Psychology Press
Taylor & Francis Group

When Muslims Are Perceived as a Religious Threat: Examining the Connection Between Desecration, Religious Coping, and Anti-Muslim Attitudes

Hisham Abu Raiya

NYU Counseling and Behavioral Health Services

Kenneth I. Pargament and Annette Mahoney

Bowling Green State University

Kelly Trevino

VA Boston Healthcare System

This study examined links between the appraisal that Muslims desecrate Christian values and teachings, religious coping methods, and anti-Muslim attitudes. Of the 192 Christian undergraduate participants, between 13.7% and 28% perceived Muslims as a threat to Christian values and teachings. After controlling for demographic and personological variables (e.g., church attendance, pluralism, Christian orthodoxy, authoritarianism, fundamentalism, particularism), higher levels of viewing Muslims as desecrators of Christianity were linked to higher anti-Muslim attitudes. In contrast, positive religious coping methods that emphasized expressions of Christian love and learning from Muslim spiritual models were associated with lower anti-Muslim attitudes. However, negative religious coping methods that emphasized that Muslims were being punished by God and demonic were also tied to greater anti-Muslim attitudes. Further, religious coping methods partially mediated the associations between desecration and anti-Muslim attitudes. Higher levels of authoritarianism, religious particularism, fundamentalism, and greater exposure to messages of desecration predicted perceptions of Muslims as desecrators of Christianity. The findings demonstrate the usefulness of Pargament's religious coping theory to understand prejudice, particularly how the perception that Muslims violate Christianity may often underlie anti-Muslim attitudes.

Prejudice toward Muslims is prevalent in the United States today. A *USA Today*/Gallup Poll of 1,007 Americans conducted in 2006 revealed that 39% of respondents said they felt at least some prejudice against Muslims. "The same percentage favored requiring Muslims, including U.S. citizens, to carry a special ID as a means of preventing terrorist attacks in the United

States. About one third said U.S. Muslims were sympathetic to al-Qaeda, and 22% said they wouldn't want Muslims as neighbors" (Elias, 2006, p. 5).

In light of prior research on links between certain types of Christian religiousness and prejudice toward minority groups (e.g., Jackson & Hunsberger, 1999; Scheepers, Gijsberts, & Hello, 2002), the role of religion in encouraging or discouraging prejudice against Muslims is important to uncover. Particularly relevant here is a recent study in which prejudice toward Jews was associated with the perception that this group threatened Christian values and teachings (Pargament,

Correspondence should be sent to Hisham Abu Raiya, PhD, NYU Student Health Care Center, Counseling & Behavioral Health Services, 726 Broadway, Suite 471, New York, NY 10003. E-mail: har1@nyu.edu

Trevino, Mahoney, & Silberman, 2007). Similar processes are likely to extend to prejudice toward Muslims, but research on religious variables and anti-Muslim attitudes is scarce. To fill this gap, this study examines anti-Muslim attitudes through the lens of religious coping theory (Pargament, 1997). Specifically we examine whether the appraisal that Muslims desecrate Christian values (the stressor) is linked to anti-Muslim attitudes (the response). Furthermore, we consider whether religious ways of dealing with this stressor (religious coping) mitigate or exacerbate the ties between these appraisals of Muslims and anti-Muslim attitudes. Finally, we examine what factors are predictive of perceptions of Muslims as desecrators of Christianity.

RELIGION AND PREJUDICE: THEORY AND RESEARCH

Does religion encourage tolerance or intolerance? The links between religiousness and prejudice have concerned social scientists for several decades. Gordon Allport (1954), one of the first psychologists to focus on this question, summarized his findings in a classic statement in which he talks of religion: "It makes prejudice and it unmakes prejudice" (p. 494). To explain this seemingly paradoxical statement, Allport referred to the religious orientation of the individual; extrinsic religiousness, he claimed, "makes" the prejudice, whereas intrinsic religiousness "unmakes" it. Although empirical studies based on Allport's conceptual distinction have yielded mixed findings (Hunsberger, 1995; Laythe, Finkel, & Kirkpatrick, 2001), the original debate still elicits controversy and has generated considerable research.

This research points clearly to a link between religion and prejudice. For example, in a review of the empirical literature, Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis (1993) found that higher levels of religiousness related to higher prejudice in 37 of 47 studies, whereas only two studies showed an inverse relationship. In addition, several religiously based variables have emerged as salient. Namely, greater prejudice has been tied repeatedly to fundamentalalist or exclusivist orientations to religion (see Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 2003, for review), more frequent church attendance (e.g., Scheepers et al., 2002), more extrinsic religious orientation (Donahue, 1985), and greater religious particularism, in which people believe theirs is the only true religion (Scheepers et al., 2002). Conversely, lower prejudice has been tied to a higher quest religious orientation, in which religion is viewed as an ongoing search for meaning (Batson et al., 1993). However, certain personality variables appear to serve as mediators between religiousness and prejudice. For example, several studies have shown that,

after controlling for the effects of right-wing authoritarianism, the relationship between fundamentalism and prejudice toward different groups almost disappeared (Hunsberger, 1995; Laythe et al., 2001; Rowatt & Franklin, 2004; Wylie & Forest, 1992).

Unfortunately, empirical studies of the links between anti-Muslim attitudes and religious variables are rare. Those few studies on this topic have yielded results that are consistent with the general findings summarized earlier. For example, working with a sample of 152 Christian undergraduate students, Rowatt, Franklin, and Cotton (2005) found that self-reported negative attitudes toward Muslims increased as self-reported social dominance orientation, right-wing authoritarianism, and fundamentalism increased. Further, they found that greater implicit anti-Muslim attitudes were tied to Christian orthodoxy. Van dir Silk and Konig (2006) used survey data from a representative subsample of indigenous Dutch ($n = 582$) to explore the relationship between orthodox, humanitarian, and science-inspired beliefs and prejudice. They found that humanitarian convictions (i.e., the belief that God reveals Himself in the actual contact between people) could work against the acceptance of prejudice toward ethnic and religious minorities including Muslims, whereas orthodox convictions (i.e., the beliefs that God is concerned with every individual personally and there is a transcendent reality) did not seem to work against the acceptance of prejudice.

Although available research sheds some light on the link between religion and prejudice, the literature suffers from several serious limitations. First, the correlations between prejudice and the various indices of religiousness are low. This suggests that there may be undetected, religiously based variables that are more strongly associated with prejudice. A related problem is that the religious variables that have been employed are often global in nature and fail to specify particular types of religiousness that may be closely or powerfully linked to prejudice (Spilka et al., 2003). This limits our understanding of precisely how religion may promote or reduce prejudice. Finally, most of the research on religion and prejudice has been personological in nature, focusing on people's stable religious and personality characteristics and traits (Pargament et al., 2007). With some important exceptions, (e.g., Batson & Burris, 1994; Jackson & Hunsberger, 1999), the research on this topic has not generally tested the role situations and intergroup dynamics might play in the development of prejudice (Pargament et al., 2007).

WHY RELIGIOUS COPING THEORY?

A few midlevel social psychological theories offer insight into prejudice. According to social identity theory

(Tajfel & Turner, 1979), prejudice toward out-group members provides the members of the in-group a sense of positive social identity and satisfies their need for self-esteem. Empirical research has yielded some support for this theory (Aberson, Healy, & Romero, 2000). Terror management theory (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1999) suggests that the awareness of the inevitability of death produces existential anxiety, which in turn motivates people to preserve themselves. To do so, they adopt a cultural worldview from which they derive a sense of self-esteem. Terror management theory stipulates that in-group members evaluate out-group members negatively because unalike others are assumed to threaten their worldview. There is some empirical evidence that people show greater intergroup bias when they become aware of the inevitability of their own death (Florian & Mikulincer, 1998). What might religious coping theory add to our understanding of the prejudice phenemon? Before we attempt to answer this question, we summarize the basic premises of religious coping theory.

General coping theory rests on the fundamental assumption that human phenomena are multifaceted and can be understood only as the product of ongoing processes of interaction between individuals and life situations in a larger social context (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Pargament, 1997). According to this theory, people are far from passive creatures. Rather, they are proactive, goal-directed beings who search constantly for meaning and significance in their lives. When people encounter life events, major as well as minor, they appraise them with regard to their important goals and strivings in life. When the framework of significance that people hold is challenged, threatened, or lost, they apply coping strategies to conserve or, when necessary, transform significance. This process is manifested in different domains in life: physical (e.g., health), financial (e.g., money), social (e.g., friends, family), and/or psychological (e.g., self-esteem; Pargament et al., 2007).

Religious coping theory adds to general coping models with its emphasis on the *sacred* as an object of and part of the search for significance. Many people seek to build, foster, maintain, and transform a relationship with whatever they hold to be sacred (Pargament, 1997). Pargament and Mahoney (2002) defined the sacred as divine beings, higher powers, God, or transcendent reality, and other aspects of life that take on spiritual character by virtue of their association with the divine. According to this definition, any aspect of life can become sacred through its association with, or representation of, divinity. This process has been labeled "sanctification" (Pargament & Mahoney, 2005). Through the process of sanctification, almost any aspect of life can attain sacred status, including psychological

qualities (e.g., identity, meaning), social qualities (e.g., community, love), time (e.g., Sabbath), people (e.g., religious leaders), and place (e.g., nature, churches).

Pargament and Mahoney (2002) hypothesized that people are particularly motivated to preserve and protect those aspects of life they hold sacred from various threats and violations. Several studies support this hypothesis. For example, Mahoney et al. (2003) found that couples who view their marriages as sacred engage more in constructive problem solving activities when they face conflict. Individuals who view their environment as sacred are also more likely to act in ecologically friendly ways (Tarakeshwar & Pargament, 2001). Mahoney et al. (2005) applied the construct of sanctification to college students' perceptions of their bodies. Students completed measures of the extent to which they viewed their bodies as being a manifestation of God (e.g., "My body is a temple of God") and as characterized by sacred qualities (e.g., holy, blessed, sacred). Greater levels of both forms of sanctification were related to higher levels of health-protective behaviors, strenuous exercise, satisfaction with one's body, and disapproval of alcohol consumption as well as to lower levels of illicit drug use, unhealthy eating practices, and alcohol consumption. Viewing the body as having sacred qualities was also related to lower rates of binge eating and illicit drug use.

When people perceive that the sacred is violated or threatened (i.e., desecration), they engage in efforts to preserve and protect these precious values (Pargament & Mahoney, 2005; Pargament et al., 2007). Several studies have examined the ties between perceptions of spiritual desecration and subsequent physical and mental health. The results of these studies have been consistent. Appraisals of sacred violation have powerful ties to mental health (Magyar, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2000; Mahoney et al., 2002; Pargament, Magyar, Benore, & Mahoney, 2005; Pargament et al., 2007). For example, in a study of college students in Ohio and New York City after the 9/11 attacks, students who perceived the attacks as desecrating sacred values were more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (Mahoney et al., 2002). Working with 117 adults selected randomly from the community, Pargament, Magyar, et al. (2005) found that people who experienced life events that were perceived to be violations of the sacred reported higher levels of emotional distress. More specifically, desecration was tied to more intrusive thoughts and greater anger and less posttraumatic growth.

We were particularly interested in religious coping theory because of the following reasons (Pargament & Abu Raiya, 2007). First, religious coping theory takes a proximal perspective on religious life; it allows us to look more carefully and closely at religious experience

as it is expressed in particular contexts. Second, religious coping theory takes a less reductionistic view of religion, one in which religion can be understood as a goal or motivation in and of itself. Finally, the findings from this approach may be more easily applied to critical psychological and social problems. Increasingly, mental health professionals are implementing a variety of interventions that address spiritual resources and struggles, with promising results (al-Issa, 2000; Freedman & Enright, 1996; Pargament, 2007; Pargament, Murray-Swank, & Tarakeshwar, 2005; Richards & Bergin, 1997).

Religious coping theory provides a fitting conceptual framework for understanding prejudice for several reasons. First, unlike reactive theories, this theory views people as proactive creatures who search for meaning in life. People, according to this theory, evaluate life situations in reference to what they hold significant (including sacred values) and actively cope with these situations to protect and preserve these important values. Applying religious coping theory to prejudice toward religious groups, we can partially understand anti-Muslim attitudes as a reaction of Christians to the perception that Muslims threaten their sacred values and as a defense against this threat. Second, religious coping theory attends to multiple levels of analysis: individual and situational (Pargament et al., 2007). Hence, it expands the effort to understand anti-Muslim attitudes by including in the analyses not only dispositional variables but other dynamic factors that may contribute to the development of this form of prejudice. Finally, unlike perspectives that stress fixed beliefs and traits, religious coping theory assumes that the relevant psychological processes are more fluid. It assumes that evaluations of situations, coping methods, and outcomes interact with each other and change over time. Based on this theory, anti-Muslim attitudes are not necessarily static and final states. They, too, may change as perceptions of the threat and methods of coping with these threats fluctuate. In sum, this theory postulates that to understand prejudice, social scientists must pay close attention to the expression of particular forms of prejudice by particular groups of people in particular contexts (Pargament et al., 2007). Though this study focuses on anti-Muslim attitudes held by Christians in the United States, religious coping theory could be applied to prejudice towards any particular religious group by the members of any other religious group.

PERCEPTIONS OF MUSLIMS AS THREATS TO CHRISTIANS AND ANTI-MUSLIM ATTITUDES

Currently, no empirical evidence speaks directly to the prevalence of the perception that Muslims represent a threat to Christian values and its implications for anti-Muslim attitudes. Nonetheless, there is indirect evidence from studies of prejudice toward other groups. Several studies from social psychology and the psychology of religion suggest that prejudice may be a response to threatened values and intergroup conflicts. For example, Jackson and Esses (1997) found that individuals higher in religious fundamentalism were more likely to view value-threatening others (homosexuals, single mothers) as being more responsible for their own problems than non-value-threatening groups. Jackson and Hunsberger (1999) hypothesized that more religious people would express greater favoritism toward ingroups (Christians, fellow believers) and more derogation toward outgroups (atheists, nonbelievers) than less religious people. Their hypothesis was supported for several indices of religiousness; higher levels of fundamentalism, Christian orthodoxy, intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientation, and belief in God were tied to more favoritism to ingroups and derogation of outgroups. The authors suggested that "prejudice against outgroups has its *origin in intergroup relations*, not in personality structure" (p. 519). Noting empirical findings linking religiousness consistently to prejudice toward some groups (e.g., gays) and not others (e.g., Blacks), Batson and Burris (1994) argued that the relationship between religion and prejudice is moderated by whether prejudice toward particular target groups is proscribed or encouraged by religious institutions.

Glock and Stark (1966) examined data from a national survey that centered on the links between Christian beliefs and anti-Semitism. They composed an index of religious dogmatism consisting of items that assessed orthodoxy, particularism, religious libertarianism, and the role of the historic Jew in the crucifixion of Jesus. They found that a two-item measure of religious hostility toward Jews mediated the link between religious dogmatism and anti-Semitism. These two items presented Jews as responsible for the crucifixion ("Jews can never be forgiven for what they did to Jesus until they accept Him as the True Savior") and degrade the Christian faith ("Among themselves Jews think Christians are ignorant for believing Christ was the son of God").

More recently, Pargament et al. (2007) tested the applicability of religious coping theory to understand anti-Semitism. Working with a sample of 139 college students who completed measures of desecration, anti-Semitism, and religious ways of coping with appraisals of Jews as desecrators of Christianity, Pargament et al. (2007) found that greater desecration was associated with greater anti-Semitism, after controlling for demographic variables and personological measures (e.g., particularism, pluralism, church attendance, Christian orthodoxy, fundamentalism, authoritarianism). Thus,

some evidence suggests that appraisals of one religious group as desecrators of another may be associated with prejudice toward the group that is perceived as a source of sacred violation or threat.

RELIGIOUS COPING WITH PERCEPTIONS OF MUSLIMS AS DESECRATORS OF CHRISTIANITY

According to religious coping theory, how the individual responds to stressors is determined by the individuals' methods of religious coping (Pargament, 1997). With regard to perceptions of Muslims as desecrators of Christianity, we hypothesize that two well-established sets of religious coping methods could be used to deal with these perceptions: (a) Positive religious coping activities that reflect a secure relationship with God, a belief that there is a greater meaning to be found, and a sense of spiritual connectedness with others, and (b) negative religious coping activities that reflect an ominous view of the world, and a religious struggle to find and conserve significance in life (Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998). Several studies have shown that positive religious coping is positively and persistently associated with desirable mental health indicators (e.g., Abu Raiya, Pargament, Mahoney, & Stein, in press; Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005; Smith, Pargament, Brant, & Oliver, 2000; Tarakeshwar & Pargament, 2001). On the other hand, a significant body of empirical research has linked negative religious coping to poorer mental health and even psychopathology (e.g., Exline, Yali, & Lobel, 1999; Fitchett, Rybarczyk, DeMarco, & Nicholas, 1999; McConnell, Pargament, Ellison, & Flannelly, 2006; Sherman, Simonton, Latif, Spohn, & Tricot, 2005). Consistent with these findings, Pargament et al. (2007) found that religious coping in ways that emphasized expressions of Christian love (i.e., positive coping) was associated with lower anti-Semitism, whereas ways of coping that emphasized being punished by God and demonic (i.e., negative coping) were tied to greater anti-Semitism.

PREDICTORS OF PERCEPTIONS OF MUSLIMS AS DESECRATORS OF CHRISTIANITY

If perceptions of desecration are linked to anti-Muslims attitudes, then it becomes important to understand how these perceptions develop. Pargament et al. (2007) found that such perceptions were tied to higher levels of authoritarianism and religious orthodoxy, less closeness to Jews, and greater exposure to messages of desecration. We assumed that these factors might be linked to perceptions of Muslims as desecrators of Christianity.

THIS INVESTIGATION

In this study, we use Pargament's (1997) religious coping theory as a framework for understanding anti-Muslim attitudes. Specifically, this study examines six major questions. First, how prevalent is the perception that Muslims are desecrators of Christianity? Second, are higher levels of appraisals of Muslims as desecrators related to greater anti-Muslim attitudes? Third, do appraisals of Muslims as desecrators remain predictive of anti-Muslim attitudes after controlling for demographic variables and established personological predictors, including right-wing authoritarianism, fundamentalism, Christian orthodoxy, religious orientation, and church attendance? Fourth, is positive and negative coping with perceived desecration tied respectively to lower and higher anti-Muslim attitudes? Fifth, if perceptions of Muslims as desecrators of Christianity are predictive of anti-Muslim attitudes, are these appraisals ameliorated or exacerbated by positive and negative religious coping respectively? Further, does religious coping mediate the relationship between desecration and anti-Muslim attitudes? Sixth, what factors are predictive of perceptions of Muslims as desecrators of Christianity?

METHOD

Participants

The participants were 192 undergraduate college students. Originally, 209 individuals submitted the online survey of the study. However, 17 individuals who indicated that they were not Christians were eliminated from the analyses. The ages of participants ranged from 18 to 26 years with a mean of 18.95 years ($SD = 1.05$). Most participants were White (80.8.3%) and female (64.3%).

To assess the general religiousness of the sample, participants were asked their religious affiliation, the frequency of their attendance at religious services, the frequency with which they engage in private prayer, and the degree to which they consider themselves religious and spiritual. Of the participants, 48.2% identified themselves as Catholic, 16.1% as Protestant, and 35.7% as non-denominational Christian. Moderate levels of religious activity and beliefs were indicated by participants across theses measures. Participants rated the frequency with which they attend religious services on a scale of 1 to 9, with a higher rating indicating more frequent attendance. The mean for attendance at religious services was 4.13 ($SD = 2.05$). More specifically, 50.4% of participants reported attending religious services "2–3 times per month" or more. Approximately

one fourth of the sample (25.3%) reported attending services "about once per month" or "about once or twice a year" and 24.1% reported attending "less than once per year" or less. Frequency of private prayer was measured on a scale of 1 to 9, with higher numbers indicating more engagement in prayer. The mean for this religious activity was 4.15 ($SD = 2.14$). More than half of the sample (52.1%) reported engaging in private prayer "once a week" or more. In addition, 22.5% reported praying privately "a few times a month" to "once a month," whereas 25.2% reported praying "less than once a month" or less. Finally, participants rated the degree to which they considered themselves religious and spiritual on a 4-point scale of 1 to 4, with a higher score indicating greater self-rated religiousness and spirituality. The mean on the self-rated religiousness item was 2.39 ($SD = .69$) and the mean of the self-rated spirituality item was 2.88 ($SD = .74$). Overall, measures of attendance at religious services, private prayer, and self-rated religiousness and spirituality indicate that this was a moderately religious college sample.

Procedures

Participants were students of introductory psychology classes at a Midwestern university. Students completed an online survey of the study. Completion and submission of the survey indicated consent to participate. Students participated voluntarily and received class credit for their participation. All procedures were approved by the university's Institutional Review Board.

Measures

Perceptions of Muslims as desecrators of Christianity. A 10-item measure was adapted from Pargament et al. (2007), who assessed the degree to which respondents believed that Jews desecrate Christian attitudes and beliefs. These items were slightly modified for this study to assess the degree to which respondents believe Muslims desecrate or violate sacred Christian teachings and beliefs. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The results section includes a list of all items and the base rates of endorsements of *agree* and *strongly agree*. In this study, the revised measure demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha = .88$).

It should be noted that this measure was not the first to be administered in the survey of the study. It is presented in this section first because desecration was the most salient variable in this investigation. This is important to note given that most of the items in this measure were worded negatively (e.g., "Muslims do not respect Christianity"), and it could have been argued that the negativity of the items primed negative attitudes toward Muslims.

Alternative predictors of anti-Muslim attitudes. Several personality constructs that have been shown to be linked to prejudice were assessed. Adherence to conservative traditional political and social beliefs was assessed via the Right-Wing Authoritarianism scale (Altemeyer, 1981). Participants responded to each of the 34 items on a scale ranging from −4 (*very strongly disagree*) to 4 (*very strongly agree*). We deleted 4 items that had low item-total correlation so the reliability of the final 30-item scale used in our sample was adequate ($\alpha = .75$). Religious fundamentalism (i.e., belief in a single true religion) was measured using a shortened version (14 item) of the Religious Fundamentalism Scale (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992). Participants responded to each item on a scale from 1 to 9, with higher scores indicating greater fundamentalism. In the current sample, this shortened form possessed good reliability ($\alpha = .87$). Beliefs in the teachings and doctrine of Christianity were measured through the 12-item Doctrinal Orthodoxy Scale (Batson, 1976). Participants rated each item on a scale from 1 to 9, with higher scores representing greater belief in Christian doctrines ($\alpha = .92$). The degree to which participants believe Christianity is the only right and true religion was assessed via the Christian Particularism scale developed by Glock and Stark (1966). Participants responded to the 6 items on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 3, with higher scores indicating greater belief in Christianity as the only true religion ($\alpha = .85$).

Two additional measures that have been tied theoretically and empirically to anti-Semitism (Glock & Stark, 1966; Pargament et al., 2007) were also used as they might also be related to anti-Muslim attitudes. The first was a seven-item measure of religious pluralism (i.e., the degree to which individuals believe there are multiple paths to religious truth). This scale included items such as "There is more than one path to salvation." Participants responded to each item on a scale ranging from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating greater pluralism ($\alpha = .87$). A four-item Closeness to Muslims scale was used to measure participants' familiarity with and exposure to Muslim individuals. Participants answered each question on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 to 5; higher scores on this scale indicate more familiarity with Muslims. After deleting one item that had a low item-total correlation, the three-item measure exhibited adequate reliability ($\alpha = .72$).

Anti-Muslim attitudes. Anti-Muslim attitudes were assessed with two indices: anti-Muslim prejudice and perceived conflict with Muslims. Prejudiced views of Muslims were assessed with the Anti-Muslim Prejudice measure (Ernst, Venable, & Bornstein, 2003). The original measure is composed of 20 items and has often been

used to assess the prevalence of anti-Muslim prejudice in the United States. This measure includes items such as "Islam, by its nature, is contrary to the American way of life" and "Compared with other people, Muslims are uncivilized and backward." For the purpose of this study, we created 4 additional items that reflect widespread stereotypes held against Muslims currently and were not included in the original measure (e.g., "Muslims take their religion too seriously; entertainment and humor is not part of their religion"). Participants rated each item on a scale from –4 to +4. Higher scores indicate more anti-Muslim prejudice. The 24 item measure demonstrated very good reliability ($\alpha = .94$).

To assess perceived conflict with Muslims, the five-item Perceived Conflict with Jews scale that was used by Pargament et al. (2007) was modified. The revised measure includes items such as "The everyday interests of Christians and of Muslims conflict" and "Muslims and Christians could co-exist together in peace and harmony" (reverse code). Each item of this five-item scale was rated on a scale of 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating more perceived conflict. In this study, this measure was moderately reliable ($\alpha = .72$).

Religious coping with desecration.   A 15-item scale was adapted from Pargament et al. (2007) to measure religious methods of coping with current negative Muslim attitudes toward Christianity. Participants were given the following instructions for this scale: "To what extent have you used the following methods to cope with Muslim attitudes and behaviors toward Christians? If you have not had to cope with Muslim attitudes and behaviors toward Christians, to what extent *do you think* you would use the following methods, if you needed to?" Participants responded to each item on a 5-point scale with higher scores indicating greater endorsement of each religious coping strategy.

These items were entered into an exploratory factor analysis using principal components extraction and direct oblimin rotation. The direct oblimin rotation was selected because the various subscales of the scale were expected to be correlated. The factor analysis yielded three factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 and accounted for 67% of the variance. Seven items loaded on the first subscale that was defined largely by beliefs that Muslims are being punished by God. Hence, we coined this factor the Punished by God subscale. This subscale ($\alpha = .87$) includes items such as "I realize that Muslims have so much trouble because God is punishing them for rejecting Jesus as their personal savior" and "I understand that God is punishing Muslims for their sins." Six items loaded on the second subscale that emphasized the value of Christian love as a means of coping with desecration. For this reason, we named this

factor the Christian Love subscale. This subscale ($\alpha = .85$) includes items such as "I offer Muslims the love and compassion that comes from God" and "I remind myself that God loves all of his children." Two items loaded on the third subscale that reflects learning from Muslim spiritual figures or Islamic texts. Therefore, we called this factor the Learning from Islamic Spirituality subscale. This subscale includes the items "I try to learn from Muslim role models" and "I try to enrich my spirituality by learning from Islamic texts."

Demonization. This 14-item scale assessed the degree to which participants attributed demonic attributes to Muslims. It was adapted from Mahoney et al. (2002). This scale includes items such as "Muslims are demonic" and "Muslims work for the devil." Participants responded to each item on a 7-point scale, with higher scores indicating greater demonization. The reliability of this scale in this sample was very high ($\alpha = .98$).

Exposure to messages of Muslims as desecrators of Christianity. A 10-item scale that measures exposure to messages affirming the desecration of Christian beliefs by Muslims was adapted from Pargament et al. (2007). Participants responded to each item on a scale ranging from 1 to 5; higher scores indicated more frequent exposure to the desecration message. The reliability of this scale in this sample was very good ($\alpha = .91$).

RESULTS

Levels of Anti-Muslim Prejudice and Perceived Conflict with Muslims

Participants indicated low to moderate scores on the Anti-Muslim Prejudice measure and demonstrated variability across the items ($M = .48$, $SD = 1.82$). In the Perceived Conflict with Muslims scale, participants indicated moderate scores and showed variability across the items ($M = 2.59$, $SD = .91$).

In the survey, we also included two open-ended questions in an effort to elicit direct quotes with regard to anti-Muslim prejudice and perceived conflict with Muslims. The first was "It's a shame that Muslims …" and the second was "Muslims are, for the most part …" Participants were asked to complete each statement in their own words. Out of 192 participants in the study, 140 replied to at least one of the two questions. The answers of each individual were combined and two independent raters (the first author and his colleague, a doctoral student in psychology) coded the responses into two categories: positive/neutral and negative. The two raters agreed initially on

92% of the items and after a further discussion, they were able to reach an agreement with regard to the remaining items. Overall, 86% of the responses were categorized as positive/neutral (e.g., "[Muslims] are peaceful and kind," "[Muslims] have the same goals and values as Christians"), whereas 14% were coded as negative (e.g., "[Muslims] are ignorant of other religions and always turn to violence to solve their problems"). Some of the extreme responses are worth mentioning. One participant indicated, "[Muslims] can't solve their problems without bloodshed"; another commented, "[Muslims] kill innocent people and wage war in their communities"; and still another stated, "They are better dead."

Base Rates of Perceiving Muslims as a Threat to Christians

To provide insight into the frequency with which participants view Muslims as a threat to the sacred values and beliefs of Christians, the base rates of participants' endorsement of *agree* or *strongly agree* are provided for each item of the measure "Perceptions of Muslims as Desecrators of Christianity" in descending order in Table 1. Taken together, between 13.7% and 28% of the sample perceived Muslims as a threat to Christian values and teachings. As for the manifestation of perceptions of desecration in the open-ended questions, the two raters agreed that 9% of the responses included such perceptions. For example, one participant indicated, "[Muslims] do not believe Jesus Christ is their savior"; another said, "[Muslims] are against the bible and Christians"; and another remarked, "[Muslim] really have no respect for Christianity."

TABLE 1
The Base Rates of Participants' Endorsement of Agree or Strongly Agree for Each Item of the "Perceptions of Muslims as Desecrators of Christianity" Measure

Item	Frequency (%)
Muslims should be respected by Christians as a member of the family of monotheistic religions (reverse code)	28
Anti-Muslim attitudes are a sin (reverse code)	27.9
Muslims oppose the fundamental teachings of Christ	22.3
Muslims believe the New Testament is in error	22.2
Muslims do not respect Christianity	21.8
Among themselves, Muslims think that Christians are ignorant for believing Christ was the Son of God	21.2
Muslims represent threat to the ultimate mission of Christ	20.1
Muslims have declared war on Christianity	16.5
The failure of Muslims to accept Jesus Christ as the Son of God is an insult to the church	16.2
Some Muslims have greatly damaged the church	13.7

TABLE 2
A Correlation Matrix of All the Variables Used in the Study: Personological Constructs, Religious Coping Methods, Perceptions of Desecration and Anti-Muslim Attitudes

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Christian orthodoxy	1													
2. Religious pluralism	-.07	1												
3. Religious fundamentalism	.05	-.57**	1											
4. Right-wing authoritarianism	.03	-.34**	.43**	1										
5. Particularism	.08	-.55**	.72**	.17*	1									
6. Punished by God	.04	-.26**	.42**	.14	.31**	1								
7. Christian love	0.11	-.01	.11	-.22**	.06	-.36**	1							
8. Learning from Islamic spirituality	-.11	.20**	-.11	-.26**	-.11	-.40**	.40**	1						
9. Demonization	-.08	-.42**	.39**	.24**	.33**	.31**	-.21**	-.11	1					
10. Exposure to messages of desecration	-.06	.08	-.04	.12	.07	.19*	.04	.06	.30**	1				
11. Perceptions of desecration	-.15	-.08	.26**	.13	.30**	.22**	-.11	-.24**	.49**	.44**	1			
12. Anti-Muslim prejudice	-.11	-.16*	.14	.19*	.15*	.24**	-.05	-.05	.31**	.05	.33**	1		
13. Perceived conflict with Muslims	-.13	-.32**	.30**	.30**	.26**	.22**	-.16*	-.26**	.49**	.17*	.52**	.34**	1	
14. Closeness to Muslims	-.06	-.09	.03	-.01	-.01	.05	.02	.04	-.03	-.10	-.08	0.01	-.22**	1

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Links Between Personological Constructs, Religious Coping Methods and Desecration, and Anti-Muslim Attitudes

Table 2 presents a full correlation matrix containing all the study variables (i.e., personological constructs, religious coping methods, desecration, and anti-Muslim attitudes). With respect to the personological constructs, higher scores on anti-Muslim prejudice were correlated with higher scores on right wing authoritarianism ($r = .19$, $p < .05$) and particularism ($r = .15$, $p < .05$). On the other hand, lower scores on anti-Muslim prejudice were correlated with higher scores on pluralism ($r = -.16$, $p < .05$). Higher scores on perceived conflict with Muslims were correlated with higher scores on right wing authoritarianism ($r = .26$, $p < .01$), higher scores on fundamentalism ($r = .30$, $p < .01$), and higher scores on particularism ($r = .26$, $p < .01$). In contrast, higher scores on perceived conflict with Muslims were correlated with lower scores on pluralism ($r = -.32$, $p < .01$) and lower scores on closeness to Muslims ($r = -.22$, $p < .01$).

With regard to religious coping methods, higher scores on punished by God were associated with higher scores on anti-Muslim prejudice ($r = -.24$, $p < .01$) and perceived conflict with Muslims ($r = .22$, $p < .01$). Lower scores on perceived conflict with Muslims were correlated with both higher scores on Christian love ($r = -.16$, $p < .05$) and higher scores on learning from Islamic spirituality ($r = .22$, $p < .01$).

As for desecration, higher scores on perceptions of desecration were linked to higher scores on both anti-Muslim prejudice ($r = .33$, $p < .05$) and perceived conflict with Muslims ($r = .52$, $p < .01$).

Perception of Muslims as Desecrators as a Distinctive Predictor of Anti-Muslim Attitudes

To determine whether the perception of Muslims as desecrators of Christianity predicts anti-Muslim prejudice and perceived conflict with Muslims after controlling for other demographic and personological predictors, hierarchical regression analyses were conducted with the anti-Muslim prejudice and perceived conflict with Muslims measures as criterion variables (see Table 3). In Model 1, the predictors that were entered into the hierarchical regression analyses were the demographic variables (age, year in school, gender, ethnicity, prayer, church attendance, and self-rated religiousness) and the personological variables (right-wing authoritarianism, fundamentalism, orthodoxy, pluralism, particularism, and closeness to Muslims). In this model, particularism significantly predicted greater anti-Muslim prejudice and greater perceived conflict with Muslims ($\beta = .34$, $p < .05$ and $\beta = .33$, $p < .05$, respectively). Christian orthodoxy significantly predicted less anti-Muslim prejudice and less perceived conflict with Muslims ($\beta = -.31$, $p < .05$ and $\beta = -.26$, $p < .05$, respectively). The finding that Christian

TABLE 3
Predictors of Perceived Conflict With Muslims and Anti-Muslim Prejudice

Predictors	Perceived Conflict With Muslims (β)		Anti-Muslim Prejudice (β)	
	Model 1[a]	Model 2[b]	Model 1[a]	Model 2[b]
Demographics				
Age	−.08	.02	.00	−.05
Year in school	.09	−.08	−.06	−.02
Gender	.18	.11	.16	.13
Ethnicity	.05	.09	.05	.03
Global Religiousness				
Church attendance	.10	.00	.04	.03
Self-Rated religiousness	−.05	−.14	−.20	−.08
Competing Variables				
Right wing Authoritarianism	.12	.10	.10	.04
Fundamentalism	.37	.12	.19	.11
Orthodoxy	−.26*	−.28*	−.31*	−.30*
Pluralism	−.06	−.08	−.19	−.05
Particularism	.33*	.20	.34*	.20
Closeness to Muslims	−.12	−.04	−.04	−.06
Perceptions of Desecration by Muslims		.33**		.37**
Overall R^2	.20**	.32**	.18**	.32**
Change in R^2		.12**		.14**

[a] Predictors: age, year in school, gender, ethnicity, church attendance, prayer, self-rated religiosity, right-wing authoritarianism, fundamentalism, orthodoxy, pluralism, particularism, closeness to Muslims. [b] Predictors: age, year in school, gender, ethnicity, church attendance, prayer, self-rated religiousness, right-wing authoritarianism, fundamentalism, orthodoxy, pluralism, particularism, closeness to Muslims, perceptions of desecration by Muslims.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

orthodoxy was tied to less anti-Muslim prejudice and less perceived conflict with Muslims was surprising.

For Model 2, desecration was added to the predictors in Model 1. Focusing on anti-Muslim prejudice as the criterion variable, the change in R^2 from Model 1 to Model 2 was significant ($\Delta R^2 = .14$, $p < .01$). Perceptions of desecration ($\beta = .37$, $p < .01$) predicted greater anti-Muslim prejudice, and Christian orthodoxy ($\beta = -.30$, $p < .01$) predicted less anti-Muslim prejudice in this model. With respect to perceived conflict with Muslims as the criterion variables, the change in R^2 from Model 1 to Model 2 was significant also ($\Delta R^2 = .12$, $p < .01$). Perceptions of desecration significantly predicted greater perceived conflict with Muslims ($\beta = .33$, $p < .01$). Christian orthodoxy was a significant predictor of less perceived conflict with Muslims ($\beta = -.28$, $p < .05$) in this model. Thus, after controlling for demographic and personality variables, perceptions of desecration by Muslims significantly predicted more anti-Muslim prejudice and perceived conflict with Muslims.

Ties Between Religious Coping and Demonization With the Risk of Anti-Muslim Attitudes

Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to determine whether the four different types of religious coping with perceptions of Muslims as desecrators of Christianity (the three resulted from the factor analysis of the religious coping measure and demonization) were associated with higher or lower levels of anti-Muslim prejudice and perceived conflict with Muslims (see Table 4). The two forms of negative religious coping in this analysis were the Demonization and Punished by God subscales, and the two forms of positive religious coping were Christian Love and Learning from Islamic Spirituality subscales. Viewing Muslims as demonic ($\beta = .23$, $p < .01$) and punished by God ($\beta = .27$, $p < .01$) were predictive of greater anti-Muslim prejudice. Similarly, views of Muslims as demonic ($\beta = .28$, $p < .01$) and punished by God ($\beta = .29$, $p < .01$) were associated with higher levels of perceived

TABLE 4
Religious Coping as Predictors of Perceived Conflict With Islamic and Anti-Muslim Prejudice

Predictors	Perceived Conflict With Muslims (β)	Anti-Muslim Prejudice (β)
Religious coping		
Christian love	$-.18^*$	$-.02$
Muslim as punished by God	$.29^{**}$	$.27^{**}$
Learning from Muslim Spirituality	$-.27^{**}$	$-.06$
Demonization	$.28^{**}$	$.23^*$
R^2	$.31^{**}$	$.11^{**}$

$^*p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$.

conflict with Muslims. Learning from Islamic spirituality as a way to cope with perceptions of desecration ($\beta = -.27$, $p < .01$) and Christian love ($\beta = -.18$, $p < .05$) were predictive of less conflict with Muslims.

Religious Coping Methods as Mediators between Desecration and Anti-Muslim Prejudice and Perceived Conflict With Muslims

Regression analyses were conducted to determine whether the four religious coping methods (i.e., Christian love, punished by God, learning from Islamic spirituality, demonization) mediated the relationship between desecration and the two outcome measures (i.e., anti-Muslim prejudice, perceived conflict with Muslims). The method suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986) was used to evaluate mediation effects. According to this method, the independent variable (IV), the dependent variable (DV), and the potential mediator *must* be significantly correlated to establish mediation. These conditions were met in five of the eight analyses. In these instances, three separate regression equations were run. In Equation 1, the potential mediator was regressed on the IV. In Equation 2, the DV was regressed on the IV. In the third equation, the DV was regressed on both the IV and the potential mediator. Mediation was indicated when the effect of the IV on the DV was less in the third equation than in the second. This was determined by comparing standardized beta coefficients from Equations 2 and 3 (the standardized coefficient should be less in Equation 3 than in Equation 2). To provide a more formal assessment of mediation effects, we also conducted Sobel (1982) tests. This test assesses whether the indirect effect of the IV on the DV via the mediator is significantly different from zero. Table 5 displays the results of the regression analyses and Sobel tests for mediation.

Focusing on punished by God, Table 5 reveals that the standardized beta coefficients were less in Equation 3 than in Equation 2 with regard to both criterion variables. Inspection of the results of Sobel test in Table 5 confirms these findings and indicates that punished by God acts as a mediator between desecration and both anti-Muslim prejudice and perceived conflict with Muslims. The results with regard to demonization were in the same direction but much stronger. Regarding learning from Islamic spirituality, the standardized beta coefficients were less in Equation 3 than in Equation 2 with respect to perceived conflict with Muslims as a criterion variable (Table 5). Once again, this was confirmed by a significant Sobel test. It should be mentioned that tests of the mediation between desecration and both outcome measures by Christian love were not conducted because the conditions for potential

TABLE 5
Regression Analyses for Desecration—Religious Coping Methods as the Mediator Variables

Independent Variable	Mediator Variable	Dependent Variable	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Δβ	Z
1. Desecration	Punished by God	Anti-Muslim Prejudice	$\Delta R^2 = .028^*$, $\beta = .166$	$\Delta R^2 = .135^{**}$, $\beta = .367$	$\Delta R^2 = .188^{**}$, $\beta = .325$	.042	1.932*
2. Desecration	Demonization	Anti-Muslim Prejudice	$\Delta R^2 = .244^{**}$, $\beta = .493$	$\Delta R^2 = .135^{**}$, $\beta = .367$	$\Delta R^2 = .179^{**}$, $\beta = .283$	.084	2.337*
3. Desecration	Punished by God	Perceived Conflict with Muslims	$\Delta R^2 = .028^*$, $\beta = .166$	$\Delta R^2 = .269^{**}$, $\beta = .518$	$\Delta R^2 = .319^{**}$, $\beta = .472$	.046	1.985*
4. Desecration	Learning from Islamic spirituality	Perceived Conflict with Muslims	$\Delta R^2 = .058^*$, $\beta = -.241$	$\Delta R^2 = .269^{**}$, $\beta = .518$	$\Delta R^2 = .309^{**}$, $\beta = .493$	.025	2.061*
5. Desecraion	Demonization	Perceived Conflict with Muslims	$\Delta R^2 = .244^{**}$, $\beta = .493$	$\Delta R^2 = .269^{**}$, $\beta = .518$	$\Delta R^2 = .320^{**}$, $\beta = .392$	.126	9.92**

Note. Step 1: Mediator regressed on independent variable; Step 2: Dependent variable regressed on independent variable; Step 3: Dependent variable regressed on independent variable and mediator; $\Delta\beta$ = change in standardized beta from regression equation 2 to regression equation 3 (Baron & Kenny, 1986); Z = test of whether indirect effect of independent variable on dependent variable via mediator is significantly different from zero (Sobel, 1982).

$^*p < .05.$ $^{**}p < .01.$

mediation were not met (Christian love was not significantly correlated with desecration). A test of the mediation of the relationship between desecration and anti-Muslim prejudice by learning from Islamic spirituality was not performed because anti-Muslim prejudice and learning from Islamic spirituality were not significantly correlated. It is important to emphasize that the religious coping variables emerged as *partial* rather than full mediators of the relationship between desecration and the outcome variables. That is, the mediating variables reduced but did not eliminate the links between desecration and anti-Muslim attitudes.

Predictors of Perceptions of Desecration

The previous results suggest that perceptions of Muslims as desecrators of Christianity are positively related to anti-Muslim prejudice and perceived conflict with Muslims. Based on this finding, the final purpose of this study was to identify the predictors of perceptions of desecration. Regression analyses were conducted with perceptions of desecration as the criterion variables (see Table 6). Variables entered into the regression equation included demographic variables (age, year in school, gender, ethnicity, frequency of prayer, church attendance, and self-rated religiousness), personological variables (right-wing authoritarianism, fundamentalism, orthodoxy, pluralism, particularism, and closeness to Muslims), and exposure to desecration. The overall model significantly predicted perceptions of desecration ($R^2 = .42$, $p < .01$). Among the personological variables, greater perceptions of desecration were predicted by

TABLE 6
Predictors of Perceptions of Desecration

Predictors	Perceptions of Desecration (β)
Demographics	
Age	.04
Year in school	−.12
Gender	.01
Ethnicity	.06
Global religiousness	
Church attendance	.13
Self-rated religiousness	.04
Competing variables	
Right-wing authoritarianism	.26**
Fundamentalism	.28*
Orthodoxy	−.09
Pluralism	−.22*
Particularism	.29*
Closeness to Muslims	−.01
Exposure to desecration	.45**
R^2	.42**

$^*p < .05.$ $^{**}p < .01.$

higher right-wing authoritarianism ($\beta = .26$, $p < .01$), higher particularism ($\beta = .29$, $p < .05$), and higher fundamentalism ($\beta = .28$, $p < .05$), whereas lower perceptions of desecration were predicted by higher pluralism ($\beta = -.22$, $p < .05$). In addition, greater perceptions of desecration were predicted by more exposure to desecration messages ($\beta = .45$, $p < .01$).

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study offer support for the applicability of the religious coping theory of Pargament (1997) as a framework for understanding Christians' anti-Muslim attitudes. Generally, the findings were consistent with the theory that perceived threats by religious outgroups against the sacred values of the ingroup are likely to elicit prejudice from the ingroup as a protective response (Pargament, 1997; Pargament & Mahoney, 2005; Pargament et al., 2007).

Several findings of the study deserve special attention. First, a notable percentage of undergraduate college students (13.7%–28%) agreed or strongly agreed with the items assessing perceptions of Muslims as desecrators of Christianity. Despite the relative low magnitudes of these figures, they are noteworthy, given that the sample was composed of college students who are presumably more educated and less religious than the general population. We suppose that among less educated and more religious samples, the number of people who hold these perceptions might be higher. The same can be said about the low to moderate levels of anti-Muslim prejudice and perceived conflict with Muslims indicated by the participants in this study. Again, among less educated or more religious samples, these levels might be higher.

Second, participants who viewed Muslims as desecrators of Christianity were more likely to report anti-Muslim prejudice and conflicts with Muslims. These findings were robust. Significant results remained even after controlling for the effects of demographic and established personological predictors of prejudice. It is important to emphasize that the main, and perhaps the only, difference between our study and previous studies that examined the prejudice phenomenon (with the exception of Pargament et al., 2007) was the inclusion of the desecration measure. This implies that this variable may play a key role in our understanding of anti-Muslim attitudes.

It is important to stress also that, in contrast to the findings of other researchers (e.g., Einsinga, Billiet, & Felling, 1999; Hoge & Carroll, 1975; Hunsberger, 1995; Laythe et al., 2001; McFarland, 1989; Rowatt & Franklin, 2004; Scheepers et al., 2002; Wylie & Forest, 1992), we found that the established demographic and personological predictors of prejudice toward minority groups other than Muslims (e.g., church attendance, prayer, self-rated religiousness, right-wing authoritarianism, fundamentalism) were unrelated to anti-Muslim attitudes. Christian orthodoxy, which predicted both *less* anti-Muslim prejudice and perceived conflict with Muslims, was the exceptions to this rule. Previous research has linked between Christian orthodoxy and anti-Semitism (Glock & Stark, 1966; Pargament et al., 2007) and anti-Muslim prejudice (Rowatt et al., 2005). Hence, the finding that Christian orthodoxy predicted less anti-Muslim attitudes was surprising and calls for replication.

Third, positive religious coping methods (i.e., expressions of Christian love, learning from Islamic spirituality) were associated with lower perceived conflict with Muslims, whereas negative religious coping methods (i.e., being punished by God and demonic) were tied to greater anti-Muslim prejudice and perceived conflict with Muslims. Further, links between desecration and anti-Muslim prejudice and perceived conflict with Muslims were partially mediated by some forms of religious coping. Punished by God and demonization (two forms of negative religious coping) and learning from Islamic spirituality (a form of positive religious coping) emerged as mediating variables. Specifically, desecration was associated with higher levels of both punished by God and demonization. These coping variables were, in turn, tied to higher anti-Muslim prejudice and perceived conflict with Muslims. Conversely, greater desecration was associated with lower levels of learning from Islamic spirituality, which was in turn tied to higher levels of perceived conflict with Muslims. Thus, religious coping seems to be one of the mechanisms through which perceptions of desecration are linked to anti-Muslim attitudes. These findings too are consistent with religious coping theory and research that religious coping methods may play a central role in coping with stressors. Like nonreligious coping methods, religious coping methods might have helpful and harmful impacts on psychological well-being.

The finding that negative religious coping methods have stronger effects than positive religious coping methods is consistent with the empirical literature in the psychology of religion. Studies have shown (e.g., Abu Raiya et al., in press; Pargament, Koenig, & Perez, 2000) that though participants made use less of negative religious coping methods than positive ones, negative religious coping methods appear to be a more powerful predictor of health and well-being. This finding can be partially explained by the "negativity bias" documented by social psychological research. This research has shown that negative events and appraisals impact people's well-being stronger than positive ones (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001; Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Another plausible explanation is that

the lower level of results involving positive religious coping could reflect two offsetting factors operative in cross-sectional studies. On one hand, both desecration and prejudice could elicit higher levels of religious coping (i.e., religious coping is mobilized by desecration/prejudice). On the other hand, religious coping could conceivably reduce prejudice. If both processes were operating, they would offset each other and we would have relatively little to show for positive religious coping. Longitudinal designs are needed to tease out the effects of these two processes as they shape the connection between positive religious coping and prejudice. Finally, it is possible that other positive forms of religious coping that were not tested in this study (e.g., forgiveness) serve as mediators between perceptions of desecration and prejudice.

Fourth, higher levels of perceptions of Muslims as desecrators of Christianity were predicted by higher levels of authoritarianism, fundamentalism, religious particularism and greater exposure to messages of desecration, whereas lower levels of perceptions of Muslims as desecrators of Christianity were predicted by higher levels of religious pluralism. The findings of our study are similar to the findings of Pargament et al. (2007), who examined the construct of desecration in the context of anti-Semitism. Thus, although the personological factors did not generally emerge as predictors of anti-Muslim attitudes, they did predict perceptions of Muslims as desecrators of Christianity. These findings suggest that personological factors may play the most critical role in triggering perceptions of outgroups as violators of the sacred, whereas the perceptions of Muslims as desecrators may be most directly linked to prejudice.

It could be argued that these findings are simply a reflection of definitional and measurement tautology (i.e., both desecration and anti-Muslim attitudes represent negative views of Muslims). However, it is important to note that the correlations between desecration and anti-Muslim attitudes were not of an adequate size to indicate that they were basically the same phenomenon. Moreover, we would argue that there is an important theoretically based and empirically supported distinction to be made between perceptions of threat *by* Muslims and attitudes of distaste and dislike *toward* Muslims.

Finally, these results shed light on some *situational* factors that might lead to the development of perceptions of desecration. One of the key factors in the development of such perceptions seems to be *exposure*; perceptions of desecration were linked to greater exposure to messages depicting Muslims as desecrators. Although the correlational design of the study does not allow clear-cut causal inferences, it does suggest that messages presented through church, family, and media have the potential to trigger perceptions of Muslims as desecrators.

In general, the findings of this study significantly expand our understanding of prejudice in general and anti-Muslim attitudes in particular. Consistent with religious coping theory (Pargament, 1997), these findings suggest that to fully understand the prejudice phenomenon, we should pay special attention to dynamic factors rather than focus exclusively on dispositional variables. The findings also imply that because they are linked to evaluations of situations and coping methods that are fluid, interact with each other and change over time, anti-Muslim attitudes are not necessarily static and final states. They too may change as perceptions of the threats and methods of coping with these threats fluctuate. In sum, these findings suggest that to understand prejudice, social scientists must pay close attention to the expression of particular forms of prejudice by particular groups of people in particular contexts (Pargament et al., 2007).

IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

These findings have some practical implications for the *prevention* of perceptions of desecration or *alleviation* of these perceptions once they occur. Because we found that exposure to messages of desecration was related to perceptions of desecration, it is possible that exposure to counterdesecration messages might help in reducing the prevalence of these perceptions. We also found that expressions of Christian love to Muslims and learning from Islamic models and texts lessened the impact of perceptions of desecration on perceived conflict with Muslims. Hence, encouraging expressions of messages of love through *education* might be beneficial in preventing and alleviating perceptions of desecration. It is also important to attend to and address ways of coping that exacerbate the effects of desecration. Perceptions that Muslims are being punished by God and influenced by Satan in particular aggravated the perceptions of desecration. Thus, encouraging people to adopt alternative and more constructive methods of coping might help in decreasing the prevalence of perceptions of desecration. Finally and perhaps most important, the findings of this study call attention to the importance of developing greater respect for what other people hold sacred. Doing so may reduce the likelihood of unintentional desecrations. On the other hand, history offers no shortage of examples of what appear to be intentional desecrations of outgroups committed by ingroups in an effort to promote their social or political ends. The study of intentional desecrations represents an important yet challenging endeavor.

Given the lack of empirical studies on the links between religious variables and anti-Muslim attitudes,

and the fact that this is the first empirical study that tests the applicability of religious coping theory for the understanding of anti-Muslim attitudes, this study should still be considered exploratory and its results should be considered with caution. In addition, the results should be interpreted in light of the following limitations. First, the results of our investigation are cross-sectional and consequently do not allow causal inferences; perceptions of desecration could be the cause or result of anti-Muslim attitudes. Longitudinal studies are needed to assess the causal connection between desecration and prejudice. Second, the sample consisted of college students, which limits the generalizability of the findings to the larger population. Future studies should attempt to replicate and generalize these findings to more diverse samples. Third, this study focused on one form of religious prejudice, namely, prejudice toward Muslims. Future research should consider other forms of religious prejudice. Finally, the study utilized a survey format and its findings were based on self-report data. Covert measures of prejudice would also represent valuable adjuncts to self-report indices (e.g., Rudman, Greenwald, Mellott, & Schwartz, 1999).

Despite these limitations, this study represents a promising further step to apply religious coping theory to the problem of religious prejudice in general and anti-Muslim attitudes in particular. According to Pargament et al. (2007), religious coping model focuses on the dynamic interplay between person, group, and situation. This model is also theoretically grounded, empirically based, and detail oriented. As such, it appears to offer a broader, more fully dimensional perspective for understanding at least some forms of religious prejudice. Therefore, we believe that social scientists may contribute significantly to our understanding of anti-Muslim attitudes (and prejudice in general) if they further investigate this topic from the prism of the religious coping model.

In addition, the findings of the study point to two directions for future research. First, researchers should consider other factors that might temper the impact of perceptions of desecration on anti-Muslims, such as beliefs that the desecration was committed unknowingly or unintentionally (Pargament et al., 2007). Second, because religious coping theory has been found to be applicable to the study of prejudice in two contexts, namely the contexts of anti-Muslim attitudes and anti-Semitism (Pargament et al., 2007), it should be applied to prejudice toward other groups. Religious coping theory might help us in understanding, partially at least, age-old conflicts between other religious groups—Hindus and Muslims, Christians and Jews, Muslims and Jews. These conflicts could be responses to perceptions that the outgroup represents a threat to the sacred values of the in-group. Additional research among diverse religious groups is needed to extend the theory of religious coping to other forms of prejudice.

REFERENCES

Aberson, C. L., Healy, M., & Romero, V. (2000). Ingroup bias and self-esteem: A meta-analysis. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 4, 154–173.

Abu Raiya, H., Pargament, K. I., Mahoney, A., & Stein, C. (in press). A psychological measure of Islamic Religiousness: Development and evidence of reliability and validity. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*.

al-Issa, I. (2000). Does the Muslim religion make a difference in psychopathology? In al-Issa & Al-junun (Ed.) *Mental illness in the Islamic world* (pp. 315–353). CT: International Universities Press.

Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Altemeyer, B. (1981). *Right-wing authoritarianism*. Manitoba, Canada: University of Manitoba Press.

Altemeyer, B., & Hunsberger, B. E. (1992). Authoritarianism, religious fundamentalism, quest, and prejudice. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 2, 113–133.

Ano, G. G., & Vasconcelles, E. B. (2005). Religious coping and psychological adjustment to stress: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 61, 461–480.

Batson, C. D. (1976). Religion as prosocial: Agent or double agent? *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 15, 29–45.

Batson, C. D., & Burris, C. T. (1994). Personal religion: Depressant or stimulant of prejudice and discrimination? In M. P. Zanna & J. M. Olson (Eds.), *The psychology of prejudice: The Ontario symposium* (Vol. 7, pp. 149–169). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Baron, R. M., & Kenny, D. A. (1986). The moderator-mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic and statistical considerations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51, 1173–1182.

Batson, C. D., Schoenrade, P. A., & Ventis, W. L. (1993). *Religion and the individual*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Baumeister, R. F., Bratslavsky, E., Finkenauer, C., & Vohs, K. D. (2001). Bad is stronger than good. *Review of General Psychology*, 5, 323–370.

Donahue, M. J. (1985). Intrinsic and extrinsic religiousness: Review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 48, 400–419.

Eisinga, R., Billiet, J., & Felling, A. (1999). Christian religion and ethnic prejudice in cross-national perspective: A comparative analysis of the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium). *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 40, 375–393.

Elias, M. (2006, August 9). USA's Muslims under a cloud. *USA Today*. Retrieved from http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2006-08-09-muslim-american-cover_x.htm

Ernst, D., Venable, J., & Bornstein, B.H. (2003, May). *Prejudice against Muslims and Jews*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Society, Atlanta, GA.

Exline, J. J., Yali, A. M., & Lobel, M. (1999). When God disappoints: difficulty forgiving God and its role in negative emotion. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 4, 365–379.

Fitchett, G., Rybarczyk, B. D., DeMarco, G. A., & Nicholas, J. J. (1999). The role of religion in medical rehabilitation outcomes: A longitudinal study. *Rehabilitation Psychology*, 44, 1–22.

Florian, V., & Mikulincer, M. (1998). Terror management in childhood: Does death conceptualization moderate the effects of mortality salience on acceptance of similar and different others? *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 24, 1104–1112.

Freedman, S. R., & Enright, R. D. (1996). Forgiveness as an intervention goal with incest survivors. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 64*, 983–992.

Glock, C. Y., & Stark, R. (1966). *Christian beliefs and anti-Semitism.* New York: Harper & Row.

Hoge, D. R., & Carroll, J. W. (1975). Christian beliefs, nonreligious factors, and anti-Semitism. *Social Forces, 53*, 581–594.

Hunsberger, B. (1995). Religion and prejudice: The role of religious fundamentalism, quest and right wing authoritarianism. *Journal of Social Issues, 51*, 112–129.

Jackson, L. M., & Esses, V. M. (1997). Of scripture and ascription: The relation between religious fundamentalism and intergroup helping. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 233*, 893–906.

Jackson, L. M., & Hunsberger, B. (1999). An intergroup perspective on religion and prejudice. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 38*, 509–523.

Laythe, B., Finkel, D., Kirkpatrick, L. A. (2001). Predicting prejudice from religious fundamentalism and right-wing authoritarianism: A multiple-regression approach. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 40*, 1–10.

Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping.* New York: Springer.

Magyar, G. M., Pargament, K. I., & Mahoney, A. (2000, August). *Violation of the sacred: A study of desecration among college students.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Washington, DC.

Mahoney, A., Carels, R. A., Pargament, K. I., Wacholtz, A., Leeper, L. E., Kaplar, M., & Fruchtey, R. (2005). The sanctification of the body and behavioral health patterns of college students. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion, 15*, 221–238.

Mahoney, A., Pargament, K. I., Ano, G., Lynn, Q., Magyar, G. M., McCarthy, S., et al. (2002, August). *The devil made them do it? Demonization and desecration in response to the 9/11 attacks.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Washington, DC.

Mahoney, A., Pargament, K. I., Swank, A. M., Swank, N. M. (2003). Religion and the sanctification of family relationships. *Review of Religious Research, 44*, 220–236.

McConnell, K. M., Pargament, K. I., Ellison, C. G., & Flannelly, K. J. (2006). Examining the links between spiritual struggles and symptoms of psychopathology in a national sample. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 62*, 1469–1484.

McFarland, S. (1989). Religious orientation and the targets of discrimination. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 28*, 324–326.

Pargament, K. I. (1997). *The psychology of religion and coping: Theory, research, practice.* New York: Guilford.

Pargament, K. I. (2007). *Spiritually integrated psychotherapy: Understanding and addressing the sacred.* New York: Guilford.

Pargament, K. I., & Abu Raiya, H. (2007). A decade of research on the psychology of religion and coping: Things we assumed and lessons we learned. *Psyke and Logos, 28*, 742–766.

Pargament, K. I., Koenig, H. G., & Perez, L. (2000). The many methods of religious coping: Initial and validation of the RCOPE. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 56*, 519–543.

Pargament, K. I., Magyar, G. M., Benore, E., & Mahoney, A. (2005). Sacrilege: A study of sacred loss and desecration and their implications for health and well-being in a community sample. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 44*, 59–78.

Pargament, K. I., & Mahoney, A. (2002). Spirituality: Discovering and conserving the sacred. In C. R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology* (pp. 646–659). New York: Oxford University Press.

Pargament, K. I., & Mahoney, A. M. (2005). Sacred matters: Sanctification as a phenomenon of interest for the psychology of religion. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion, 15*, 179–198.

Pargament, K. I., Murray-Swank, N. A., & Tarakeshwar, N. (2005). An empirically-rationale for a spiritually-integrated psychotherapy. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture, 8*, 155–165.

Pargament, K. I., Smith, B. W., Koenig, H. G., & Perez, L. (1998). Patterns of positive and negative religious coping with major life stressors. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 37*, 710–724.

Pargament, K. I., Trevino, K., Mahoney, A., & Silberman, I. (2007). They killed our Lord: The perception of Jews as desecrators of Christianity as a predictor of anti-Semitism. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 46*, 143–158.

Richards, P. S., & Bergin, A. E. (1997). *A spiritual strategy for counseling and psychotherapy.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Rowatt, W. C., & Franklin, L. M. (2004). Christian orthodoxy, religious fundamentalism, and right-wing authoritarianism as predictors of implicit racial prejudice. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion, 14*, 125–138.

Rowatt, W. C., Franklin, L. M., & Cotton, M. (2005). Patterns and personality correlates of implicit and explicit attitudes toward Christians and Muslims. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 44*, 29–43.

Rozin, P., & Royzman, E. B. (2001). Negativity bias, negativity dominance, and contagion. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 5*, 296–320.

Rudman, L. A., Greenwald, A. G., Mellott, D. S., & Schwartz, J. L. K. (1999). Measuring the automatic components of prejudice: Flexibility and generality of the Implicit Association Test. *Social Cognition, 17*, 437–465.

Scheepers, P., Gijsberts, M., & Hello, E. (2002). Religiosity and prejudice against ethnic minorities in Europe: Cross-national tests on a controversial relationship. *Review of Religious Research, 43*, 242–265.

Sherman, A. C., Simonton, S., Latif, U., Spohn, R., & Tricot, G. (2005). Religious struggle and religious comfort in response to illness: Health outcomes among stem cell transplant patients. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 26*, 359–367.

Smith, B. W., Pargament, K. I., Brant, C., & Oliver, J. M. (2000). Noah revisited: Religious coping by church members and the impact of the 1993 Midwest flood. *Journal of Community Psychology, 28*, 169–186.

Sobel, M. E. (1982). Asymptotic confidence intervals for indirect effects in structural equation models. In S. Leinhardt (Ed.), *Sociological Methodology 1982* (pp. 290–312). Washington DC: American Sociological Association.

Solomon, S., Greenberg, J., & Pyszczynski, T. (1999). A terror management theory of social behavior: The psychological functions of self-esteem and cultural worldviews. In M. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 24, pp. 93–159). San Diego, CA: Academic.

Spilka, B., Hood, R. W., Hunsberger, B. & Gorsuch, R. (2003). *The psychology of religion: An empirical approach.* New York: Guilford.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Tarakeshwar, N., & Pargament, K. I. (2001). The use of religious coping in families of children with autism. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 6*, 247–260.

van der Silk, F.W.B, & Konig, R. P. (2006). Orthodox, humanitarian, and science-inspired belief in relation to prejudice against Jews, Muslims, and ethnic minorities: The content of one's belief does matter. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion, 16*, 113–126.

Wylie, L., & Forest, J. (1992). Religious fundamentalism, right wing authoritarianism and prejudice. *Psychological Reports, 71*, 1291–1298.