THE STRUCTURE AND VARIETY OF PRAYER

An Empirical Study of Dutch Youth

SUMMARY

Although in Europe as a whole and in the Netherlands in particular, church membership is in steady decline, most Dutch youth still pray. In this study, praying is interpreted as a ritual, composed of seven structural elements: need, action, effect, direction, time, place and method. On theoretical grounds, we distinguish four varieties of prayer. In our sample, petitionary prayer and religious prayer were found to coincide. In both, direction (mostly towards God) is central and so they are labeled as religious prayer. In meditative prayer the focus is on action (meditating or pondering). In psychological prayer need (concrete problems, especially the death of loved ones) is central.

The importance of time and place was greater than expected. Every type of praying has a specific set of adjuncts. Psychological prayer is mostly said at night, lying in bed. Religious prayer takes place at fixed moments in church. Meditative prayer is performed anywhere and anytime. Young people who pray always combine these three types of prayer, with the core of praying being psychological in nature and functioning as a self-directing style of problem-solving. For most young people, praying is a way of coping cognitively and actively with problems of daily life and unresolvable negative events in order to gain secondary control and maintain balance in their life.

1. Introduction

In Europe as a whole and in the Netherlands in particular, the decline in church membership is clearly apparent (Becker & Vink 1994). This trend is especially manifest among the younger generation (Campiche 1997). Less than half of Dutch youth are still members of a church (Janssen & De Hart 1993), which is the lowest rate in Europe (16th among 16 countries: Campiche 1997). However, it would be inaccurate to interpret this as just a process of secularization in the sense of a decline of religion (Janssen 1998). Overall, only few young people reject religion explicitly or define themselves as atheist. Various researchers have pointed out that secularization must be redefined as a reorganization of religion (Hervieu-Léger 1990). On the one hand we see the emergence of new religious movements
like New Age (Stenger 1989; Hanegraaff 1996; Becker et al. 1997). On the other hand we see that religious beliefs are increasingly shaped outside the institutional churches in the form of individualized practices (Dobbelaere & Voyé 1990; Dobbelaere 1993; Dekker et al. 1997). Indeed, if religion is not measured by church membership but as an individualized characteristic indicated by church attendance as well as prayer and the salience of religion in one’s life, Dutch young people score relatively high (5th place among 16 countries: Campiche 1997). Prayer in particular is a widespread and important individualized ritual for the young (Janssen et al. 1990; Barz 1993). In European studies (Campiche 1997) 61% of Dutch young people were found to pray, a percentage that is surpassed only by youth in Ireland and Italy. Remarkably, there is hardly any difference between these numbers and those that apply to the older generation (68% of Dutch people over 60 pray). We can only conclude that at a time when church membership and religious affiliation are decreasing significantly, especially among youngsters, religiosity is still present in the form of individualized rituals, most notably in prayer. With institutionalized religion in decline, private prayer is still a good index of religious activity, especially since “non-religious motives are less likely to interfere”, as Argyle and Beit Hallahmi (1958/1975) have argued. To understand the religiosity of today’s youth, it is therefore crucial to understand what their prayer is about.

Common sense holds that prayer involves talking to God (Brown 1994). The Encyclopædia Britannica defines prayer as “a petition or other address by a human being to God or a god in word or thought”. But definitions of prayer are very diverse and not all definitions include a god. For an illuminating and extensive review of definitions, see Wierzbicka (in Brown 1994). Here we will seek a definition of prayer by asking youngsters themselves to tell us in their own words what prayer is for them, why they pray, when they pray and how they pray.

It is often said that the psychological study of prayer is still in its infancy. Finney and Malony (1985) and Gill (1987) stress this point independently. Today, the number of studies on prayer is still small, but there are indications that interest in the subject is growing. In newspapers and magazines (for example the cover stories of Life magazine 1994 and Newsweek 1997), in radio and television programs (the Oprah Winfrey show is a prime example) and in popular publications (the most spectacular being perhaps Dossey 1993) praying receives public attention. Many young people pray (Gallup & Castelli 1989; Gallup & Jones 1989; Janssen et al. 1990; Poloma & Gallup 1991; Campiche 1997), but it is unclear why, how, when and where young people pray, what effects they anticipate and whether they engage in different varieties of prayer. Before we can answer these
questions, some theoretical clarifications and specifications must be made. We will do so by clarifying what we mean by prayer and by defining prayer as ritual.

2. The Ritual Structure of Praying

Rituals have a tripartite structure. There is a beginning, a main part and an ending. This may seem trivial, but this structure is important if we want to understand rituals and prayer. Various studies on the structure of rituals stress this point. In the sacrifice, studied by Henri Hubert & Marcel Mauss (1899) and Emile Durkheim (1912), this tripartite structure is defined as ‘entrance’ (‘entrée’) → ‘the sacrifice as such’ (‘sacrifice propre’) → ‘exit’ (‘sortie’). The same tripartite structure is recognizable in other ritual practices. In the gift, analyzed by Marcel Mauss (1925), the structure is: ‘give’ (‘donner’) → ‘receive’ (‘recevoir’) → ‘give back’ (‘rendre’). In the ‘rite de passage’ Arnold Van Gennep (1909) distinguishes successively ‘separation’ (‘séparation’) → ‘transition’ (‘marge’) → ‘incorporation’ (‘agrégation’). In his study on confession, Berggren (1975) distinguishes: ‘guilt’ → ‘confession’ → ‘mercy’. The classic study of William James (1902) about the varieties of religious experience is also based on a tripartite model. The split personality, the sick soul, is healed by a process of conversion (‘sick soul’ → ‘conversion’ → ‘healing’). After an initial state of uncertainty, a state of conversion and finally ecstasy sets in.

In the petitionary prayer, the oldest and most widespread form of prayer (Capps 1982; Gill 1987), the ritual structure is clearly visible: there is a motive to pray (a problem), an action to perform (ask something) and an effect to be sought (the solution of the problem). We are ill, ask to be cured and are cured in the end. Once the problem is reversed (cured), the prayer is over.

In previous research (Janssen et al. 1990), young people were asked if they ever felt the need to pray, and how they themselves defined praying. This research has produced a general model of praying. We prefer the term ‘praying’ over ‘prayer’ to underline that we are dealing with an activity. We agree with Phillips, that “the meaning of ‘prayer’ is in the activity of praying” (1965). Praying is a process, a ritual. Praying can be conceived as an (individualized) ritual with a tripartite structure, consisting of a beginning, a main part and an ending. Beginning and ending often have mirror symmetry. The activity is meant to turn the starting point around and bring about a happy ending. This tripartite structure of praying is often also spatially determined: we enter a sacred place from the outside, perform a specific activity, and leave.
Religion in general, and praying in particular, is often described as a coping mechanism: in difficult circumstances and in times of stress religious activity heightens (Pargament 1997). When we ask young people nowadays to describe their praying practices, the tripartite coping structure appears, but the process is more complex than in the previous examples. Anthropologist Geertz (1966) defined religion as the tuning of worldview (the world as it is in sheer actuality) and ethos (the world as it should be). The tuning can go either way: by changing the ethos (one’s wishes) or by changing the world. This runs parallel to the distinction in psychology between primary and secondary control: people can bring the environment ‘into line with their wishes’ or bring themselves ‘into line with environmental forces’ (Rothbaum, Weisz and Snyder 1982). When confronted with the hardships of life (like the death of close relatives), most people today do not pray to reverse events or situations, but to find the strength to accept and endure them. Pratt (1910/11, 1920) came across this function of prayer in his empirical research. Praying often aims at acquiring secondary control, a change in oneself. Young people do not simply want to change things in their favor; rather, they look for force, strength and support to accept the unavoidable or to achieve certain things (Janssen et al. 1990). So mirror symmetry is not excluded, but it is a special case.

3. A General Model for Praying Practices

The tripartite structure of praying can be described in terms of the structure of a sentence: it contains a conditional adjunct (the need), a predicate (the action) and a direct object (the effect). Praying often also has a direction that can be described as an indirect object: someone or something apart from the one who prays (Janssen et al. 1994). The word that is most often mentioned as the direction of praying is ‘God’, but at the same time the definition of God turns out to be vague and changeable. Traditional images of God have lost credibility and young people prefer an abstract representation (Dobbelaere & Voyé 1990; Hutsebaut & Verhoeven 1991; Janssen et al. 1994). It seems puzzling that such a central concept cannot be defined more precisely. Yet on second thought, this might not be so puzzling when we realize that according to Durkheim (1912), it is not the concept of a God that lies at the base of religions, but an indeterminate collection of vague and impersonal powers, which Durkheim called ‘mana’. It would seem that although present-day youth use the term ‘God’, they are actually referring to a concept that is closer to ‘mana’.

Secondary but significant, as we will see, is the finding that praying is often performed at special moments, in special places and according to specific rules or methods (Janssen et al. 1990). So we can extend the sentence structure by adding three adverbial adjuncts: time, place and method (see figure 1).
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FIGURE 1: A model for praying practices of modern young people (Janssen et al. 1990).

1. Need \( \rightarrow \) 2. Action \( \rightarrow \) 4. Effect
   (conditional adjunct) (predicative) (direct object)
   
   3. Direction (indirect object)

5. Time (adverbial adjunct 1)
6. Place (adverbial adjunct 2)
7. Method (adverbial adjunct 3)

4. Varieties of Prayer

Having established this broad and general model for praying practices, we will now turn our attention to varieties of praying. We propose a new method to classify the varieties of prayer, based on a re-examination of Heiler’s classic study of prayer (1921/1932). We will update his findings and place them within the structural model that we identified earlier (figure 1). Heiler distinguished nine different kinds of prayer: 1) the naive prayer of primitive man, 2) the ritual prayer formula, 3) the hymn, 4) prayer in the religion of Greek Civilization, 5) prayer in philosophical thought, 6) the prayer in the individual piety of great religious personalities, 7) the individual prayer of great poets and artists, 8) prayer in public congregational worship and 9) the individual prayer as a religious duty and good work.

The criteria Heiler used are somewhat disparate and sometimes evaluative. Several of his examples cannot be expected to apply to today’s youth (in particular 3, 4, 6 and 7). However, we expect four ways of praying to be of factual importance today: primitive prayer, which we will call petitionary prayer (1 and 2), meditative (philosophical) prayer (5), religious (Christian) prayer (8) and individual prayer (9). We can define each of the four types of praying by its specific emphasis on one of the four central structural elements (need, direction, action and effect). In petitionary prayer the effect is central, in religious prayer the direction is central, in meditative prayer the action is central and in individual prayer — here defined as psychological prayer — the need is central (see figure 2).
FIGURE 2: Prediction for four varieties of praying: a combination of some definitions of praying by Heiler (1921) and the praying model of modern youth (Janssen et al. 1990). Shaded cells reflect the prediction of the main component of each variety of praying.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prototypical varieties of praying</th>
<th>Components of praying</th>
<th>method/time/place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>petitionary</td>
<td>need: concrete problem/ action: ask</td>
<td>direction: God/p: power/real</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>religious</td>
<td>need: positive/guilt/ action: thank</td>
<td>direction: God/ action: faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meditative</td>
<td>need: continuous/ action: meditate/think</td>
<td>direction: power/self/ cognitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>psychological</td>
<td>need: concrete problem/ action: meditate</td>
<td>direction: power/self/ emotional</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before we elaborate on these four varieties of prayer, we will first compare them with other classifications of prayer. Our typology resembles that of Poloma & Gallup (1991) and that of Hood, Morris & Harvey (1993, we refer to the presentation in Hood et al. 1996). In both studies, four remarkably similar praying factors were found (Hood et al. 1996, 212). Poloma & Gallup distinguish ritual, petitionary, conversational and meditative prayer (Poloma & Gallup 1991), Hood et al. distinguish material, petitionary, liturgical and contemplative prayer (in Hood et al. 1996). Both studies base their typology on a factor analysis of a range of closed questions concerning prayer activities. We defined our classification independently and on theoretical grounds, based on a re-examination of Heiler’s study. Still, there is some resemblance: what we define as meditative prayer resembles Poloma’s meditative and Hood’s contemplative prayer; our religious prayer resembles Poloma’s conversational and Hood’s liturgical prayer; our petitionary prayer resembles Poloma’s petitionary and Hood’s material as well as petitionary prayer. However, our psychological prayer does not seem to match any of the four.

In a study about religion and coping styles, we find an interesting classification that bears great resemblance to our typology of the varieties of prayer (Pargament et al. 1988). Pargament and colleagues distinguish three methods of problem-solving, depending on the individual’s relationship with God. The locus of responsibility for the problem-solving process can be either the individual or God, and the problem-solving process itself can be either active or passive. Following these two dimensions, Pargament and colleagues find three styles or modes of problem-solving that correspond to
three of our types of prayer. In the deferring mode of problem-solving, God is active but the person is passive. This mode matches the petitionary prayer. In the collaborative mode, both God and the person are active, which matches the religious prayer. The self-directing mode matches what we call psychological prayer: the person is active but God is passive.

Following the logic of this classification, a fourth style of problem solving is conceivable, in which both God and the individual are passive. Pargament and colleagues do not define this mode, but it fits in perfectly with our meditative prayer. Meditative prayer is what we would call a receptive mode, in which responsibility for problem-solving is neither located in the individual, nor God. Acceptance characterizes the attitude of the person who meditates. In figure 3, we compare our classification of prayer with the classification of problem-solving by Pargament et al.

**FIGURE 3: Three styles of problem-solving found by Pargament, Kennell, Hathaway, Grevenoed, Newman and Jones (Pargament et al. 1988) (bold), compared with the prediction for four varieties of praying (underlined). (The receptive mode is not distinguished by Pargament et al.)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person active</th>
<th>Person passive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>collaborative mode</strong></td>
<td><strong>deferring mode</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>active</td>
<td>God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>religious prayer</td>
<td>petitionary prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>passive</td>
<td>self-directing mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>psychological prayer</td>
<td>receptive mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>meditative prayer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We will now describe the four varieties of praying that we have established (see figures 2 and 3).

**5. Prototypical Petitionary Prayer**

In the petitionary prayer the principal component is the effect. This type of prayer is meant to change personal or social problems in a real way. One is not seeking some vague psychological support, but real things: "life and health, food, sunshine and rain, possessions, honour and victory..." (Heiler 1932/1958). These needs are based upon concrete real life problems, especially to do with health and prosperity. In petitionary prayer we can see mirror symmetry between need and effect: praying is meant to bring about
a solution of a concrete problem. By praying in this manner, people attempt to gain primary control, that is, to bring the environment in line with their wishes (Rothbaum, Weisz & Snyder 1982).

In petitionary prayer, the action is directed towards God or some supernatural power but is primarily meant to solve the original problem. When God is mentioned, he is often referred to as a direct object: God is asked to act, to change things. In the Roman religion, God was prayed (or gods were prayed). In classical Latin the verb ‘precati’ is regularly followed by a direct object (‘precati deum’). In fact God is to change and thereby becomes a direct object and part of the effect 1.

Petitionary or primitive prayer, the oldest and most basic way of praying according to Heiler, is mostly done in public and in a ritual way. A classic example of petitionary prayer is the Italian custom of praying for rain in spring. God and the saints are called and eventually pressed to deliver rain. If it does not start to rain, the statues of the saint are thrown into the river. Here, God and the saints function in a dramatic way as direct objects, not as subjects.

This magical aspect of praying is still popular today. Many people expect real effects of praying and some argue that science corroborates these expectations (Dossey 1993). We will not discuss these claims, agreeing with Hood et al. (1997, 396) that they are “scientifically very open to question”. Among today’s youth, the way of praying that is most similar to petitionary praying is to ask for success at examinations (Janssen et al. 1990). However, although the real effect does seem central in the latter case, most of the young people realize that praying can only stimulate them to do what is necessary to achieve the objective. So, on closer inspection, the effect is not real, since the individuals do not aim at gaining primary control, but rather secondary control, bringing themselves into line with environmental forces and altering not the problem but the person (Rothbaum, Weisz & Snyder 1982).

Following the classification of problem-solving styles by Pargament and colleagues (Pargament et al. 1988), we would call petitionary prayer a deferring mode since the person is passive and God is regarded as active. All power is attributed to God and the praying person waits for solutions from God.

6. Prototypical Religious Prayer

In religious (Christian) prayer, the direction (God) is central. One wants to communicate and talk with God. Needs and effects are often expressed in religious language, using words like ‘thank’, ‘guilt’ and ‘forgiveness’.
These words assume the presence of another person, someone who listens or who forgives. Finney and Malony (1985) underline that not a (personal) need but the affirmation of faith in God is at the heart of Christian prayer. We expect that this prayer will mainly take place in public rituals. The direction is differently defined in different religions. In the Christian religion God is prayed to (‘orare ad Deum’, or ‘precari Dei’), where God is an indirect object. This type of prayer is communicative. Both the praying person and God are active, and the problem-solving style is a collaborative mode (Pargament et al. 1988). Elsewhere, Pargament (1997, 293) defines religious coping as ‘pleading’, as a ‘relationship’ or ‘partnership’. Religious prayer aims at gaining a form of secondary control that Rothbaum and colleagues label vicarious control: submission to a deity enables the individual to join in His power and “gain strength through the Lord” (Rothbaum, Weisz & Snyder 1982). We use the label religious prayer instead of Christian, because this way of praying is also characteristic of other institutionalized religions.

7. Prototypical Meditative Prayer

Heiler talks of “prayer in philosophical thought”, aimed at realizing moral values. We prefer the term meditative prayer, referring to the main element in this way of praying, the action, that can be described as meditating or thinking. The direction is often self-centered. The need is non-specific and the effect is a constant improvement of self-awareness. One hopes to become a better human being by regularly withdrawing into oneself. This type of prayer is typically individualistic. It can be done anywhere, preferably alone and in silence. Pratt (1920, 334) spoke of the “use of prayer as selfculture”. He argued that worldwide only a few earnest “emancipated” minds may succeed in reaping some subjective benefits from prayer after they have given up the belief in any external influence (Pratt 1920, 335). Today the number of emancipated prayers seems to have increased substantially. As we will see, many young people pray without referring to external powers, and even when God is mentioned, he is often located within the self.

The classical question is whether the meditative kind of prayer should be named prayer. Tylor (1871, 450) defined prayer as “the address of personal spirit to personal spirit”. He excluded Buddhist “devotional utterances of desire” because “there is no Thou”. Even the pragmatic definition of religion by William James (1902) stresses the importance of the divine. In our opinion, the direction of prayer is indeed important, but it does not have to be a person or another being. People increasingly pray to vague powers and they locate these powers in themselves (Janssen et al. 1994). Meditating is considered a form of prayer by a significant number of today’s youth.
Although Pargament and colleagues do not distinguish meditation as a separate problem-solving style, it follows logically from their classification (Pargament et al. 1998). In meditative prayer the praying person is passive, in what we might call a receptive mode, but without handing over the responsibility to God.

8. Prototypical Psychological Prayer

The psychological prayer is not defined as such by Heiler, but it is not just a product of today’s individualistic and psychologically oriented way of life. Griffin (1929) already stressed the psychological effect of prayer on the individual. As we found in our previous research, it is the most widespread and most important way of praying of modern youth, and it is primarily performed individually: at night, in bed (Janssen et al. 1990). At the center is a real problem in everyday life. One tries to cope with the problem by psychological means: either learning to accept it or finding the strength to change things by personal achievement. If something is asked for, it is not a real effect in the outside world but a change in oneself: to be more self-confident, have more strength and perseverance. One hopes to improve one’s achievements by being optimally psychologically prepared. Psychological prayer gives the individual a form of secondary control (Rothbaum, Weisz & Snyder 1982).

Hood and colleagues describe secondary control as emotion-focused coping, where “the problem continues to exist, but the person is being altered” (Hood et al. 1996, 381). We think this can be an important aspect of psychological praying. However, we saw before that when youngsters ask for success at examinations they in fact pray in order to concentrate and study more effectively. Praying has an objective effect in so far as it helps them to achieve. So, psychological prayer as a secondary control can indeed change the world, just by changing the subject.

Following the classification of Pargament and colleagues, psychological praying is a self-directing mode: God is considered passive and the praying person is active (Pargament et al. 1988). A self-directing mode is an active coping orientation that stresses personal agency. The problems that cause people to pray need not be immense. Many people also report religious coping with daily hassles and frustrations (Pargament 1997, 142). We expect that many people pray in a psychological way.

The question is whether the four kinds of praying that we distinguished on theoretical grounds can be found in the actual religious behavior of modern youth. We hypothesize that four varieties of prayer will be predominant: petitionary, religious, meditative and psychological, each with a main
component, effect, direction, action and need. Considering previous research (Janssen et al. 1990), we expect psychological prayer to be the most common of these four varieties of prayer.

9. Method

The research was carried out in 1991 (De Hart 1994) and the sample consisted of 687 Dutch young people who had participated in previous research when they were still at secondary school (1986). A random sample was taken in all Dutch provinces. Participants had an average age of 23.9 years. Of the sample, 44% was male and 62% attended school; among these, 57% were at university. The conclusions therefore relate to better-educated, older youth, who in due time will constitute an important segment of opinion leaders in society.

Our research is predominantly based on the analysis of open-ended questions. The multiple choice method applied in several surveys can be useful in some cases, but has its shortcomings when it comes to fully understanding how young people construct their religion. In general, open-ended questions are to be preferred over closed questions when people’s behavior and concepts are subject to constant change and reconstruction (Ratner 1997). We are living in an age of cultural change, marked by individualization and differentiation, where people have to construct their own concepts. They have to be inventors in a sense (Janssen & Prins 2000). Religious beliefs and practices are increasingly shaped outside the traditional institutional churches and becoming more and more individualized and diverse (Dobbelaere & Voyé 1990; Dekker et al. 1997). To understand the religious practices of today’s youth, we have to study their thinking process and not just the conclusions of that process (Spilka et al. 1985: 69). Using open-ended questions is therefore the best, if not the only way to obtain an insight into contemporary religious practices among young people.

We asked our respondents whether they ever had the need to pray. The majority did pray at least sometimes (35% regularly, 38% sometimes, 27% never). We asked them to describe their praying behavior and also to describe needs, actions, methods, times, places and effects. We did not ask for the direction of prayer but most of the answers did mention directions. To analyze the answers to the open-ended questions, we used a computerized method of content analysis called Textable (Janssen 1990; Welten & Janssen 1992). This computer program allows us to handle texts, to categorize them and to link them with data from closed questions. One of the advantages of Textable is the possibility of interaction between open and
closed information processing. It is also possible to continuously control and adapt the category system and return to the original answers at any point in the analysis.

10. Results

All texts were scored according to the variable scheme described in figure 4. The frequencies are given there as well. The results show that, as in previous research (Janssen et al. 1990), the prototypical prayer of youth goes as follows: faced with negative problems (346) to do with others (207), people ask/hope (201) or meditate (197), directing their prayer to God (207), looking for emotional relief (286), lying in bed (215), at night (223), with their eyes closed (119) and hands joined (104).

FIGURE 4: Categories used to score the descriptions of praying behavior. Frequencies are mentioned between brackets. (N=687)

need (408): negative (346), others (207), concrete (142), positive (105), neutral (85), regularly (29).
action (561): to ask/hope (201), to meditate (197), dialogue (183), to thank (82), to propound (73).
direction (330): God (207), someone (69), power (50), myself (42).
effect (398): emotional (286), cognitive (129), religious (74), real (73).
place (403): in bed (215), anywhere (101), at home (91), church (69), room (30), countryside (36), else (26).
time (385): at night (223), anytime (128), at dinner (55), in the morning (26), fixed (23).
method (394): eyes closed (119), hands joined (104), think (91), talk (59), lying down (45), to myself (43), quiet (39), formula (40), sit down (37).

These results indicate that young people mainly pray when they themselves or their relatives or friends are in trouble. As the old adage goes, ‘in wartime, there are no atheists in the foxholes’. Young people hope to obtain emotional and cognitive strength. Real effects are mentioned, but in most cases problems are solved in a self-directed way (Pargament et al. 1988) whereby the first effect of praying is secondary control: a change in the person who prays (Rothbaum, Weisz & Snyder 1982). On the whole the religious aspect of prayer is secondary: a minority pray to affirm their faith. God is an important element in most prayers, but he is a rather vague and impersonal being for many young people. Many just meditate without reference to anyone else.
A factor analysis was carried out to check the empirical status of the four forms of prayer we defined. The input variables are the categories the respondents used to describe their prayer (figure 4). The results show an outcome that reflects the predictions we made. We extracted four (fixed) factors that should reflect the four varieties of prayer (see figure 5).

FIGURE 5: Four varieties of praying and their components. Principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation. The analysis is based on tetrachorical correlations. Four-factor solution (number of factors fixed). Factor loadings smaller than .30 not shown. Bold elements load only on one factor. Shaded cells reflect the prediction of the main component of each variety of praying. N=687.

Components of praying

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Varieties of praying (factors)</th>
<th>need</th>
<th>action</th>
<th>direction</th>
<th>effect</th>
<th>method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>explained variance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor I</td>
<td>'petitionary prayer'</td>
<td>thank.33</td>
<td>someone -81</td>
<td>religious.51</td>
<td>time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor II</td>
<td>'religious prayer'</td>
<td>thank.33</td>
<td>power -.89</td>
<td>religious.47</td>
<td>place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor III</td>
<td>'meditative prayer'</td>
<td>meditate.48</td>
<td>myself.48</td>
<td>cognitive.64</td>
<td>lying down -.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor IV</td>
<td>'psychological prayer'</td>
<td>negative.60</td>
<td>dialogue.38</td>
<td>emotional.52</td>
<td>fixed moments.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

formula.69
talk.32
morning.73
regularly.53
at night.32
room.65
dinner.52
home.36
quiet.59
lying down -.40

regularly.34
church.79
dinner.70
home.59
in myself.55
think.49
anytime.84
anywhere.74
outside.49

lying down.72
eyes closed.69
hands joined.68
at night.89
in bed.91
On the whole, though not in all details, the four ways of praying can be distinguished. Elements shown in bold load on one factor or type of prayer only, but we also see that many elements load on two factors (with factor loadings >.30). If we compare figure 2 (our prediction) and figure 5 (the result of factor analysis) we find a striking resemblance, some refinements and some unexpected results. Overall, the four types are clearly visible, but not all types are complete. We will describe the four types of praying that we found and clarify them using the respondents’ own answers (between quotation marks).

10.1 Factor I, labeled as Petitionary Prayer

In the first factor, which we label as petitionary prayer, the effect — the central element according to the hypothesis — is indeed central. Typical petitionary prayer aims at a real effect, and although no specific needs are mentioned, we can deduce them by turning around the effect. If one aims to be cured, the need is an illness. The most mentioned structural elements are thanking God, in the morning, in one’s room, talking and using formulas. In petitionary prayer the effect is central and primordial. Our respondents ask and hope that “things will pass off as favorably as possible”, that there will be “unexpected turns”, that “it will help”, that prayer will be “heard”, that “relations will improve”, that “war will be prevented”, that “wishes will come true”, that “things will be good”, that there will be “a happy end”, that we “can make things happen”. In petitionary prayer as we defined it, God is active, and the person who prays is passive in a deferring mode. However, closer inspection of the texts reveals that God is almost never referred to as a direct object, but rather as an indirect object: our respondents define God in a more religious way, namely as a partner in a relation.

Furthermore, the data indicate that petitionary prayer is indeed of a ritual nature, often with the use of formulas (little prayers, Our Father, prayer book). However, it is not a public ritual as predicted, but a private one. Petitionary prayer is not performed in church, but at home in one’s room.

10.2 Factor II, labeled as Religious Prayer

According to the data, praying to God is a common element in all varieties of praying except for meditative prayer. Specific to religious prayer is the fact that the direction is towards God, and explicitly not “a power”. Belief in a personal God is part of orthodox Christian religion (Batson et al. 1993, 171). In our sample, as predicted, the direction of religious prayer is God: one often talks and communicates with God, thanking him and asking advice. Here God is represented as an indirect object.
Religious prayer is described by the respondents as starting from a positive need (at moments of happiness and joy: on a wedding day, when everything is going well, when the weather is good and examinations have been passed), thanking or talking to God, aiming for a religious effect (hoping “to experience God”, that “God sympathizes with me”, to “trust in God”, “to let God share in our hopes and sorrows”, “to build a relationship with God”), and is said quietly, at fixed moments, in church. As we predicted in figure 2, religious prayer is indeed embedded in a public ritual.

10.3 Factor III, labeled as Meditative Prayer

The prediction that the emphasis in meditative praying lies in the action component is corroborated in our findings. The action is described as meditation, that is to “reflect”, “ponder”, “consider”, “concentrate”, “meditate”. Meditative praying often starts from a negative need (mostly concrete events concerning others), aiming at emotional (look for “strength”, “support”, “courage”, “consolation”, “rest”, “to blow off steam”, “to be relieved”, “to relax”) and cognitive effects (get “new ideas”, “make things clear”, “become conscious of oneself”, “reflection”, learn to “put things into perspective”). The prayer is directed inwards and the method corresponds with this and consists of thinking to oneself (“evaluating”, “thinking”, “concentrating”, “talking”, “whispering”; “with myself”, “in myself”, “with my inner self”, “in my heart of hearts”, “with my super-ego”, “with my consciousness”, “quiet”, “in silence”), whereby both time and place are non-specific: meditative praying can be done anywhere at any moment (“time is irrelevant”, “always when needed”, “at different moments”, “at various moments”, “any time”, “all day”; “can be anywhere”, “at all places”, “no special place”, including “the countryside”, “wandering” and “biking”, at “quiet places” in “small rooms”). Meditative prayer is a “portable” prayer, so to speak, that can be performed anytime, any place. It is indeed (as predicted in figure 2) a private ritual. In meditative prayer, both God (or the direction of the prayer) and the person are passive, in a receptive mode.

10.4 Factor IV, labeled as Psychological Prayer

As predicted the main component of psychological prayer is need. This need is defined as neutral or negative and often concerns concrete events and other people (“when my mother died”, “when my father had a heart attack”, “when my father and stepmother got divorced”, “when my father attempted suicide”, “when my father got cancer”, “when my mother was institutionalized”, “when I was in crisis”, “when my uncle was cremated”, at the funerals of grandfathers, grandmothers and dogs, “at the outbreak of the Gulf war”, “when my friend did not come home”, “when I got lost on vacation”). As always, people pray when they are in trouble; youths are no
exception. While petitionary prayer aims at a real effect, psychological prayer functions as a mechanism to actively cope with stressful events, in a self-directing mode, thereby gaining secondary control. Stressful events range from death to daily hassles.

The action of psychological prayer is a dialogue with God in order to achieve an emotional or religious effect. Psychological prayer is said at night, lying in bed, with eyes closed and hands joined. All respondents use these same simple words. Psychological prayer and meditative prayer are typically private, not public.

Remarkable and unforeseen is the importance of method, time and place in differentiating between the several types of praying. The factor loadings are rather high and most elements often load on only one factor (bold elements in figure 5). Each variety of praying is characterized by a specific set of elements concerning method, time and place. Young people who pray anytime and anywhere pray in a meditative fashion. Psychological prayer is said lying in bed at night. Religious prayer is said quietly, at fixed moments in church. Petitionary prayer consists in formulas and is said in the morning in one’s room. So place, time and method are not just (adverbial) adjuncts loosely connected to a sentence of more central importance (see figure 5). Durkheim (1912) emphasized the importance of religion as structuring times and places. In the Middle Ages, the hours of the day were named after the prayer that was said (for instance compline and vespers). Today, times and places are still important for understanding the religious behavior of people.

Although we successfully distinguished the four factors that we expected, it turned out that there is a substantial correlation in our population between petitionary and religious praying. The distinction we made is theoretically convincing, but on empirical grounds we have to conclude that young adults combine religious and petitionary praying elements. We can show this in a second order factor analysis (figure 6).


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4 praying factors</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>petitionary</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>religious</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>psychological</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meditative</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% explained variance</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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The second order factor analysis reveals two clear factors. The first factor combines religious and petitionary prayer. Meditative prayer represents the second factor. These two factors account for almost 90% of the variance. However, psychological prayer is common to both factors. This is an indication that the psychological aspect of praying might be a general underlying structure of all prayer, that is interpreted and applied according to the religious affiliation and religious involvement of the praying subject. We conclude that there are not four, but three varieties of prayer that can be defined as religious (including the petitionary aspect), psychological and meditative.

The correlation between religious and petitionary prayer ties in with the finding of Pargament and colleagues (Pargament et al. 1988) that there is a significant correlation between the deferring problem-solving style, which corresponds with petitionary prayer, and the collaborative problem-solving style, which corresponds with religious prayer. As we saw before, in our sample God functions as an indirect object in both cases. The balance of the negotiation between God and man goes up and down between the deferring and the collaborative mode, often hanging in between the two.

10.5 Religious Involvement and Praying

The Netherlands has long been a country of several religious minorities that lived in harmony, in what was called a pillarized society. Since the sixties the Netherlands pluralized even more as a result of the processes of secularization, individualization and the emergence of new religious movements, summarized here as ‘New Age’ (Janssen 1998). The next question we want to answer is how the three types of praying that we have found are distributed over the full range of Dutch youth, religious as well as non-religious (Janssen & Prins 2000).

First, we constructed a measure for religious involvement by combining traditional sociological variables like ‘church membership’ and ‘church attendance’ with the personal variables ‘praying’ (regularly or sometimes versus never) and ‘involvement in New Age activities’. Combining these sociological and personal variables, we can distinguish nine religious groups. The first distinction is the traditional one between church members and non-church members. This sociological variable still works, albeit for a diminishing segment of the youth. In our research 39% of the young people are still members of a church. We distinguish Orthodox Protestants (4%), Calvinists (7%), Reformed Protestants (7%) and Catholics (12%). It is known from previous research that these groups show a decreasing measure of participation and conviction (Peters & Schreuder 1987; De Hart 1990; Felling et al. 1991; Dekker et al. 1997). Furthermore there are those who
consider themselves members of a church, but either never attend church, or never pray. We labeled them *marginals* (9%).

For the remaining 61% that are not affiliated with a church, we devised a new heuristic scheme. Usually this group is not differentiated any further. In our opinion this is a mistake: apostasy is as multicolored as conversion and disbelief is as complex as belief (Pruyser 1974). Besides, non-denominational people are also individualized and construct their own particular way of life. First, we distinguish the *New Age* youth, who participate in a considerable number of *New Age* related activities (16%). We presented a list of 12 fields of interest: yoga, reincarnation, astrology, extraterrestrial civilizations, parapsychology, macrobiotics, anthroposophy, homeopathy, the *New Age* movement, Buddhism, Zen and holism (De Hart & Janssen 1992). Young people not affiliated with a church who participate in activities related to six or more of these issues are considered *New Age*-minded. The seventh group is made up of former members of churches (*ex-members*). Their only religious activity is praying (18%). Young people in the eighth group, labeled *doubters* (9%), were never affiliated with any church, but do pray at least sometimes. The last group is the group of *non-believers* (18%). They lack any religious involvement whatsoever.

To test the validity of this classification of religious involvement, we correlated it with other variables concerning religion. Our prediction is that religious involvement is linearly correlated with religious opinions and activities. We tested this hypothesis by comparing Pearson-R correlations (indicating linearity) and ETA coefficients (maximizing non-linearity). When the Pearson correlation is high and the ETA does not substantially deviate, correlation is linear and the model we predicted holds. Tests of significance were not applied, since the sample is rather large and all correlations, even very small ones, would be significant. Figure 7 shows some of the main results.
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FIGURE 7: Religious involvement on the variables V84 The importance of being close to God; V534 Conciliation with death is only possible by trusting God and surrendering to Him; V57 The importance of being a good Christian; V418 Definition of a higher reality. Range V84 and V57: 1= very important, 5= very unimportant; V534: 1= agree totally, 5= do not agree at all.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RELIGIOUS INVOLVEMENT</th>
<th>V84 close to God mean score</th>
<th>V534 trust God mean score</th>
<th>V57 good Christian mean score</th>
<th>V418 definition higher reality God higher being</th>
<th>V418 definition higher reality don't know</th>
<th>V418 definition higher reality doesn't exist</th>
<th>V418 definition higher reality total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. ORTHODOX</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. CALVINIST</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. REFORMED</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. CATHOLIC</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. MARGINAL</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. NEW AGE</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. EX-MEMBER</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. DOUBTER</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. NONBELIEVER</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson -r | .72  | .71  | .70  | .68  |
eta         | .74  | .74  | .73  | .69  |

In all cases, the Pearson-R is almost equal to the Eta. This is a clear indication of linearity and corroborates our predictions. Differences within the Protestant groups are sometimes small, but in line with our predictions. Catholics differ remarkably in all respects from the Protestant groups. Their scores lie between these groups and the marginals. The group of non-believers, a significant group of young people (about 18% of the population), almost entirely rejects any reference to God and Christianity. They are, in the words of Max Weber, 'religiös unmusikalisich', tone-deaf to religion.

The classification represents a solid measure of religious involvement (see also Janssen & Prins 2000). We can now answer the question of how the three types of praying that we have found earlier are distributed over the variations of religious involvement. How do young people in each of these groups pray (excluding category 8, the people who never pray of course)? Figure 8 shows the results.
FIGURE 8: The varieties of religious involvement and types of prayer. N=542.

a) the absolute number of praying elements

b) the relative importance of praying elements

Correlations and partial correlations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>number of:</th>
<th>religious involvement</th>
<th>Pearson r correlation</th>
<th>Partial correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>religious praying elements</td>
<td></td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>psychological praying elements</td>
<td></td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meditative praying elements</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8a validates the claim that the variety of religious involvement is correlated in a linear fashion with praying: religious involvement leads to a more complicated and richer definition of praying. In earlier research a substantial correlation (Pearson r=.45) between praying frequency and the number of structural elements was found (Janssen et al. 1990). The number of psychological and religious praying elements (Figure 8a) is correlated substantially with the measure of religious involvement (Pearson r = .33 and .52). However, there is no correlation for the meditative prayer (r = -.02). The correlation for psychological praying turns out to be very small in the end (partial correlation: .05).

When the relative importance of the praying elements is calculated (figure 8b) the psychological praying elements turn out to be of equal importance for all groups. Independently of the degree of religious involvement, around 40% of the praying elements are psychological in nature. The combination of religious and meditative elements varies in accordance with our hypothesis: the greater the religious involvement, the greater the number of religious
praying elements and the smaller the number of meditative elements, and vice versa. An important result is the stability of psychological praying elements. They show no correlation with religious involvement and their relative contribution is invariant (Figure 8b).

A closer inspection of the several categories (structural and content-related), gives some additional information. For the structural categories, it is remarkable that direction and action clearly show the lowest correlation with religious involvement (.29 and .27), and place and time the highest (.54 and .51). Again, as before in the factor analysis, place and time have the highest discriminative power. As we saw in figure 4, the most frequent type of prayer, in terms of the content categories, is characterized as starting from negative needs, directed to God, aiming at an emotional effect, based on meditating and asking or hoping, performed in bed, at night, with eyes closed and hands joined. The prayer of the religiously involved young people is characterized as starting from negative needs, directed to God, aiming at religious and emotional effects, based on dialogue, and performed at home, at dinner and in bed, at night. So, in the religious prayer some specific elements are added to the general, most frequent model. Place and time (at home and at dinner) are the most important and most discriminative elements. The prayer of the religiously involved people is not only more complex (in that it combines more elements), but it is also more frequent: they pray several times (mean Orthodox 1.6, mean doubters .8) and at several places (mean Orthodox 1.5, mean doubters .5).

11. Discussion

Institutional churches have lost many of their traditional functions. In Europe, the Dutch youth have the lowest church membership. However, religion is not simply a fading phenomenon, for many young people nowadays still pray. The basis of each prayer is a tripartite structure: there is a need to pray, an action and an effect. Prayer also often has a direction. To understand how these young people pray, we used open-ended questions. Our empirical findings show that there are three types of praying: religious, meditative, and psychological prayer, that each has its own focus. In religious prayer the direction, in particular 'God', is central. Meditative prayer focuses on the action: one meditates or ponders. In psychological prayer the need is central and refers to concrete problems, especially the death of loved ones.

In practice, praying is always a combination of these three types of prayer. There is no such thing as a purely religious, meditative or psychological prayer. Like Poloma & Gallup (1991) and Hood, Morris & Harvey (1993,
in Hood et al. 1996), we always find a substantial overlap. Therefore, it is more appropriate to speak of three aspects of praying: successively religious, meditative and psychological. These three varieties of prayer are cumulative and correlate with religious involvement. With increasing religious involvement, the number of words to describe the praying practice grows, and so does the number of structural praying elements. So religious competence and experience lead to a richer and more extensive prayer.

An unexpected finding is the importance of place, time and method. Every type of prayer has its own set of adjuncts. Religious prayer takes place at fixed moments in church and is performed in silence. Psychological prayer is done at night, lying in bed with hands joined and eyes closed. Meditative prayer is performed anywhere and anytime; it is so to speak a portable prayer. So although prayer is often a mixture of the three aspects, time and place make the different prayers distinguishable. Varieties of praying each have their own time and place, their own \textit{kairos} and \textit{topos}. The same person can pray in different ways, matching the type of prayer with a specific time or place.

Independently of religious involvement, we find a great similarity between the prayer of young people especially on the psychological and meditative aspects. In all prayers, 40\% of the praying elements are psychological. At the basis of each prayer lies a purely psychological fact, as Heiler calls it "the immediate expression of an original and profound experience of the soul" (1932/1958, 354). When confronted with concrete, negative events, mostly concerning others, youngsters pray in order to find strength and courage to go on. The need to pray stems from concrete experiences and feelings: problems, and in particular problems that cannot be solved, like death, are the subject of prayer. These needs to pray correspond with what seem to be the needs for religion in general: death, illness and injury (Batson et al. 1993, 9). The effect of praying is formulated in abstract and psychological rather than real terms. The person praying aims at gaining secondary control by bringing himself or herself in line with environmental forces (Rothbaum, Weisz & Snyder 1982). It does not aim at directly changing the situation but rather at bringing about a psychological change in the person who prays, eventually enabling that person to change the situation. Thus praying is essentially a coping mechanism in which people actively cope with negative events, described by Pargament and colleagues as a self-directing style of problem-solving (Pargament et al. 1988). This particular form of problem-solving has been associated with greater psychological competence, which suggests that this coping mechanism functions rather well (Pargament et al. 1988). Positive correlations between frequency of personal prayer and perceived purpose in life, found by Francis & Burton (1994) and Francis & Evans (1996), strengthen this suggestion.
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On top of this psychological basis come meditative praying elements focused on the action itself: young people mostly do not communicate or talk when they pray, but ponder and reflect in silence within themselves. Meditative prayer aims at cognitive effects, at expanding the person, becoming more conscious of oneself. We consider meditative prayer to be a receptive style of problem-solving, in which both the person and the direction of the prayer are passive. Only the more religiously involved young people, and in particular those who are church members, add religious elements to their prayer: they thank God or ask for a real effect. This aspect of praying combines a collaborative and a deferring mode of problem-solving (Pargament 1988).

While most prayers look alike and are psychological in nature, small nuances can bring about great differences. For instance, adding a small word like 'God' or 'Jesus' can change the gestalt of the prayer into a religious prayer. A small quantitative difference can make a big qualitative difference. For most young people, praying is essentially a self-directed, cognitive therapy aimed at obtaining secondary control, in order to keep their lives in balance.

NOTES

1. Little or no research appears to have been done on these questions. We thank Dr. A. Bastiaensen for his valuable advice.
2. The computer program Textable is comparable with the computer program TextSmart, which SPSS has recently developed. For information about TextSmart see the Web site at http://www.spss.com/textsmart/.

LITERATURE


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