve positive effects, and whether he/she is using resources that help him/her to cope with the stressful situation.

## **6.5 Significance**

Suffering becomes more tolerable if the person manages to find explanations that give some sense to the difficult moment he or she is going through. Religious beliefs allow reaffirming that life has some meaning, in spite of all the negative things that have to be faced. Situations of loss due to the death of a loved one can represent a threat to one's beliefs and value system, even in the case of believers and practitioners of a religious creed; and can raise questions and challenge what they believed about themselves, about the event in question and about the nature of the sacred in which they had placed their faith. Several empirical studies show how religious people persevere in maintaining their religious beliefs and practices in times of great stress and that, after having gone through the critical moment in their lives, they maintain their religious faith and feel it strengthened (Pargament, 1997).

The Pentecostal group of Christians, in relation to the secularists, have been the ones who have tried the most to find meaning in the midst of adversity. Not as a way of finding fault or self-blame, but as a way of giving acceptance to their problems and preservation to their faith. They see conflict as an opportunity for transformation and growth toward something better. Some of them have also stated that in spite of adversity, they always seek lessons and learn from past mistakes in order to first accept the adversity and avoid making the same mistakes in the future. Putting the whole adverse situation in God's hands and under His control, takes on greater meaning for believers. Meaning in the midst of trial helps to find purpose in adversity and preservation to their faith. It will always be positive to find meaning and purpose in adversity, this helps you to accept the problems. As I once heard it is better to ask for what? than to ask why? God can turn meaninglessness into meaningfulness.

#### **6.6 Age and gender**

In conclusion, although analyzing the role of age and gender was not the aim of this study, I would like to point out the role of these factors in the choice of religious and spiritual coping methods. In this sense, we can cautiously assume, based on the results obtained in this study, that the women interviewed mostly presented a type of coping centered on emotions, they have a greater management of their emotions in a positive way when dealing with adversity, while men have a type of coping centered on the problem, that is, they present as a characteristic a greater processing of information and search for alternative solutions. This analysis is carried out under the theory of Lazarus and Folkman (2000) with respect to coping strategies.

In this chapter, I have discussed the different coping styles and how Pentecostal Christians and secular people cope with critical life situations. I have presented the different types of religious coping within the context studied, which are positive, negative, collaborative, autonomous and avoidant. I went further to present the different sense of control, such as the control centered in self, centered in God, centered in efforts to work through God and finally centered in the relationship between the individual and God within the context studied. According to the data emerged by the interviewees, it can be said in a general way that Pentecostal Christians cope with adversity with a collaborative positive style and that allows them to find significance in the adverse situation. At the same time, all

the interviewees belonging to this group perceive God in a real way. God represents for them, strength and security. Although they know that God is in control of every situation, they feel the conviction to work together with Him with actions such as reading the Bible, praying and worshiping. While the confidence of the secularists do not present a positive coping style (according to the parameters established by Pargament.), because they believe that God is not trustworthy because God is an illusion and distraction. For them, believing in God is only a means to avoid facing the situation. Their frequent style of coping with adversity is through family and friends

## CHAPTER SEVEN – CONCLUSION

### 7.1 Conclusion

Finally, we come to the last chapter of this research work. I have conducted a qualitative study of religious coping experienced by a group of Pentecostals Christians and Secularists in Norway facing critical life events such as the death of a loved one and/or health or financial problems. The purpose was to explore how these groups cope with critical situations and to then discuss this in relation to K. Pargament's theory of religious coping. At the same time, my goal was to identify similarities and differences between these two groups. In the interest of having my research be considered balanced and unbiased, the data material comprised interviews with self-identified Norwegian Christian Pentecostals and secularists and practitioners who had recently faced a personal crisis. An exploratory approach was used to generate and analyze the data material.

Before going on to comment on the findings of the material emerged by the participants, I want to make it clear that I cannot and much less wish to overgeneralize about coping styles based exclusively on a small sample group. I tried to be mindful about not saying that all secularists cope a certain way or that ALL Christians cope a certain way. Yet, when analyzing the data from the secularists, the theme *Family and Friends* appeared as a primary theme around which four other themes centered were: 1) Loneliness and Introspection, 2) Face the problem, 3) Art and finally 4) Alcohol. Based on the results obtained, we can say that turning to family and friends was the main way in which the secularists participating in this study found to cope with difficult situations. They considered it necessary to be able to share their feelings and thoughts with people they trust in order to get ahead and not get caught up in their problems. Facing difficult situations depended on their ability to manage themselves in adversity, on the management of critical thinking and stress control. In other words, it was a strategy where they mainly depended on themselves.

Meanwhile, for the Pentecostal Christians, the theme *Faith in God* emerged as a primary theme around which two other themes centered were: 1) Family and Friends and 2) Isolation and Introspection. The Pentecostal Christians participating in this study have manifested a positive collaborative religious coping. I come to this conclusion based on

three aspects. The first is the positive image they have of God. None of the respondents felt that trials are synonymous with sin or punishment. On the contrary, for them, God represented love and care in times of distress. In the midst of their problems, God grants them security, strength and comfort in the difficult situations that they must face. Second, they gave God control of the situation while at the same time they collaboratively seek God's guidance through Bible reading, prayer and praise. Third and last, Pentecostal Christians were aware that everyone (believers or non-believers) go through critical situations, but it is at this moment that they look for meaning and purpose to that critical moment they are going through, as a way to preserve their faith in the midst of life. adversity. This meaning allows them to say what it says in Romans 8:28 "*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God,*" (NVI)

After the above, I can say that the main objective of the investigation was fulfilled. As for the main difference that I see between the two is where they put the question of control, one believes that God is in control of good things and bad things and the other believes that they need to control things. The two main similarities between the two groups is that both seem to turn to friends and family, and both include respondents who prefer to deal in private and think things through before taking action.

Regarding my research methodology, initially all the interviews had to be carried out face to face. But due to the high rates of contagion of the COVID-19 Pandemic, finally not all of them could be carried out in person but they had to make use of technology such as zoom and email means. Although technology helped me to carry out the interviews and to be able to collect data from the participants in order to finish the thesis on time, I do not feel that Zoom and email correspondence is an optimal resource for qualitative research. Of course, the exception would be for those of us who must work around limitations that are out of our control. For example, I noticed that the participants were uncomfortable in front of the camera, and at the same time tired and anxious about the situation of the pandemic in general, and the consequences of the confinement of a home office, lack of social life and inability to attend church. Many were quick and specific in their matter of answering; At the same time, I did not want to be too demanding or incisive either. One has to be very careful when people share their feelings and intimacy

regarding sensitive issues. This situation had the effect of, in some cases, responses that seemed to provide little information and also, "little cloth to cut" for my analysis.

For future research, this work could be further enriched by adding other variables such as personality type. There we could analyze whether or not the personality of the people directly affected religious confrontation or further limit the type of coping one exhibited in critical situations for example, death, infertility, among others.

This is one of the few studies on religious beliefs and coping between religious groups in Norway, and more studies are needed to gain a deeper understanding of religious coping within these groups and others. I hope that there will be more added to this emerging field of study in the future.

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## ATTACHMENT 1

### INFORMATION LETTER

**Are you interested in taking part in the research project?**  
**” Coping strategies of Pentecostal Christians and Secularist in critical life situations.”**

This is a inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to know how do Pentecostal Christians and Secularist cope with critical situations in Norway.

In this letter we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

#### **Purpose of the project**

Many of us, Christians or Secularist have faced critical moments throughout our liv, such as the death of a loved one, illness, divorce, or financial problems. Whether expected or unexpected, short-lived, or long-lasting. These critical moments demand actions of how we are going to react to them and what strategies are we going to use at the given moment.

This has motivated me to investigate how do Pentecostal Christians and Secularist face with critical situations in Norway and whether there will be similarities or differences between both groups when facing these life situations that often come without our expecting or wanting them.

#### **Who is responsible for the research project?**

MF Vitenskapelig Høyskole/ Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society.

#### **Why are you being asked to participate?**

You have been chosen because you fulfill the main characteristics that are: Be Pentecostals Christians or Secularists, to be between the age of 30 and 50 and to live in Norway. The research has a sample of twelve other people, 6 Pentecostal Christians (3

women and 3 men) and 6 secularists (3 women and 3 men) who fulfill the same characteristics. All of you were chosen by my own network of contacts.

### **What does participation involve for you?**

Initially I wanted to lead semi-structured interviews face-to-face with the interviewees in a space that the interviewees liked.

But due to the global pandemic (COVID-19) and the growth of infections in Norway, 7 of those interviewees prefer to do the interview in writing. The interview will be sent and received by email from the interviewees. The rest prefer to do it by Zoom, but I will only record audio not image of the session. If there is something else to clarify or ask, the interviewees are predisposed to do so.

I will save the interviews only assigning a number (I1, I2, I3 etc.), gender and probably age for analysis if I required it. Both the recorder and the computer are only used by me. No one else has access to it.

All collected material will be destroyed, erased and eliminated when I will finish the data analysis.

### **Participation is voluntary**

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

### **Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data**

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

- I and supervisor will have access to the personal data. Nobody else.
- My work tools are a tape and recorder and a computer. Only I have access to these tools.

- The interviews will be saved with a code (I, I2, I3 etc.). Possibly for the data analysis, gender and age range will be considered.

### **What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?**

The project is scheduled to end first week of august. All collected data will be removed or erased. The data will be used for the only time at this period and in this study only.

### **Your rights**

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data
- 

### **What gives us the right to process your personal data?**

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with *MF Vitenskapelig Høyskole/ Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society*, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

### **Where can I find out more?**

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- MF Vitenskapelig Høyskole/ Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society.  
via Professor Tatjana Schnell , by email ([Tatjana.Schnell@mf.no](mailto:Tatjana.Schnell@mf.no)).
- NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: ([personverntjenester@nsd.no](mailto:personverntjenester@nsd.no)) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

- Student project, Master’s thesis, via Carla Monasterios, by email [carlymonasterios@yahoo.com](mailto:carlymonasterios@yahoo.com).

## **CONSENT FORM**

*Consent can be given in writing (including electronically) or orally. NB! You must be able to document/demonstrate that you have given information and gained consent from project participants i.e. from the people whose personal data you will be processing (data subjects). As a rule, we recommend written information and written consent.*

- *For written consent on paper you can use this template*
- *For written consent which is collected electronically, you must chose a procedure that will allow you to demonstrate that you have gained explicit consent (read more on our website)*
- *If the context dictates that you should give oral information and gain oral consent (e.g. for research in oral cultures or with people who are illiterate) we recommend that you make a sound recording of the information and consent.*

*If a parent/guardian will give consent on behalf of their child or someone without the capacity to consent, you must adjust this information accordingly. Remember that the name of the participant must be included.*

*Adjust the checkboxes in accordance with participation in your project. It is possible to use bullet points instead of checkboxes. However, if you intend to process special categories of personal data (sensitive personal data) and/or one of the last four points in the list below is applicable to your project, we recommend that you use checkboxes. This because of the requirement of explicit consent.*

I have received and understood information about the project” Coping strategies of Pentecostal Christians and Secularist in critical life situations.” and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

- to participate in *(insert method, e.g. an interview)*
- to participate in *(insert other methods, e.g. an online survey) – if applicable*

- for my/my child's teacher to give information about me/my child to this project (include the type of information)– if applicable*
- for my personal data to be processed outside the EU – if applicable*
- for information about me/myself to be published in a way that I can be recognised (describe in more detail)– if applicable*
- for my personal data to be stored after the end of the project for (insert purpose of storage e.g. follow-up studies) – if applicable*

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx.

## **ATTACHMENT 2:**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

#### **COPING STRATEGIES OF PENTECOSTAL CHRISTIANS AND SECULARISTS IN CRITICAL LIFE SITUATIONS.**

1. What do you consider as a critical life situation?
2. Could you please describe a critical situation you experienced recently?
3. How stressful did you experience it from 0 (not at all) to 5 (absolutely)?
4. How did you cope with it?
5. Is this how you usually cope with critical situations in your life? Or are there other ways you react?
6. Do you think that having faith in God can help coping with critical situations?
  - a. If yes: Why?  
Does it make it easier or harder to deal with them?
  - b. If not: why not?
7. Do you think having faith in God can make a person more vulnerable in critical situations? (If you believe in God, please respond with reference to yourself)
8. Do you think having no faith in God can make a person more vulnerable in critical situations? (If you do not believe in God, please respond with reference to yourself)

9. Do you think having faith in God can make a person more or less stress resistant in general? (If you believe in God, please respond with reference to yourself)
  
10. Do you think having no faith in God can make a person more or less stress resistant in general? (If you do not believe in God, please respond with reference to yourself)
  
11. In what way do you think that God could help a person cope with critical situations?
  
12. In what way do you think that God could not help a person cope with critical situations?