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An Empirical Study of Ordinary Prayer

by

Tania ap Siôn

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degree of

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CONTENTS

<i>List of Tables</i>	7
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	8
<i>Declaration</i>	8
<i>Inclusion of Published Work</i>	8
Summary	9
Introduction	10
Part one	
Chapter 1 Ordinary prayer	15
Introduction	15
Ordinary theology	15
<i>Defining ordinary theology</i>	15
<i>Studying ordinary theology</i>	20
Ordinary Prayer	24
<i>Defining ordinary prayer</i>	24
<i>The significance of prayer in religious practice</i>	25
<i>The contribution of ordinary prayer to ordinary theology</i>	27
<i>Studying ordinary prayer</i>	28
Summary	30
Chapter 2 Who prays?	32
Introduction	32
Review.....	32
<i>Broadly-based social surveys</i>	32
<i>Studies focused on the behaviour, attitudes, and values of religious people</i>	38

<i>Surveys focused on quantifying and contextualising prayer in people's lives</i> ...	45
Synthesis and evaluation of survey results.....	48
Summary	52
Chapter 3 When do people pray?	54
Introduction	54
Review.....	54
<i>Personal health and physical illness</i>	54
<i>Parents with ill children</i>	60
<i>Marital conflict</i>	62
<i>General coping</i>	62
<i>Finance and work-related problems</i>	64
<i>Working in care contexts</i>	64
Synthesis and evaluation of survey results.....	66
Summary	69
Chapter 4 Exploring the objective correlates of prayer	71
Introduction	71
Review.....	71
<i>People</i>	71
<i>Other living organisms</i>	78
Synthesis and evaluation of survey results.....	81
Summary	87
Chapter 5 Exploring the subjective correlates of prayer	89
Introduction	89
Review.....	90
<i>Behaviour and attitudes</i>	90

<i>Positive self-perception</i>	95
<i>Anxiety and related states</i>	98
<i>Resilience and coping</i>	102
<i>Spiritual health</i>	106
Synthesis and evaluation of study results.....	107
Summary	112
Chapter 6 Exploring the content of prayer	113
Introduction	113
Review.....	113
<i>Surveys of prayer content</i>	113
<i>Analyses of prayer</i>	120
Synthesis and evaluation of study results.....	124
Summary	129
Chapter 7 Proposing a new methodology	130
Introduction	130
Analytical review	130
Practical implications	133
Introducing a new methodology	134
<i>Rationale</i>	135
<i>A framework for studying ordinary intercessory prayer</i>	136
Summary	138
Part two	
Chapter 8 Case study 1: A general content analysis of ordinary prayer	141
Introduction	141
Method	141

Results	142
<i>Quantitative analyses</i>	142
<i>Qualitative analyses</i>	146
Conclusion	167
Chapter 9 Case study 2: A general content analysis replication	173
Introduction	173
Method	173
Results	174
<i>Quantitative analyses</i>	174
<i>Qualitative analyses</i>	178
Conclusion	201
Chapter 10 Case study 3: Ordinary prayer and implicit religion	206
Introduction	206
<i>Implicit religion</i>	206
Method	211
Results	212
Conclusion	225
Chapter 11 Case study 4: Ordinary prayer and health and well-being.....	229
Introduction	229
Method	229
Results	230
<i>Quantitative analyses</i>	231
<i>Qualitative analyses</i>	233
Conclusion	244
Chapter 12 Case study 5: Ordinary prayer and God’s activity in the world... 	249

Introduction	249
Method	249
Results	251
<i>Quantitative analyses</i>	251
<i>Qualitative analyses</i>	255
Conclusion	284
Conclusion	291
Main findings	291
Evaluation of new methodology	299
Relevance of research to the Church.....	301
Bibliography	304

List of Tables

Case study 1: Content of intercessory and supplicatory prayer	
by intention, reference, and objective	172
Case study 2: Content of intercessory and supplicatory prayer	
by intention, reference, and objective	205
Case study 3: Content of intercessory and supplicatory prayer	
by intention, reference, and objective	228
Case study 4: Content of intercessory and supplicatory prayer	
by intention, reference, and objective	248
Case study 5: Content of intercessory and supplicatory prayer	
by intention, reference, and objective	290

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work. It has not been submitted for a degree at any other university.

Inclusion of Published Work

Included in this thesis is published material arising from work on the thesis which has appeared in print before the thesis was completed or examined. The published material includes:

ap Siôn, T. (2007). Listening to prayers: an analysis of prayers left in a country church in rural England. *Archiv für Religionspsychologie*, 29, 199-226.

ap Siôn, T. (2007). Implicit religion and ordinary prayer. *Implicit Religion*. Paper presented at the Implicit Religion conference at Denton Hall, England in May 2007.

ap Siôn, T. (2008). Distinguishing between intention, reference and objective in an analysis of prayer requests for health and well-being: eavesdropping from the rural vestry. *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*, 11, 53-65.

ap Siôn, T. (2008). Interpreting God's activity in the public square: accessing the ordinary theology of personal prayer. Paper presented at the ISERT conference, Würzburg, Germany in April 2008.

ap Siôn, T. (2009). Ordinary prayer and the rural church. *Rural Theology*, 7, 17-31.

ap Sion, T. & Francis, L.J. (2009). Psychological perspectives on prayer. In M. de Souza, L.J. Francis, J. O'Higgins-Norman, & D. Scott (Eds), *International handbook of education for spirituality, care and wellbeing: Part one* (pp. 247-267). Netherlands: Springer.

Summary

The aim of the thesis is to demonstrate the significance of ordinary prayer for the study of ordinary theology, as conceived by Astley (2002), and to make an original contribution to research in this field. For this purpose, in part one, the thesis begins by establishing the relationship between ordinary theology and ordinary prayer, followed by a review and evaluation of empirical studies relevant to ordinary prayer. These studies are organised according to five themes: who prays, when people pray, the subjective effects of prayer, the objective effects of prayer, and the content of prayer. Part one concludes with a consideration of the significance of the empirical prayer studies for the understanding of ordinary theology and ordinary theologians, and demonstrates their practical importance to the Church. Based on the evidence gathered thus far, a new methodology is proposed, which supports the detailed study of ordinary prayer content found in prayer requests left in churches. The new methodology involves the development of an analytical framework designed to explore the content of ordinary prayer through the three components of *reference*, *intention*, and *objective*. In part two, the analytical framework is employed in five case studies: two case studies test the general framework through the analysis of two different sets of prayer requests; one case study uses the general framework to explore ordinary prayer and implicit religion; and two case studies use modifications of the intention component of the framework in order to provide focused studies relating to ordinary prayer and health and well-being and to ordinary prayer and the activity of God in the world. The thesis concludes with an evaluative summary of the contribution of ordinary prayer to ordinary theology in general and the contribution of the new methodology to the study of ordinary prayer and ordinary theology in particular.

Introduction

The aim of the thesis is to demonstrate the significance of ordinary prayer for the study of ordinary theology, as conceived by Astley (2002), and to make an original contribution to research in this field. In order to achieve this, chapter one, 'Ordinary prayer', contextualises and defines the subject of the thesis: ordinary prayer.

Contextualisation and definition of ordinary prayer are closely connected to the construct of ordinary theology; therefore, the first part of the chapter is concerned with defining ordinary theology and discussing the study of ordinary theology, and the second part of the chapter is concerned with defining ordinary prayer, establishing the significance of prayer in religious practice, identifying the contribution of ordinary prayer to ordinary theology, and identifying an approach to studying ordinary prayer. The five chapters in the first part of the thesis (chapters two through to six) summarise and analyse the key empirical research concerning prayer in order to define the context for the new empirical study presented in chapter seven.

Chapter two, 'Who prays?', reviews and evaluates the main findings of surveys conducted over the past three to four decades which provide information relevant to the question, 'Who prays?' from an empirical perspective. The review includes pertinent broadly-based social surveys, studies focused on the behaviour, attitudes, and values of religious people, and surveys focused on quantifying and contextualising prayer in people's lives.

Chapter 3, 'When do people pray?', reviews and evaluates the main findings of surveys conducted over the past three to four decades which provide information relevant to the question, 'When do people pray?' from an empirical perspective. The review includes pertinent situational surveys which have made good progress in

charting the circumstances in which people turn to private prayer, including surveys relating to: personal health and physical illness; parents with ill children; marital relations; coping in non-medical contexts; finance and work-related difficulties; and working in caring contexts.

Chapter 4, 'Exploring the objective correlates of prayer', reviews and evaluates the main findings of surveys concerned with the objective effects of prayer. The review includes studies concerned with measuring the objective effects of prayer on people for whom prayers are offered and studies concerned with the objective effects of prayer on other living organisms for which prayers are offered (for example, plants).

Chapter 5, 'The subjective correlates of prayer', reviews and evaluates the main findings of studies concerned with measuring the subjective effects of prayer. The review is organised around five predominant areas in which the subjective effects of prayer have been tested: behaviour and attitudes; positive self-perception; anxiety and related states; resilience and coping; and spiritual health.

Chapter 6, 'Exploring the content of prayer', reviews and evaluates the main findings of studies investigating the content of people's prayer. The review focuses on pertinent studies which fall into two categories: studies accessing the content of prayers through surveys of people's reported experiences and studies analysing the content of prayers directly.

Chapter 7, 'Proposing a new methodology', evaluates the significance of the empirical studies of ordinary prayer included in chapters 1 to 6 to Astley's (2002) construct of ordinary theology, and provides a consideration of its key practical implications. In light of this contextualisation, a new methodology is proposed for

analysing ordinary prayer with the aim of contributing to the empirical study of ordinary prayer and to the empirical study of ordinary theology. The new methodology approaches ordinary prayer through prayer requests left in a church setting using an original analytical framework comprising three components: prayer *reference*, prayer *intention*, and prayer *objective*. The new methodology is then related to five case studies which form the basis of the second part of the thesis (chapters eight through to twelve).

Chapter 8, 'Case study 1: A general content analysis of ordinary prayer', provides a detailed content analysis of 917 prayer-cards left in a rural church over a 16-month period, using the general analytical framework to explore prayer *intention*, prayer *reference*, and prayer *objective*. The aim of the case study is to test the robustness of the general framework and to provide qualitative and quantitative information about the concerns and thinking of ordinary pray-ers expressed through intercessory and supplicatory prayer.

Chapter 9, 'Case study 2: A general content analysis replication of ordinary prayer', replicates the general content analysis conducted in case study 1, using data drawn from a new batch of 1,067 prayer-cards left in the same rural church over a 16-month period. The aim of the case study is to test the robustness of both the general analytical framework and the results emerging from the analyses conducted in case study 1, with reference to the concerns of ordinary pray-ers and their perceptions of how prayer works.

Chapter 10, 'Case study 3: Ordinary prayer and implicit religion', explores the content of ordinary prayers for the presence of implicit religion within an explicit religion context. The study builds on the results emerging from the second set of

1,067 prayer-cards analysed in case study 2 by applying Lord's (2006) nine-type definition of implicit religion to identify examples of implicit religion within the prayer content. In order to define and to contextualise the implicit religion component in this case study, an outline of the relevant aspects of implicit religion is provided.

Chapter 11, 'Case study 4: Ordinary prayer and health and well-being', explores the content of ordinary prayers for material relevant to health and well-being. The study analyses the second set of 1,067 prayer-cards using a modification of the general analytical framework, which is designed to provide a focused study of aspects of health and well-being. In the modified framework, the general *intention* categories are replaced by health and well-being categories, which include physical health, mental health, affective communication, and direct communication.

Chapter 12, 'ordinary prayer and God's activity in the world,' explores the content of ordinary prayers for material which identifies the beliefs of ordinary pray-ers concerning the nature and activity of God and God's concern with and impact on the everyday world. The study analyses the second set of 1,067 prayer-cards using a modification of the general analytical framework, which is designed to provide a focused study of ordinary pray-ers' views of God and God's activity in the world. In the modified framework, the general *intention* categories are replaced by nine categories, which are articulated as: gift-bestower, confidant/e, intervener, protector, intermediary, revealer, strength-giver, helper (general), and comforter.

The thesis concludes with an evaluative summary of the contribution of ordinary prayer to ordinary theology in general and the contribution of the new methodology to the study of ordinary prayer and ordinary theology in particular.

Part one

Chapter 1 Ordinary prayer

Introduction

The aim of the present chapter is to contextualise and to define the subject of the thesis: ordinary prayer. As both contextualisation and definition of ordinary prayer are closely connected to the construct of ordinary theology, the first part of the chapter is concerned with defining ordinary theology and discussing the study of ordinary theology. After these foundations are provided, the second part of the chapter is concerned with defining ordinary prayer, establishing the significance of prayer in religious practice, identifying the contribution of ordinary prayer to ordinary theology, and identifying an approach to studying ordinary prayer.

Ordinary theology

Defining ordinary theology

Theology is usually regarded as an activity which lies in the domain of ‘qualified’ theologians within the Church or Academy. Although dialogue exists between qualified theologians and ordinary people, notably in the context of practical theology, very often that dialogue is controlled by the former. In response to this perceived imbalance, Astley (2002) introduced and defined the construct of ordinary theology, and asked whether benefits could be gained from listening carefully to the voices belonging to those who are technically unqualified (ordinary) people. For Astley, ‘the study of ordinary theology can promote a perspective that meets the contention of Edward Farley and others that we should recover theology as a fundamental dimension of piety, an inherent part of *every* Christian’s vocation.’

(2002: viii). At the heart of this perspective is the recognition that personal theological reflection is central to the faith development of all Christians and that this personal theological reflection is bound closely to personal experience. It is grounded, relevant theology, and it is 'ordinary' because it pertains to the everyday and the architect is the ordinary Christian. This stands in direct contrast to what is often viewed as the cerebral, objective, and often abstract theological reflection of exclusive groups of professional theologians in the Church and Academy.

In *Ordinary Theology: looking, listening and learning in theology* (2002), Astley outlines and discusses various defining characteristics of ordinary theology. An exploration of five areas in particular provides a good overview of ordinary theology's nature and interests: the concerns of ordinary theology; the difference between ordinary theology and academic theology; categories of ordinary theology; benefits gained from studying ordinary theology; and defending ordinary theology. First, ordinary theology is concerned with 'the theological beliefs and processes of believing that find expression in the God-talk of those believers who have received no scholarly theological education' (Astley, 2002: 1). What is meant by 'no scholarly theological education' in practice is not precisely defined, but would include those who have not studied theology as part of an academic discipline. This ordinary God-talk or ordinary theology is a deeply personal, 'lived' theology and may be hesitant or inarticulate because it has not been subjected to the same objective, analytical rigours required for academic theology. Ordinary theology is also concerned with understanding how the processes of believing work, and this requires an appreciation of individual learning contexts and an understanding of how people learn (Astley, 2002: 17ff). Astley argues that learning takes place in 'experiential learning contexts' which are located outside the person (for example, the religious community) and

inside the person (for example, individual life experiences), and that these two contexts for learning exist in a dialogical relationship. Therefore, in a real sense, individuals have their own theologies, informed by reflection on their individual circumstances, and this theology is in a continual state of change and adaptation as individuals reflect on and incorporate new information arising from individual experiential learning contexts.

Although Astley (2002) appears to be concerned primarily with ‘churchgoers’ and their ordinary theology, he makes it clear that ordinary theology should not necessarily be limited to this group:

Ordinary theology ... is a category that embraces the majority of regular (even orthodox) churchgoers, as well as extending right across the range of irregular churchgoers and the wholly unchurched. (p. 89)

Secondly, the difference between ordinary theology and academic theology is best described as one of degree rather than kind and as such it may be conceived of in linear terms, without accompanying value judgements and sense of development towards a desirable goal. Using this image, the extremes within academic theology or ordinary theology are more easily recognisable than that which lies towards the centre where distinctions can become blurred. Each academic theologian will originally have been an ordinary theologian even though the ordinary voice may have long since been forgotten or suppressed by the discipline of academic theology (Astley, 2002: 58).

Thirdly, Astley (2002: 58-86) outlines eleven qualitative characteristics of ordinary theology in addition to the essential identificatory characteristic of ordinary theology which is that it is an activity done by ‘those who have received little or no

academic theological education' (Astley, 2002: 57). The eleven qualitative characteristics are set out as follows. Ordinary theology is a learned and learning theology (acquired through experience), a tentative theology (hesitant and without confidence in its articulation), a lay theology (neither expert nor professionally qualified as well as different and set apart from the theology of Church and Academy), a significant theology (important to ordinary people), a meaningful theology (providing meaning to life events and experiences), a subterranean theology (not 'universally available' and closer to grassroots experiences of ordinary people), a religious theology (grounded in the religious lives of ordinary people), a kneeling, celebratory theology (located in practical experience rather than communicative, critical 'theology at a desk'), a mother-tongue theology (focused on maintenance of relationships rather than 'distancing discourse of competitive disagreements'), an onlook theology (influenced by 'seeing' religious meaning in aspects of the surrounding world), and a theology which has similarities with Barth's 'irregular dogmatics' (such as its fragmentary, unsystematic nature and the influencing factor of personal life stories).

Fourthly, Astley (2002: 145-162) suggests a number of benefits that may be gained from studying ordinary theology and engaging in a dialogue with ordinary theology. For example, the study of ordinary theology provides the Church with significant information about the people it serves which is essential if the Church is properly to 'exercise its ministry of pastoral care, worship, Christian education, apologetics, preaching and evangelism ...' (Astley, 2002: 146). Good ordinary theology may play a useful role in the activity of doing theology; for example, it is able to test whether academic theology actually 'works' in practice, in the sense of being meaningful on the level of experience. In addition, for Astley, theology is

something which should be experience based and as such academic theologians do not hold the monopoly in relation to it. By implication, this means that good ordinary theologians are able to contribute to as well as critique theology, and these ordinary activities will help ensure the continuing relevance of theology within an ever-changing world.

Fifthly, after defining ordinary theology and demonstrating its value, Astley (2002: 123-162) defends ordinary theology against the anticipated criticism that 'theology' is an inappropriate term to describe the thinking of those who are technically unqualified in the field of religion. Possible reasons for unease with the concept of ordinary theology are discussed, which include the arguments that it is too varied, too unsystematic, too concrete and anthropomorphic, too biographical, too subjective, too superstitious, and too uncritical. In response, Astley largely points to the characteristics of and diversity within theology, traditionally conceived, and reiterates the position that the difference between ordinary theology and the theology of the Church and Academy is one of degree rather than kind. Perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of ordinary theology for theology traditionally conceived (which may underpin Astley's list of criticisms) is the idea that ordinary theologians are able to contribute to theology, and this may superficially be taken to advocate an uncritical acceptance of the content of ordinary theology. This argument may be refuted in two ways which relate to how authenticity is determined and how locus of management is construed. Within the Anglican context in which Astley is working, the authenticity of beliefs could be tested against the Bible and tradition, and also involve human reason (Sykes, 1978). This process should prevent the uncritical acceptance of ordinary beliefs as well as ensure that theology is adaptable and relevant. Locus of management remains with qualified or professional theologians

who are best equipped to interpret and apply the contribution of ordinary theology because they are able to place ordinary theologies within the relevant broader perspectives.

Studying ordinary theology

In addition to providing a theoretical model for ordinary theology, Astley also considers approaches to studying ordinary theology, where he identifies ‘two areas of original research [that] are of particular importance: one is empirical and social-scientific, the other is philosophical and theological (that is, conceptual)’ (2002: 97). With reference to the former, Astley anticipates that empirical studies of ordinary theology will reveal significant variations in ordinary theologies, apparent on two inter-related levels: the level of the individual where theologies are deeply personal constructions moulded by individual life stories and the level of the group where theologies reflect the influences of certain shared characteristics pertaining to culture, gender, sex, age, and religious tradition, for example:

I do not doubt that qualitative and quantitative research studies in ordinary theology will reveal both an internal variety in each sample studied, and a variation between different individuals, groups, congregations, denominations, genders and cultures that reflects their different backgrounds and contexts, among other factors. (2002: 126)

A number of empirical and social-scientific studies relating directly to ordinary theology are emerging, for example, Littler and Francis (2005), Christie (2007), and Christie and Astley (2009). These studies have begun the process of exploring facets of ordinary theology primarily in terms of content, using both qualitative and

quantitative research methodologies. In relation to their areas of enquiry, they illustrate what is meaningful in practice for specific samples of ‘churchgoers’, and this provides a substantive part of the dialogue that Astley envisages taking place between ‘ordinary’ theologians and ‘professional’ theologians.

Littler and Francis (2005) examined ordinary ideas of holiness in a survey of 4,879 visitors to a number of rural churches. Results indicated that the visitors identified three specific aspects of a rural church with their view of the church as holy:

First and foremost, a holy country church is a place where it is possible to find somewhere quiet to pray. Holiness is associated with peace, quiet and prayer.

Second, a holy country church is a place which is actively used by the local Christian community and which is pleased to make known details about its time of meeting for worship. Holiness is associated with the life and witness of the worshipping local community. Third, a holy country church is a place where fresh flowers are in evidence. Holiness is associated with the beauty and fragrance of fresh flowers and with the love and care of those committed to arranging fresh flowers in a church kept open and ready for use by parishioners and tourists. (pp. 52-53)

Christie (2007) used interviews to classify and exemplify the ordinary christologies of 45 Anglican churchgoers. The study identified three main types of christology: functional (biblical); ontological (ecclesial); and sceptical. Key facets of these types of christology were evaluated in relation to the doctrinal position of the Church as articulated in the creeds of Nicaea and Chalcedon. Results indicated that most of the churchgoers interviewed did not understand Jesus according to the

classic Trinitarian model, and as such held unorthodox Christian beliefs. The vast majority of those interviewed (30 of the 45 churchgoers) displayed a functional christology, which is illustrated by the absence of belief in the pre-existing Son of God who becomes incarnate in Jesus as well as a non-Trinitarian conception of God who as ‘Father’ relates to the world through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the assertion that ‘Jesus is God’ or that ‘Jesus is the Son of God incarnate’ is rejected (for these churchgoers, Jesus’ position as Son of God began at his birth). Instead, there is a preference for understanding Jesus as being uniquely ‘of God’ and ‘divine’, displaying qualities of God and acting as God’s agent in the world with the miraculous signs attending his birth and life acting as testimony to this.

Some of those interviewed (nine of the 45 churchgoers) displayed an ontological christology, which superficially conforms to the basic orthodox statements of belief pertinent to God as Trinity. However, when reflecting on God, Godhead, Trinity, and Jesus in more detail, unpacking and applying these orthodox statements was more problematic for these churchgoers. For example, Jesus may have been viewed as fully God, but with a compromised humanity.

A minority of those interviewed (six of the 45 churchgoers) displayed a sceptical christology, which is illustrated by the belief that Jesus was not the Son of God. It is unclear in the article, however, whether Jesus was viewed as ‘divine’ in a broader sense as illustrated in the functional christology category. This disbelief tended to be accompanied by a disbelief in the general notion of ‘miracle’ as portrayed in the gospel narratives as well as some familiarity with influential literature pertaining to the historical Jesus and the early church. However, these traits did not affect their personal identification as Christians.

Christie and Astley (2009) also explored the ordinary soteriology of the 45 churchgoers. Unlike ordinary christology, there is no clear doctrinal position of the Church to act as a reference point, but as the cross is usually viewed as central to soteriology, the cross provided the focus for the in-depth interviews in the study. Results indicated that three main types of soteriology were reflected by the churchgoers: exemplarist, traditionalist, and evangelical. Although each type related to a recognised soteriology, the soteriologies were incomplete and unsystematic. Twelve of the 45 churchgoers exhibited an exemplarist soteriology, which rejected a traditional understanding of Jesus' death as atonement for sin. According to this soteriology, the cross (set within the wider context of Jesus' life) is salvific because of the truths it reveals to Christians rather than the cross being intrinsically salvific *per se*. Therefore, Jesus' life was viewed as an exceptional temporal 'moral and/or religious' example, an encouragement to persevere in suffering, or a 'demonstration of God's love', evoking a personal human response which was transformative and salvific. Around one third of the 45 churchgoers displayed a traditionalist soteriology which is distinguished by the belief 'in everything conventionally included in the Christian religion' (as exemplified in the language of the liturgy and hymns), although there was difficulty in explaining the details of these beliefs and the reasons for holding them. The evangelical section of the sample (six of the 45 churchgoers), as the name suggests, alone reflected the 'evangelical soteriology' which included a full substitutionary theory of atonement and the belief in a personal relationship with Jesus (although Jesus and God were used interchangeably in this regard). Finally, around a third of the sample experienced real problems trying to understand or accept traditional views of the cross, salvation, and atonement because they were viewed as unnecessary, unhelpful, or morally questionable.

All these studies were conducted within rural ministry contexts. Astley (2003: 10) argues that ‘rural ministry may in principle serve as the ideal testing ground for the very notion of ordinary theology, and for the requisite empirical studies that are needed in order to paint its portrait (or, rather, its variety of portraits) in sufficient detail.’ In comparison with urban ministry, for reasons relating to scale among others, a closer relationship often exists between rural clergy and their church-attending and non-church-attending parishioners, which may enable their ordinary theology to be heard more clearly.

Ordinary Prayer

Defining ordinary prayer

‘Ordinary prayer’ is a term coined from ‘ordinary theology’. Ordinary prayer is the prayer of ordinary people or ‘those believers who have received no scholarly theological education’. As such, ordinary prayer shares many of the key characteristics displayed by ordinary theology, broadly conceived. Ordinary prayer is ‘grounded, relevant’ prayer, and it is ‘ordinary’ because it pertains to the everyday and the architect is the ordinary person. It is a deeply personal, ‘lived’ prayer and may be hesitant or inarticulate because it has not acquired the knowledge or skills developed by systematic professional teaching about prayer. Ordinary prayer is acquired in ‘experiential learning contexts’ which are located outside the person (for example, the religious community) and inside the person (for example, individual life experiences), and these two contexts for learning exist in a dialogical relationship. The difference between ordinary prayer and ‘professional’ prayer is best described as one of degree rather than kind and as such it may be conceived of in linear terms,

without accompanying value judgements and sense of development towards a desirable goal. Using this image, the extremes within ‘professional’ prayer or ordinary prayer are more easily recognisable than that which lies towards the centre where distinctions can become blurred. ‘Professional’ prayer will originally have come from ordinary prayer even though the ordinary voice may have long since been forgotten or suppressed by the discipline of learning about prayer.

Like ordinary theology, ordinary prayer may be described as learned and learning prayer (acquired through experience), tentative prayer (hesitant and without confidence in its articulation), lay prayer (neither expert nor professionally qualified as well as different and set apart from the prayer of Church and Academy), significant prayer (important to ordinary people), meaningful prayer (providing meaning to life events and experiences), subterranean prayer (not ‘universally available’ and closer to grassroots experiences of ordinary people), religious prayer (grounded in the religious lives of ordinary people), kneeling, celebratory prayer (located in practical experience rather than communicative, critical ‘prayer at a desk’), mother-tongue prayer (focused on maintenance of relationships rather than ‘distancing discourse of competitive disagreements’), onlook prayer (influenced by ‘seeing’ religious meaning in aspects of the surrounding world), and prayer which has similarities with Barth’s ‘irregular dogmatics’ (such as its fragmentary, unsystematic nature and the influencing factor of personal life stories).

The significance of prayer in religious practice

Prayer is often viewed as the most significant religious practice. For example, prayer has been described as ‘the very soul and essence of religion’ (James, 1902), ‘the

centre and soul of all religion, and upon the question of its validity depends the trustworthiness of religious experience in general' (Hodge, 1931), and 'the central phenomenon of religion, the very hearthstone of all piety' (Heiler, 1997 edition). Coe (1916) even claimed that 'a history and psychology of prayer would be almost equivalent to a history and psychology of religion.' In addition, the significance of prayer on an individual's development was appreciated by Brown (1994) who commented that 'as a discovery process, praise is matched by petition as a form of *self* discovery, and intercession as a deepening awareness of the place that other people have in our lives and in the world' (p. 251).

In specifically Christian terms, the centrality of prayer is also evident in the New Testament. For example, in the gospel narratives, Jesus often teaches about prayer (Matthew 6:5ff; Mark 11:24ff; Luke 11:1ff and 18:1ff), and is frequently portrayed as praying both regularly (Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:35 and 6:46; Luke 5:16) and at important stages in his ministry (Luke 3:21 and 9:28ff; Matthew 26: 39-44). The importance of prayer is also recognised by biblical theologians who discuss the place and significance of prayer within the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (MacLachlan, 1952; Coggan, 1967; Crump, 1992; Kurichianil, 1993), historical theologians who discuss the development of prayer in the church (Simpson, 1965; Kelly 1966; Jasper & Cuming, 1987; Guiver, 1988), philosophical theologians who discuss the meaning and implications of the religious practice of prayer (Phillips, 1965; Baelz, 1968, 1982; Alhonsaari, 1973; Brümmer 2008; Clements-Jewery, 2005), and pastoral theologians who provide manuals and suggestions to promote the practice of prayer (Thornton, 1972; Harries, 1978; Leech, 1980; Miller, 2008; Davidson, 2008).

The contribution of ordinary prayer to ordinary theology

Initial empirical studies examining ordinary theology explicitly have focused directly on a theological concept or doctrine, and proceeded to access ordinary theologies or ‘God-talk’ from this starting point. As the results from these studies have shown, this method of accessing ordinary ‘God-talk’ is particularly productive because it is a directed and reflective process, which is initiated and managed by an appropriately qualified theologian. More studies of this nature are needed to continue the important work being done in this area.

There is, however, another approach to the empirical study of ordinary theology which can provide data of a different but complementary kind. This approach takes as its starting point the ordinary theologian (broadly conceived) rather than the doctrine, and tends to be experiential rather than consciously analytical or reflective. The primary mechanism for accessing ordinary theology in this way is the empirical study of ‘ordinary’ prayer (that is, the prayer of the ordinary theologian). Astley frequently describes theology as ‘God-talk’ in the sense of ‘talking about God’, from a distance, and this (in many respects) is theology proper. However, to borrow and to reinterpret the expression, prayer can be described as ‘God-talk’ in the sense of ‘talking with God’, which is direct and experiential, with God and the prayer placed in relationship at its centre. For prayer to work on any level for the pray-er and for prayer to be a repeated activity, there needs to be some kind of understanding of God, the world, and the relationship between the two, however incomplete, partial, or useful. To give specific examples, ordinary pray-ers could believe that God answers prayer (or not) for various reasons, and have a variety of beliefs about how

God answers prayer or why God does not answer prayer, or the ordinary pray-er could reflect their images of God and God's relationship with people in the way that they pray. These issues are not irrelevant to ordinary theology, but they arise from the ordinary theologian. Therefore, behind ordinary prayer, numerous ordinary theologies are either latent or being developed and applied in practice (largely unconsciously) which provide necessary meaning and shape for this 'God-talk'. As a result, ordinary prayer is capable of providing data relevant to ordinary theology at a fundamental and formative level.

Studying ordinary prayer

In order to explore ordinary prayer, it is necessary to define carefully the parameters of study, while recognising the significance of interactions with elements of prayer which lie outside those boundaries. Prayer can be broadly classified according to type and context. In terms of type, four kinds of prayer have been traditionally identified in Christianity which relate to the functions they perform: petition (a request for something material or immaterial), thanksgiving (an expression of gratitude for something material or immaterial), confession (an admission of wrongdoing or wrong thinking), and adoration (an offering of worship and praise). Although these are discrete categories, they often appear together, in various combinations.

In terms of context, prayer can take place communally (as a group or congregational activity) or privately (as an individual activity). Although the various 'types' of prayer are present to varying degrees in both contexts, the format and timing of prayer will differ according to the context. For example, communal prayer

may exhibit formal liturgical characteristics or be influenced by the presence of others in extempory situations, and it will often take place at specific times.

Communal prayer brings the collective experience to the fore. Private prayer may use or be influenced by prayer in communal contexts (depending on the pray-er's level of access to those communal contexts), but it will be a largely personal composition, and is not restricted to set times or restricted in frequency. Private prayer brings the individual experience to the fore.

For the study of ordinary prayer, as with the study of ordinary theology, it is the individual expressions which are of primary significance rather than the collective expressions. However, it is recognised that these individual expressions do not exist in isolation from the collective expressions, although the nature and extent of the interaction between the two will vary considerably from individual to individual. As a result, the most productive source of empirical data concerning ordinary prayer will focus on self-reported private experiences of prayer. As Brown (1994) comments:

It is the participants' (or performers') stance on their own prayers which provides the most valid data for any studies of prayer, whether they are to be understood within religious, social-scientific or psychological contexts.' (p. 2)

A thorough empirical exploration of private ordinary prayer would investigate a number of key areas. These areas would include data concerning who prays, when people pray, the content of people's prayer, and the effects of people's prayer (both subjective and objective). The practice of private prayer extends beyond and outside the attendance of religious services. Despite decreasing numbers

attending traditional religious services, there is evidence to suggest that expressions of religion outside formal religious contexts are prevalent (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005; Partridge, 2004). Therefore, data should be drawn from a wide range of samples, including those who remain on the outside, but still express themselves in religious terms. Astley talks of ‘degrees’ of difference between ordinary theologians and ‘professional’ theologians, and does not exclude categories of people from a place on the scale on the basis of whether they are churched or unchurched. Likewise, if ordinary prayer is to be studied fully, it will be useful to include examples of as many ‘degrees’ as possible.

Such an empirical study of ordinary prayer would be able to map out what ordinary prayers look like in real terms, and the influences on them. With regard to influencing factors, it is anticipated that there will be significant variations in ordinary prayers both on the level of the individual and on the level of the group where culture, sex, age, and religious tradition will be relevant, for example. Such an empirical study of ordinary prayer would also contribute to a greater understanding of ordinary theology and the ordinary theologian, both directly and indirectly.

Summary

The aim of this chapter is to contextualise and to define ordinary prayer. Ordinary prayer is placed firmly in the context of ordinary theology according to the Astley tradition, and is defined as the prayer of ordinary people or ‘those believers who have received no scholarly theological education’. It is argued that the study of ordinary prayer can make a valid and distinctive contribution to the study of ordinary theology, both directly and indirectly. Prayer is commonly viewed as integral to

religious experience and through prayer, ordinary theology can be accessed at a fundamental and formative level, with the starting point being the ordinary theologian and not a doctrine or theological concept. It is suggested that a thorough study of ordinary prayer should focus on self-reported private experiences of prayer, and should gather empirical data concerning who prays, when people pray, the content of people's prayers and the perceived effects of prayer.

Chapter 2 Who prays?

Introduction

Various types of survey have been conducted over the past three to four decades which provide information relevant to the question, ‘Who prays?’ from an empirical perspective. The aim of the present chapter is to access the main findings of these surveys in order to offer an informed response to that question. For this purpose, a representative review is provided of pertinent broadly-based social surveys, studies focused on the behaviour, attitudes, and values of religious people, and surveys focused on quantifying and contextualising prayer in people’s lives. The review is followed by a synthesis and evaluation of survey results.

Review

Broadly-based social surveys

Prayer has become a routinely collected variable in a number of broadly-based social surveys. For example, Francis (1982a) reports on the personal and social values and attitudes of a sample of 1,085 16-25 year old members of London Central YMCA using the Centymca Attitude Inventory. The survey covered twelve areas: well-being; worry; values; self image; beliefs; morals; law; politics; society; work; leisure; and counselling. One question about prayer was included in the survey: ‘When did you last pray by yourself?’ with response categories of ‘within the last week’, ‘within the last month’, ‘within the last year’, ‘within the last 5 years’, ‘more than 5 years ago’, and ‘never’. Results showed that although overall respondents attributed a low importance to religion, with 65% claiming not to be practising members of any

religious group, in the past year 54% claimed to have attended a place of worship and 62% had prayed (31% had prayed within the past week). Even among those who claimed to have no religious affiliation, 30% claimed to have prayed within the last month. In addition, women were more religious than men in terms of their beliefs, attitudes, and practices, and were more likely to pray than men with 71% of women having prayed within the last year compared to 50% of men. Younger respondents were also more likely to pray than older respondents in the sample.

Francis (1982b) extended the survey of London Central YMCA members to 2,074 26 to 39-year-olds. Results reflected the same trends as the 16 to 25-year-old study, showing that although overall respondents attributed a low importance to religion, with 67% claiming not to be practising members of any religious group, in the past year 47% claimed to have attended a place of worship and 52% had prayed. Even among those who claimed to have no religious affiliation, 22% claimed to have prayed within the past month. In addition, women in this age group were more religious than men in terms of their beliefs, attitudes, and practices, and were more likely to pray than men with 44% of women having prayed within the past month compared to 35% of men. Only slight variations were apparent among younger and older respondents in this age group in relation to prayer, with the 16 to 21-year-olds from the previous survey still being the group most likely to engage in prayer.

Furnham and Gunter (1989) conducted a series of four surveys of over 2,000 12 to 22-year-olds drawn from the National Association of Youth Clubs in the UK with the aim of exploring young people's social attitudes. The fourth survey included a section concerning beliefs about religious and spiritual matters. In this survey, 37% said that they never prayed. Prayer was correlated with age, with the youngest age group (10 to 14-year-olds) praying more often than 15 to 16-year-olds and 17-year-

olds and above. However, those who engaged in prayer did so regularly, with 43% praying several times a day, 17% praying once a day, and 8 % praying only during difficult periods in their lives. In addition, 48% of females compared to 37% of males claimed to pray several times a day. Details about the wording of the prayer question and the relationship between prayer and other measures of religiosity were not provided.

The British Social Attitudes Report (Jowell, Briik, Prior, and Taylor, 1992) included a set of questions designed to explore religious beliefs and practices in Britain and to compare those findings with the findings in the USA, the Irish Republic, and Northern Ireland across three areas of enquiry: religious beliefs and religious observance; the place of God in people's lives; and the place of religion in public life. The report concluded that overall, respondents in Britain were not as 'religious' as those in the three comparison groups, although they were by no means 'irreligious'. The analyses included frequency of prayer and with regard to Britain, the relationship between frequency of prayer and denominational allegiance, gender, region, and school-leaving age. First, in terms of frequency of prayer, in Britain 27% of respondents said that they prayed weekly, compared with 75% for the Irish Republic, 65% for Northern Ireland, and 58% for the USA. Secondly, when the 27% in Britain who claimed to pray weekly were viewed from a denominational perspective, respondents affiliated with the Church of England and the Presbyterian Church were least likely to pray on a weekly basis (30% respectively), compared with 38% of those affiliated with Free Churches, 52% of Roman Catholics, and 52% of other Protestants. In addition, even among those who had no religion, 8% reported praying weekly. Thirdly, women in Britain were much more likely to be 'religious' than men both in beliefs and practices, and in terms of prayer 33% of women

reported praying weekly compared with 21% of men. Women working full time and women not working full time were also compared, and although four of the eleven selected items to measure religiosity (which included praying weekly) were statistically significant, when age was taken into account differences between the two groups disappeared, with younger women tending to be less religious than older women regardless of whether or not they were in full-time employment. Fourthly, no relationship was found between the age of leaving school and religiosity after controlling for age with the exception of one item concerning support for daily prayer in schools, where the ‘less educated’ were more in favour. Fifthly, statistically significant differences were found between regions of Britain and religiosity. In terms of prayer, 32% of those in the ‘Celtic Fringe’ claimed to pray weekly compared with 25% for the rest of Britain. However, when denominational allegiances alongside the various denominations’ relative religiosity scores were taken into account, these differences disappeared (with the Celtic Fringe recording collectively higher proportions of Roman Catholics and Presbyterians and lower proportions of Anglicans than the rest of Britain).

Prayer has also become an established item in the European Values Study which is a large scale, cross-national, longitudinal survey concerned with mapping human values among adults in Europe (and also outside Europe) periodically since 1981. Replicated every nine years (1981, 1990, 1999, and 2008), the survey focuses on values in relation to life, family, work, religion, politics, and society in addition to the collection of social, economic, and religious data. Prayer was present in all four surveys, which shared one common question: ‘Do you take some moments of prayer, meditation or contemplation or something like that?’ The surveys subsequent to the 1981 survey all included an additional question about prayer: ‘How often do you

pray to God outside religious services?’ In relation to this question, the 1990 questionnaire offered the response categories of ‘often, sometimes, hardly ever, only in times of crisis, never, and don’t know’. The 1999 questionnaire sharpened and standardised the response categories which read, ‘every day, more than once a week, once a week, at least once a month, several times a year, less often, never, and don’t know’, and this was repeated in the 2008 survey. In one of the surveys (1999), a third question relating to prayer was presented: ‘In my opinion, time should be set aside for prayer, meditation or contemplation in all schools’ with a range of possible responses from ‘I strongly agree’ to ‘I strongly disagree’. The scale and broad scope of the European Values Study offers researchers a useful tool for measuring and comparing trends across Europe and worldwide in relation to prayer, especially with the introduction of a more refined and measurable prayer question present in the 1999 and 2008 questionnaires. For example, Harding, Phillips, and Fogarty (1986) analysed the results from the 1981 survey across ten European countries, including 12,463 respondents. They reported that overall 58% of respondents claimed to take ‘some moments of prayer, meditation or contemplation or something like that’, including 26% of those without religious affiliation, 33% of those who never attended church, 30% of those who described themselves as non-religious, and 18% of ‘convinced atheists’. After identifying five dimensions of religion (namely, church attendance, traditional beliefs, attitudes towards the Church, religious disposition, and adherence to the ‘moral commandments’) into which the ‘religious’ items of the questionnaire could be grouped, the authors concluded that religious disposition, defined as ‘the holding of positive religious attitudes and the acknowledgement of religious needs’ and into which the prayer item was placed, ‘is less likely to be associated with traditional beliefs and attitudes towards the Church, although there is

a tendency for this factor and reported Church attendance to be quite strongly correlated' (p. 62). Women were significantly more religious than men in all the five dimensions of religion with the most contrast apparent for religious disposition, where 64% of women displayed positive attitudes compared to 17% of men. In addition, positive attitudes in relation to religious disposition increased steadily with age from 40% for 18 to 24-year-olds to 74% for 75 years and above.

However, the great socio-economic, political, and religious differences among the countries surveyed should act as a caution against drawing any unqualified pan-'European' conclusions about private prayer. For example, with regard to the latest 1999 survey (Halman, 2001), data showed that in response to the question: 'Do you take some moments of prayer, meditation or contemplation or something like that?' overall, out of a total of 38,558 responses across 32 countries, 61% of respondents responded positively, although there were considerable differences among the participating countries, for example, Romania recorded 94%, Malta 91%, Netherlands 71%, Great Britain 50%, France 41%, and Russia 33%. In response to the question asking, 'How often do you pray to God outside of religious services?' overall, out of a total of 36,619 responses across 31 countries, 43% claimed to do so at least once a week, 7% at least once a month, 19% less often, and 32% never. Again, the distribution of responses varied considerably among the countries surveyed, for example, 87% of respondents from Malta claimed to pray at least once a week, compared with 69% from Ireland, 59% from Croatia, 44% from Austria, 29% from Great Britain, and 20% from France.

Bibby and Posterski (1985) surveyed 3,600 15 to 19-year-olds from 152 randomly selected schools across Canada, profiling their attitudes, values, beliefs, outlook, expectations, and behaviour. In the survey, 20% of respondents said that

they prayed frequently (a collation of the 'regular' and 'very often' categories), with females demonstrating slightly higher positive responses on every belief and practice measure.

Studies focused on the behaviour, attitudes, and values of religious people

Prayer is given a more prominent place in surveys particularly concerned with the place of religion in individual's lives or with the attitudes and values of religious people. For example, Francis (1984b) provides a profile of 1,328 churchgoing 13 to 20-year-olds. In relation to frequency of prayer, he found that sex, denomination, and age were determining factors: churchgoing girls (48%) were more likely to pray every day than churchgoing boys (38%); the Roman Catholics (49%) and the Free Church teenagers (46%) were more likely to pray every day than the Anglicans (35%); and the 16 to 20-year-old churchgoers (51%) were more likely to pray every day than the 12 to 15-year-olds (38%).

The use of data gathered from various national versions of the Values Survey, have produced detailed studies focused on the analysis of the religious sections of the survey and their relationship to individuals' values. For example, Webster and Perry (1989) studied the values and beliefs of a national probability sample of around 2,000 New Zealanders over 15-years-old in the mid-1980s, using data from the New Zealand Study of Values survey which utilised the basic international content of the European Values Survey while making some modifications and including additional content pertinent to New Zealand such as prison policy, crime prevention, nuclear policy, and Maori rights. In total, 79% of those surveyed associated themselves with either a Christian denomination (77%) or another religion (2%). The study identified

five dimensions of religiosity and examined how they interacted with other measures in the survey. The five dimensions of religiosity included: frequency of church attendance; frequency of prayer; nature of belief in God; frequency of experiences of a spiritual presence; and importance of God in own life. The question posed for prayer read 'How often do you pray or meditate?' with the response categories of 'never, rarely, occasionally, fairly often, most days'. In total, 27% of respondents claimed to pray 'most days' or 'fairly often', 43% 'occasionally' or 'rarely', and 29% 'never'. By denomination, Baptist and 'other Christian' (which included the addition of Pentecostal, Seventh-day Adventist, Salvation Army, Ratana, Mormon, Jehovah Witnesses, Brethren) prayed most frequently, recording 69% and 61% respectively, while fewer Anglicans and Presbyterians prayed frequently, recording 25% and 24% respectively. Of the other denomination categories, 54% of those belonging to other religions prayed frequently, followed by 42% of Catholics and 27% of Methodists. It is interesting to note that 5% of those who identified themselves as having no religion also prayed frequently. Frequency of prayer and church attendance were correlated with around 60% of the 29% who claimed regular church attendance praying frequently, while conversely around three quarters of those who seldom or never attended church rarely or never prayed.

Bouma and Dixon (1986) studied the values and beliefs of a national probability sample of around 1,228 Australians aged 14 or above using data from the Australian Values Systems Study. Five dimensions of religiosity were identified of which prayer was one: frequency of attendance; frequency of prayer; importance of God in life; self-identification as religious; nature and belief about God. The prayer question was formulated in the following terms: 'Do you ever take some moments for prayer, meditation, contemplation or something like that?' In response, two thirds

of Australians recorded that they prayed at some point with 17% most days, 16% fairly often, 23% occasionally, 9% only rarely and 35% never. Frequency of prayer varied according to denominational grouping, age and sex. For denomination, Right Wing Protestant groups (such as Baptist, Lutheran, and other Christian which included, Churches of Christ, Reformed Church of Australia, Pentecostal groups and Assemblies of God) were more likely to claim to pray most days (42%) followed by Catholic (21%), Mainline Protestant groups which included Presbyterians, Methodists and Uniting (15%), Anglican (10%) and no religion (6%). Conversely, those who claimed never to pray were unsurprisingly those professing no religion (53%), followed by Anglicans (41%), Mainline Protestant groups (37%), Catholics (28%), and Right Wing Protestant groups (15%). Again, figures indicate that even a proportion of those falling into the no religion category were not inactive in prayer, contemplation or meditation. The denominations followed the same ranking order for each of the other four dimensions measuring religiosity. For age, the percentage of those claiming to pray, contemplate or meditate most days rose with each decade of life from 7% for 14 to 19-year-olds to 26% for 70+ year olds. Similar patterns were evident for the other four dimensions of religiosity. For gender, women were clearly more likely to pray, meditate or contemplate than men with 20% of women claiming to pray most days compared to 13% of men, and women were the least likely never to pray (women, 27% and men, 44%). Similar patterns were evident for the other four dimensions of religiosity. Few links existed between the five dimensions of religiosity and the two measures of social status included in the survey (which were based on family income and the occupation of the main earner) apart from a tendency for those at the extreme ends of the income scale to pray more often than those at the middle.

When frequency of prayer was analysed in relation to the other four measures of religiosity, nature of belief about God was found to be closely related to frequency of prayer with those perceiving God in personal terms being more likely to pray more regularly than those perceiving God as a life force / spirit. For example, 33% of those praying most days see God as personal compared with 7% for a life force, 4% for don't know, and 4% for no God / spirit. As with other surveys, a strong relationship existed between frequency of church attendance and frequency of prayer in each of the response categories with 66% of those who attend church regularly praying most days, followed by 11% for those attending occasionally, 7% for those attending rarely and 7% for those never attending.

The US Religious Landscape Survey conducted by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life (2008), involving 35,000 adult respondents, aimed to explore the relationship between affiliation with a particular religious tradition alongside people's religious beliefs and practices in relation to their social and political views. In terms of prayer, the following question was posed: 'People practice [sic] their religion in different ways. Outside of attending religious services, do you pray several times a day, once a day, a few times a week, once a week, a few times a month, seldom, or never?' In the survey, prayer and meditation were explicitly differentiated and an additional prayer question was included for Hindus and Buddhists which asked the frequency of prayer before a shrine or religious symbol in the home. Results indicated that 58% of respondents claimed to pray at least once a day, with correlations identified between frequency of prayer and religious tradition, age, gender, and income. With reference to religious tradition, 89% of Jehovah Witnesses prayed at least once a day, followed by 82% Mormon, 80% historically Black Protestant, 78% Evangelical Protestant, 71% Muslim, 62%

Hindu, 60% Orthodox Christian, 58% Catholic, 53% Mainline Protestant, 45% Buddhist, 26% Jewish, and 22% unaffiliated. The unaffiliated group was further subdivided into atheists, agnostics, secular unaffiliated, and religious unaffiliated. The activity of praying once a day was recorded as 44% for the religious unaffiliated but was predictably lower for atheists (5%), agnostics (9%), and secular unaffiliated (11%). With reference to age, frequency of prayer increased with age with 48% of 18 to 29-year-olds praying at least once a day, followed by 56% of 30 to 49-year-olds, 61% of 50 to 64-year-olds, and 68% of 65-year-olds and above. With reference to gender, females were more likely than males to pray at least once a day, scoring 66% and 49% respectively which was a balance reflected across the religious traditions, apart from Buddhism where males and females recorded equal scores. With reference to income, lower income earners reported praying more frequently than higher earners with 64% of those in the lowest income bracket of \$30,000 or below praying at least once a day compared with 48% of those in the highest income bracket of \$100,000 or above (with the income brackets between these two categories reflecting this downward trend).

Kaldor, Powell, Bellamy, Castle, Correy, and Moore (1995) examined data from the 1991 National Church Life Survey which involved 6,700 congregations and 310,000 attenders with the aim of accessing attenders' views on a range of subjects under the broad categories of social issues, church-related issues, patterns of belief, experience and practices, and information concerning attenders' backgrounds. Different versions of the survey form were used and employed in the analyses. With reference to experience and practices, the following prayer question was posed, 'Which one of the following best describes the pattern of prayer in your daily life at present?' with response options of 'prayer is not important in my daily life', 'I pray

only during times of stress, need or gratitude’, ‘I put aside a set time each day for prayer’, ‘I often move to/drift into prayer during the day’, and ‘both of the last two above’. From a random sample of 90,628 respondents, 20% had a daily set time for prayer, 28% drifted in and out of prayer, 20% prayed both at a daily set time and drifted in and out of prayer during the day, 26% did not pray on a regular basis, and 6% said that prayer was not important in their daily lives. In terms of age, older attenders were more likely to pray regularly with 72% of attenders over 50-years-old praying regularly (i.e. daily in terms of set times and/or drifting into prayer during the day). In addition, a set time for prayer was preferred by those over 60-years-old, while drifting in and out of prayer during the day was preferred by younger attenders.

Kaldor, Dixon and, Powell (1999) examined data from the 1991 and 1996 National Church Life Surveys, the 1996 Catholic Church Life Survey, and 1998 Australian Community Survey. The 1996 NCLS involved 6,900 congregations and around 324,000 attenders. The 1996 Catholic NCLS involved 281 parishes and around 102,000 people. The 1998 Australian Community Survey involved 8,500 respondents. The aim of the study was to provide an overview of the beliefs, attitudes, and religious practices of attenders of a broad range of congregations in Australia as well as to explore the wider social impact these make. Two questions involving private prayer were analysed in their study. First, ‘How often do you spend some time in private devotional activities (reading the Bible alone, intentional times of prayer, meditation)?’ with the Catholic NCLS presenting the second half of the question thus: ‘prayer, meditation, or reading the Bible alone. Secondly, ‘Are you satisfied with your own level of private devotional practice (eg private prayer, Bible reading, meditation)?’ Around two thirds spent some time in private devotional activities every day, most days, or a few times a week. Of those, more than 74% of

Pentecostals, Seventh-day Adventists, Baptists, Salvation Army attenders, and other Protestant attenders had a regular private devotional time compared with 63% of Catholics, 63% of Anglicans, 62% of Lutherans, and 61% of Uniting Church attenders. In terms of satisfaction with devotional life, older attenders were more likely to be satisfied than younger attenders.

Woolever and Bruce (2002) profiled over 300,000 worshipers in over 2,000 congregations in the United States using the USA national results from the International Congregational Life Survey which was an extension the National Church Life Survey conducted in Australia in 1991 and 1996. The aim of the study was the exploration of four areas of congregational life: spirituality and faith development; activities and relationships within the congregation; community involvement; and worshipers' vision for the congregation's future. As part of the spirituality and faith development part of the survey, worshippers were asked 'How often do you spend time in private devotional activities (such as prayer, meditation, reading the Bible alone?)'. Overall, 45% engaged in private devotions every day or most days, 18% a few times a week, 34% less often, and 3% never. Worshipers from Catholic congregations engaged in private devotion less often than other types of congregation.

Bentley and Hughes (1998) analysed data from a number of different surveys to provide a broad range of information covering Australian life and values, and the place of religion within them. Drawing on data from the National Social Science Survey, 1993 with a sample size of 1378, when asked 'How often do you pray?' with response categories of 'daily', 'nearly every week plus', 'occasionally', and never, 34% of Australians claimed that they prayed nearly every week or more often and

35% claimed that they never prayed. Frequency of prayer was related to age with 23% of 15 to 29-year-olds praying nearly every week or more often, compared with 32% of 40 to 49-year-olds and 45% of 60+ year olds. Frequency of prayer was also related to gender with females being more likely to pray nearly every week or more often at 43% compared to 28% of males and conversely, only 27% of females claimed never to pray compared with 42% males.

Surveys focused on quantifying and contextualising prayer in people's lives

Some surveys have concentrated specifically on quantifying and contextualising the place of prayer in individual's lives. For example, Poloma and Gallup (1991), in a book entitled *Varieties of Prayer*, report on the findings about prayer from the 1988 Gallup Survey on religion in American life. Their findings show that the proportion of people who pray has remained static in the USA over the past forty years, although the frequency with which they pray has declined. In 1988, 88% of the respondents acknowledged that they engaged in prayer, as did 89% in 1978 and 90% in 1948. While in 1952 42% claimed to pray on average twice a day or more, the proportion had fallen to 27% in 1978, rising slightly to 31% in 1988. According to these data 91% of people aged 65 and over prayed, compared with 80% of those between the ages of 18 and 24; 92% of those who had not completed high school prayed, compared with 85% of college graduates; 94% of blacks prayed, compared with 87% of whites; and 92% of those living in the South prayed, compared with 83% of those living in the East. This study also examined the prayer experiences of those who prayed. The findings show that 9% regularly felt during prayer divinely inspired or 'led by God' to perform some specific action, while 32% regularly

experienced a deep sense of peace and wellbeing during prayer. Whereas petitioning for non-material concerns, including forgiveness of sin and divine guidance, was practised by nine out of every ten pray-ers in the sample, well under half (44%) ever prayed for material things that they needed.

Gibson (1995) provided a profile of 900 12 to15-year-olds attending non-denominational secondary schools in Scotland, examining the influence of sex, age, and church attendance on adolescents' personal attitudes to prayer and perception of their peers' attitudes to prayer. Results showed that 59% claimed never to pray, 29% claimed to pray occasionally and 12% claimed to pray regularly. Differences between males and females in relation to attitudes to prayer were significant, with females displaying more positive attitudes to prayer in terms of their perceptions of others who engage in prayer, their friends' belief in prayer, and the efficacy of prayer. Although differences between 13-year-olds and 15-year-olds in relation to attitudes to prayer were relatively small, evidence of a decline in positive attitudes towards prayer was observed, with the most marked difference occurring between the ages of 12 and 13 to14-years-old. Frequency of church attendance and attitudes to prayer were also significant, and indicated that pupils who attended church frequently had more positive attitudes to prayer than those who did not attend church.

Dubois-Dumée (1983) conducted a survey with 3,000 respondents exploring the way in which Christians were praying. Although no figures were cited, Dubois-Dumée concluded that prayer today had become less institutional than it had been but it was by no mean less 'living'; rather, prayer was taking place in new contexts, more centred on praise and thanksgiving for those who seriously practise it, and its content was more global in reference. Another study in this tradition includes Janssen, de

Hart, and den Draak (1989).

Krause and Chatters (2005) studied prayer among older American adults with the aim of exploring race differences between African Americans and white Americans. It was hypothesised that older adults would provide more focused data for this specific research area than data inclusive of or focused on younger age groupings because religiosity appeared to increase with age and (within this) prayer frequency. The survey included a nationwide sample of 1,500 black Americans and white Americans, 66 years or above, who were practising Christians, and used 17 measures designed to explore five dimensions of prayer: the social context of prayer; the substantive content of prayer; the length of prayer; interpersonal aspects of prayer; and beliefs about how prayer operates. Overall, results demonstrated that that older blacks were more deeply involved in prayer than older whites in 16 of the 17 measures. Results for the social context of prayer measure indicated that after adjusting for the covariates of age, sex, education, marital status, and region (the south being distinctive in religious terms), racial differences were significant for participation in private prayer, participation in prayer groups, and saying grace at mealtimes, with older blacks statistically significantly more likely to participate in these activities than older whites. Also, the standard deviation for the frequency of private prayer among older whites was 78% larger than the corresponding estimate for older African Americans, indicating a greater similarity in frequency of private prayer among the African Americans than the white Americans. Similar differences with regard to race have been identified by Levin, Taylor, and Chatters (1994), Cavendish, Welch, and Leege (1998), Barna (2002), and Taylor, Chatters, and Levin (2004).

Baker (2008) conducted an examination of the frequency and content of

prayer using data from the 2005 Baylor Religion Survey, drawing on a national random sample of 1,721 USA adults. The aim of the study was to explore the relationship between prayer and sociodemographic factors in a multivariate context. Frequency of prayer was accessed through the question, ‘About how often do you pray or meditate outside of religious services?’ with possible responses including, never, only on certain occasions, once a week or less, a few times a week, once a day, several times a day. Results indicated that, after the addition of controls for religious belief, attendance, and affiliation, women prayed more often than men, African Americans prayed more often than whites or other non-whites, and people under 40 years prayed the least while people over 70 years prayed the most. Also, frequency of prayer decreased as income and education levels increased. As expected, religious factors had a strong influence on frequency of prayer with particular reference to church attendance and biblical literalism. Also, Black Protestants, Mainline Protestants, and those with no religion prayed less than Evangelicals. On the basis of the results, Baker (2008: 180) concluded that some qualified support could be found for the hypothesis that individuals belonging to underprivileged groups prayed more often and were perhaps using prayer as a coping mechanism.

Synthesis and evaluation of survey results

Various types of survey incorporating measures of prayer have been collecting data for around forty years, providing sufficiently comparable, cumulative data which is able to respond to the question ‘Who prays?’ with reasonable confidence within parameters defined by the scope and interests of the existing surveys. These parameters are largely defined by geography and religious tradition. In terms of

geography, the surveys focus on the USA, Britain, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and Europe to varying degrees. In terms of religious tradition, apart from the large general population surveys or surveys of groups in secular contexts, a large number focus on Christianity.

In order to answer the question, ‘Who prays?’ it is important to have access to data which is comparable in terms of the questions being asked about prayer. Usually, at the very least, these will include a question to determine whether or not the respondent engages in private prayer and a question about the frequency of private prayer. Private prayer is used because it is a proven effective measure of religiosity concerned with recording private devotional activity. As the review shows, the prayer question/s have not always been usefully articulated in terms of comparability with other surveys, and in the case of some, two very different activities are placed side by side: prayer and meditation. Meditation is a nebulous construct which may or may not be part of prayer, and when placed alongside prayer in this way, confusion may arise concerning what is being measured. A similar problem arises when prayer is set alongside Bible reading in a single question. Frequency of prayer has proved to be a particularly important measure, and as the surveys show, real differences are consistently observable between those who pray often or regularly and those who pray infrequently or not at all. However, despite the problem of identifying clearly what is being studied, the volume of surveys measuring prayer and the consistency of their findings provide valuable information about who prays.

What do the representative surveys included in the review offer in response to the question, ‘Who prays?’ The key variables routinely collected in the surveys offer a useful starting point: gender, age, and social status. In terms of gender, there is a

strong correlation between being female and the practice of prayer and the frequency of prayer: more females pray than males, and females who pray, pray more often than males who pray. This is a trend which is also reflected in other measures of religiosity. In terms of age, there is generally a strong correlation between increasing age and the practice of prayer and the frequency of prayer: data pertaining to adults demonstrate that with each decade of life, people are more likely to pray and more likely to pray with greater frequency. In terms of social status (usually measured through indicators related to income, occupation, and level of education), the relationship to prayer is less strong and this variable appears to be less predictive than either gender or age. However, there is some evidence to suggest that there may be a correlation between lower income levels and the practice of prayer and frequency of prayer: those with lower incomes may be more likely to pray and more likely to pray with greater frequency than those with higher incomes.

As the studies in the review show, private prayer is only one indicator for religiosity. Religiosity measures usually access four basic types of information about a person's involvement in and commitment to religion: formal religious commitment (religious service attendance); private devotional practice (prayer which is sometimes combined with Bible reading); personal beliefs (for example, nature of belief in God); and the importance of religion in one's own life. When prayer is set alongside other measures of religiosity, it is seen that, although there is a strong correlation between religious service attendance and the practice of private prayer, there is consistent evidence to show that a significant number of people who pray do not attend religious services. Therefore, the practice of private prayer (as with other religiosity indicators) is not restricted to those who participate in congregational life through service attendance, although those who attend religious services more

frequently are significantly more likely to pray than those who attend religious services infrequently or not at all. A few surveys have also shown that there may be a relationship between particular religious beliefs and the practice of prayer, for example, those who believe in a personal God are more likely to engage frequently in private prayer.

Marked geographical differences in the practice of prayer are also evident from the countries surveyed. For example, adults in Britain are less likely to pray than adults in the USA, the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland. Adults in Malta and Romania are more likely to pray than adults in most other countries included in the surveys, and adults in Russia and France are least likely to pray. Differences in religiosity and practice of prayer are also evident within countries, for example, USA studies have consistently shown that certain southern states are more religious and practise prayer with greater frequency than other USA states. Therefore, where people live predicts whether or not they are likely to pray. This would indicate that certain cultural, social, and political factors have an important role to play in determining who prays, resulting in the populations of some countries using prayer more often than others.

Many of the studies indicate that belonging to particular denominations will influence the practice of private prayer. For example, in Britain Anglicans are less likely to engage in private prayer than other denominations (this is also reflected in the USA, Australia and New Zealand). Generally, in the countries involved in the surveys reviewed those belonging to the evangelical tradition and those belonging to denominations such as Baptists, Pentecostals, Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists, for example, are significantly more likely to pray than those belonging to mainline denominations such as Anglicans, Methodists, and Roman

Catholics. Although this information is useful because it provides a broad picture of the practice of prayer within individual denominations, surveys could also explore the more fundamental relationship between the practice of prayer and underlying religious orientations such as Catholic, Evangelical, and Charismatic, for example, which would access the traditions which are an important influence on people's prayer.

A growing number of studies have begun to show that race is an important indicator of who prays. In the USA blacks consistently pray more than whites, and similar, although not so marked, differences exist between whites and Hispanics. To what extent this reflects cultural differences and to what extent this reflects race-related life circumstances are areas which need further research.

Summary

The aim of this chapter is to provide an informed response to the question, 'Who prays?' from an empirical perspective. Based on a representative review and evaluation of various types of survey, including pertinent broadly-based social surveys, studies focused on the behaviour, attitudes, and values of religious people, and surveys focused on quantifying and contextualising prayer in people's lives, a number of conclusions are drawn about who prays. Overall, significant numbers of people practise private prayer in the Western world. However, survey data have shown that some groups practise private prayer more than others and these differences are related to gender, age, social status, church attendance, religious beliefs, geographical location, race, and Christian denomination. Further empirical investigation is needed to explore some of these relationships with prayer in more

detail, for example, the relationship between the practice of prayer and Catholic, Evangelical, and Charismatic religious orientations, and the effect of social and cultural background on race differences in the practice of prayer.

Chapter 3 When do people pray?

Introduction

An increasing number of surveys conducted over the past four decades have contained empirical information relevant to the question, ‘When do people pray?’ The aim of the present chapter is to access the main findings of these surveys in order to offer an informed response to that question. For this purpose, a representative review is provided of pertinent situational surveys which have made good progress in charting the circumstances in which people turn to private prayer. These circumstances provide the structure for the review and include: personal health and physical illness; parents with ill children; marital relations; coping in non-medical contexts; finance and work-related problems; and working in caring contexts. The review is followed by a synthesis and evaluation of survey results.

Review

Personal health and physical illness

McNeill, Sherwood, Starck, and Thompson (1998) studied pain management and levels of patient satisfaction in a study involving 157 patients in an American teaching hospital. Included in the survey was patient-reported use of ways of controlling pain with results showing that the most popular non-drug method of pain control was prayer which was used by 62% of patients.

Trier and Shupe (1991), McCaffrey, Eisenberg, Legedza, Davis, and Phillips (2004) and Bell, Suerken, Quandt, Grzywacz, Lang, and Arcury (2005) are examples of studies which explore the prevalence and correlates of prayer specifically

addressed to health concerns broadly conceived. Trier and Shupe (1991) examined the prevalence and correlates of prayer specifically addressed to health concerns within a wider study of the use of alternative health therapies in the USA. The study focused on 325 adults randomly selected from a Midwestern metropolitan area and collected data pertaining to their use of health services and therapies, use of prayer, religiosity, and religious (Christian) orthodoxy. Results indicated that the sample was more religious and more conservative than national samples, and in terms of prayer, almost ninety percent engaged in prayer with 31% doing so twice a day or more, and almost one third used prayer for health maintenance. Prayer was not employed in preference to conventional health care provision, but alongside it. In addition, consultation with a health professional was 'modestly but significantly correlated' with both frequency of prayer and the belief that prayer had been instrumental in healing which had taken place.

McCaffrey, Eisenberg, Legedza, Davis, and Phillips (2004) conducted a larger multivariate study of the prevalence of prayer for health concerns using data from a national survey of 2,055 adults. Results showed that 35% of respondents used prayer for health concerns of which 75% prayed for wellness (maintaining health) and 22% prayed for specific medical conditions. Of those using prayer for health concerns, 72% did so alongside the use of conventional medicine. Overall, 69% of those who used prayer in health contexts found it helpful. Frequency of prayer for health was independently related to age, sex, education, and individual health issues with increased use of prayer apparent among the 33 years and above bracket, females, and those educated beyond high school level.

Bell, Suerken, Quandt, Grzywacz, Lang, and Arcury (2005) examined the US 2002 National Health Survey and Alternative Health Supplement in a study

exploring the demographic, health, and CAM use correlates of prayer for health among USA adults. Results indicated that 45% of respondents used prayer in relation to health, with 43% praying for their own health. As with the McCaffrey et al (2004) survey, prayer for health was independently associated with increasing age, being female, and poorer self-rated health, however, unlike the McCaffrey study, prayer for health was associated with lower education. The Bell et al study also included additional significant findings such as the positive associations between prayer for health and Hispanic or non-Hispanic Black ethnicity and region of residence (South and Midwest). Those who prayed for their health were also more likely to make use of varieties of CAM than those who did not pray for their health.

Levin, Lyons, and Larson (1993) studied the use of prayer among pregnant women (biethnic; black and Hispanic) for their unborn baby using data from the Galveston Low Birthweight Survey. Alongside the data collected in the survey, interviews were conducted with 266 of the mothers which retrospectively explored the relationship between frequency of prayer ('While you were pregnant, how often did you pray about your baby?' with responses ranging from 'never' to 'more than once a day') and subjective self-ratings of health immediately prior to the pregnancy and during the pregnancy. Variables included age, marital status, gravidity, years in education, and self-rated religiosity. Results showed that 48% prayed for their unborn child at least daily which is considerably more than that which would be expected from national data pertaining to mainly non-pregnant black and Hispanic women within this age group. In addition, poor subjective perceptions of health pre-pregnancy were linked to greater frequencies of prayer for the unborn child, and older, married, and multigravida mothers also prayed more frequently. Although the retrospective aspect of prayer and subjective health data was recognised as having

some self-evident drawbacks, the results led to the conclusion that frequency of prayer may be a useful predictor of a pregnant woman's subjective health of relevance to health professionals, and it was recommended that further investigation into the content of the prayers for the unborn child would further develop understanding of this area.

The role of prayer has been explored among people with musculoskeletal complaints by Cronan, Kaplan, Posner, Blumberg, and Kozin (1989), Bill-Harvey, Rippey, Abeles, and Pfeiffer (1989), Abraído-Lanza, Guier, and Revenson (1996), and Laird, Snyder, Rapoff, and Green (2004). Cronan, Kaplan, Posner, Blumberg, and Kozin (1989) surveyed 382 people in San Diego County with self-reported musculoskeletal complaints. The sample was mainly white (86%), married (53%), and well educated (87% had completed high school). The questionnaire asked respondents about the unconventional remedies that they had used in the previous six months for their complaints and an indication of their helpfulness. Unconventional remedies were banded into the following groups: dietary, behavioural/cognitive, exotic, and other, with prayer located in the behavioural/cognitive group. Prayer was used more frequently than any other unconventional remedy with 44% reporting that they had used prayer for their complaint in the previous six months. In terms of perceived effectiveness, 54% of these rated prayer as 'very helpful', second only to the whirlpool or hot tub which was considered 'very helpful' by 61% of users although the remedy was used by fewer respondents (29%).

Bill-Harvey, Rippey, Abeles, and Pfeiffer (1989) conducted a survey of 160 low-income minority arthritis sufferers in Connecticut comprising 66% black and 34% Hispanic in order to assess conventional and alternative pain relief usage and preferences. Blacks and Hispanics used different pain relief methods with blacks

finding prayer (92%), appliances (70%), and heat (33%) most effective and Hispanics finding prayer (50%), heat (40%) and topical ointment as most effective.

Abraído-Lanza, Guier, and Revenson (1996) interviewed 109 Hispanic women of low socioeconomic status with arthritis about their coping and social support resources. The second most common coping strategy employed after 'engaging with activities' (63%) was religion or prayer (38%), which helped to overcome pain and physical limitations as well as provide a source of comfort and hope.

Laird, Snyder, Rapoff, and Green (2004) developed a multidimensional measure for prayer and used it to evaluate the role of prayer as a coping strategy among adult arthritis patients at the University of Kansas Medical Center. The sample comprised 36 men and 126 women. Correlations were identified between aspects of prayer and physical health issues; for example, greater frequency of prayer was linked to poorer upper extremity function for those with rheumatoid arthritis, and prayers of adoration occurred most often and 'most of the time' for arthritis patients.

The role of prayer among renal transplant patients was studied by Sutton and Murphy (1989) in a survey of 40 renal transplant patients from an outpatient kidney centre in a southeastern metropolitan area in the USA. The study set out to examine the strength of 35 stressors for post-transplant patients (using the End-Stage Renal Disease stressor scale) and their coping strategies (using the Jalowiec Coping Scale). Coping strategies most frequently employed were prayer, looking at the problem objectively, and trying to maintain control over the situation. These coping strategies were also found to be among the top five in a study focusing on dialysis patients by

Baldree, Murphy, and Powers (1982).

Numerous USA studies have explored the role of prayer as a coping strategy among adults suffering from chronic pain with many using the Coping Strategies Questionnaire devised by Rosentiel and Keefe (1983) in which prayer forms a part. Examples of these studies include Rosentiel and Keefe (1983) in a study of 61 chronic low back pain patients, Turner and Clancy (1986), Keefe, Crisson, Urban, and Williams (1990), Tuttle, Shutty and DeGood (1991), Geisser, Robinson, and Henson (1994), and Swartzman, Gwadry, Shapiro, and Teasell (1994). Hill, Niven, and Knussen (1995) also made use of the Coping Strategies Questionnaire in a study of 228 adult outpatients in Scotland in the context of adjustment to phantom limb pain, and 'hoping and praying' was one of the coping strategies used by the amputees surveyed.

Prayer and patient preparation for cardiac surgery was investigated by Saudia, Kinney, Brown, and Young-Ward (1991) in a survey of 100 patients from a Southern hospital conducted one day prior to cardiac surgery. Results indicated that 96% of respondents used prayer as a coping mechanism in dealing with the stress of cardiac surgery.

The use of prayer among older American adults in the general treatment of illness was examined by Bearon and Koenig (1990). In a survey of forty 65 to 74-year-olds, 53% of those who had experienced physical symptoms in the last three weeks reported praying for at least one of the symptoms. Prayers were most likely to be said for symptoms perceived to be serious, and the use of prayer and the seeking medical attention were not mutually exclusive. Those respondents with the least education and those who identified themselves as Baptists were the most likely to

pray.

In a rare European study, Hank and Schaan (2008) drew on data from the 2004 Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe to explore the relationship between frequency of prayer and perceived physical and mental health. Results spanning nine countries (Greece, Italy, Spain, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands), indicated that frequency of prayer in adults aged 50 years or older was negatively correlated with all four measures of physical and mental health, which informed the conclusion that prayer may be an important practice for older adults when they are ill. Although marked differences in levels of religiosity were discernible among the nine countries, only minor variations were present for prayer frequency and perceived physical and mental health.

Parents with ill children

De Vellis, De Vellis, and Spilsburg (1988) studied the hypothetical influence of parents' beliefs about locus of control on their utilisation of care options when their children were sick, using five 'control' factor measures pertaining to the child, the parents, professionals, chance, and divine influence, focusing on results for divine influence and the relationship of these beliefs to a range of parental responses to their children's symptoms. In the survey 72 parents of 5 to 9-year-olds from six different denominations (Unitarian, Baptist, Reorganised Latter-day Saints, Jehovah Witnesses, Lutherans, and Episcopalians) were given written vignettes describing hypothetical asthma attacks of varying severity and were asked to indicate the likelihood of 13 possible responses as a parent to each attack. The strength of parents' belief in divine intervention was assessed by the Divine Influence Scale of

the Child Improvement Locus of Control (CILC) scale. Eleven viable responses were then collapsed into three indices denoting inaction (not doing anything/waiting), help seeking (friends, family, health professionals), and spiritual guidance (God and the Church, the former articulated as ‘ask God to help your child’) which were controlled for religious affiliation, self-reported religiosity, education, and number of children. With regard to the Divine Influence Scale, results demonstrated that the inaction index was unrelated to beliefs in divine influence, the help-seeking index was positively associated with beliefs in divine influence, and (as expected) the spiritual guidance index was closely associated with beliefs in divine influence. Greater endorsement of spiritual guidance was associated with stronger beliefs in the role of divine intervention and lower educational levels. In terms of the other four CILC scales, inaction was significantly related to diminished belief in both parental influence and professional influence and to strength of belief in child influence, help seeking was not significantly related to any of the CILC scales apart from divine influence, and spiritual guidance was positively related to the Parental Influence Scale. This means that the stronger parents’ beliefs in divine influence, the more likely they were to turn to God or the clergy when children were hypothetically ill and the more likely they were to seek help from health professionals, family, and friends (even after controlling for education, number of children, religiosity, and religious affiliation). In addition, seeking spiritual guidance may have been one way through which parents could have exerted indirect parental control over their child’s health problems. Although the survey has limitations with regard to the nature of the sample, which is not representative of either the denominations included or society as a whole, it provides a potentially important basis on which to test the results in wider, more representative contexts and to explore the relationship between parental beliefs

and parental responses to their children's illness.

Cayse (1994) explored the coping strategies of predominantly white fathers of children who had been diagnosed with cancer in a small-scale study of 23 fathers. Prayer was reported as the most frequent and the most helpful coping strategy, followed by gathering information, exploring options, and weighing choices.

Marital conflict

Butler, Gardner, and Bird (1998) showed that married couples were most likely to employ prayer when marital conflict had been most volatile, although for some couples the use of prayer appeared to prevent conflict situations rather than respond to conflict situations.

General coping

Gibson (1982) studied the use of prayer among black American adults at middle and late life as a coping strategy using data collected in 1957 and 1976 from the Americans View Their Mental Health study. Results indicated that blacks were much more likely than whites to turn to prayer in response to their concerns, although the use of prayer as a coping response declined between the 1957 and 1976 surveys and the use of prayer in this context also seemed to decline with age. In both the 1957 and 1976 samples, blacks were poorer, less educated, and more likely to have had family disruption than their white counterparts.

Ellison and Taylor (1996) studied the social and situational antecedents to the use of prayer as a coping strategy among African Americans using data from the

National Survey of Black Americans collected during 1979-80, which included significant parts focused on religious life, mental health issues, and help-seeking. In the study, links were explored between the dependent variable of religious coping and four sets of independent variables, namely, religiosity, social and psychological resources, problem domain, and social location. Results indicated that prayer (either personal prayer or asking others to pray on one's behalf) was widely used by African Americans experiencing serious problems. Although a relationship was evident between the use of prayer in serious personal circumstances and individuals' religiosity, the strength of this relationship suggested that other factors were also likely to be involved. In addition, those whose serious personal circumstances were caused by bereavement and health-related problems were more likely to resort to prayer as a coping strategy as were those who had low levels of personal 'mastery' or feelings of control over personal affairs. The use of religious coping, however, was unrelated to respondents' access to social resources in terms of friendships or family. Females were also more likely to use prayer in response to these circumstances than males after controlling for religiosity, problem domain and personal social and psychological resources; however, there were no consistent variations related to age and education.

Prayer and general coping effectiveness among nursing home residents was investigated by Shaw (1992) through a survey of 100 randomly-selected residents over 65-years-old from ten different nursing homes from the central area of a southwestern state. In terms of sample, all but two respondents were Caucasian, and 77% were female. Using the Jalowiec Coping scale, three coping strategies of interest were accessed: problem-focused coping (gathering more information, problem solving, and considering alternatives), emotion-focused coping (regulation

of emotions), and secondary coping (help from outside the person, prayer/communication with God or family). Residents selected secondary control most often and items used most frequently were prayer and seeking help from family members. Perceived health and secondary control were the only variables linked to coping effectiveness while problem-focused strategies and emotion-focused strategies were negatively related to coping effectiveness (understood as quality of life and adjustment to the nursing home).

Finance and work-related problems

Francis (1984a) studied a subgroup within a 16 to 25-year-old YMCA sample, focusing on those who had experienced recent unemployment (32% of the sample). Although the young recently unemployed appeared statistically to be more likely to reject belief in God and the Church than the rest of the sample, they were also considerably more likely than the rest of the sample to practise private prayer. For example, 39% of the long-term unemployed and 34% of the short-term unemployed reported that they had prayed by themselves in the past week, compared with 29% of young people who had had no recent experience of unemployment.

Working in care contexts

The attitude and practice of health professionals and clergy working in hospital contexts toward prayer has also been the subject of a number of studies. For example, Lange (1983) explored the role of prayer in the practice of psychotherapy among 335 professional practitioners within the North American membership of the Christian Association for Psychological Studies. In response to the statement 'prayer

is an important agent in therapy' 53% of practitioners strongly agreed, and in response to the statement 'therapists should pray regularly for their clients', 31% of practitioners strongly agreed with the statement. The use of prayer in their work was unlikely to be seen as 'manipulation' by these Christian practitioners and although prayer was viewed as very important, it was not seen as a replacement of conventional therapy but rather a part of the whole process.

Koenig, Bearon, and Dayringer (1989) explored the views of family physicians and general practitioners regarding the role of prayer in the relationship between the physician and older patients. Among 160 respondents in Illinois, two-thirds felt that prayer with patients was appropriate under certain circumstances and over one-third reported having prayed with older patients during extreme physical or emotional distress (it is interesting to note that from a patient perspective, a survey by King and Bushwick, 1994, showed that 48% of hospital inpatients wanted physicians to pray with them).

Spilka, Spangler, and Nelson (1983), Johnson and Spilka (1991) and VanderCreek and Cooke (1996) examined hospital pastoral care and pastoral care provided by parish clergy. In these studies prayer was identified as a prevalent pastoral activity. VanderCreek (1998), building on the previous studies, conducted a survey of 286 parish clergy to identify the prayer styles used in hospital pastoral care contexts. Extemporaneous intercession was employed most frequently by parish clergy and meditative and liturgical prayers were employed less frequently. Olive (1995) surveyed 40 physicians in the USA who had been identified by peers as having significant religious or spiritual beliefs with the aim of exploring the nature and frequency of the physicians' religious interactions with their patients. Although praying aloud with patients occurred with only 13% of patients, 67% of physicians

surveyed reported having one this at least once.

Schneider and Kastenbaum (1993) explored the role of prayer in the personal and professional lives of 78 care-givers to the dying who were involved with hospices in Arizona. The study indicated that most of the care-givers described themselves as being very religious, frequently employing prayer as a way of helping them cope with the challenges of their work. In terms of how prayer was employed in relation to their work, most of the care-givers' prayer was private and spontaneous, seldom conducted with patients or their families and seldom requesting specific interventions.

Synthesis and evaluation of survey results

Studies exploring the circumstances in which people pray have been collecting data for around forty years, providing comparable, cumulative data which is able to respond to the question 'When do people pray?' with reasonable confidence within parameters defined by the scope and interests of the existing studies. These parameters are largely defined by geography and religious tradition. In terms of geography, with the exception of one study, all the studies emerge from USA contexts, and apart from a few national surveys, most studies are local in focus. In terms of religious tradition, in addition to the large number of studies where religious tradition was not one of the criteria for sample selection, there are a significant number of studies which focus on Christian samples.

As the results of surveys reviewed in Chapter 2, 'Who prays?', indicate, a significant number of people engage in private prayer with different levels of frequency. People may engage in private prayer as a normal, regular part of everyday

life, and people may also engage in private prayer as a response to special individual circumstances. The surveys included in this chapter have been selected because they reflect specific situations in which people are known to pray. These situations are often perceived as challenging or extreme in nature, in both mental and physical terms. A wide range of such situations have been covered in the review and are clustered around circumstances involving personal health and physical illness, parental coping with ill children, volatile marital relationships, coping in non-medical contexts, finance and work-related problems, and working in often difficult caring contexts. In terms of use of private prayer for health and physical illness, reviews indicate that large minorities of the USA population use prayer for health concerns, both in response to ill health and for the maintenance of good health. A number of these surveys comment that the numbers employing prayer are larger than what would be expected from equivalent national data, thereby emphasising its significance. In terms of ill health, surveys have focused on the use of prayer for common but debilitating illnesses such as arthritis and related conditions, kidney disease, and cardiac problems as well as the use of prayer as a coping strategy for pain, including chronic pain. In addition, the European study indicated that older adults may use prayer frequently in response to perceived physical and mental ill health. In a number of these surveys, the use of prayer for health and illness was positively correlated with being female, increased age, and poorer self-related health. The relationship between type of prayer and nature of physical impairment (Laird, Snyder, Rapoff, and Green, 2004) is also of interest and would benefit from further study. Another large body of studies focuses on alternative therapies to conventional medicine of which prayer is one. These studies show that prayer is one of the most common alternative therapies used by respondents, although the use of prayer is not

seen to replace conventional medicine, but rather to work alongside it. A much smaller group of studies indicates that prayer in the context of health and physical illness is also employed when family members (children) are experiencing these situations.

Conflict situations are other challenging experiences where the use of prayer would be anticipated. However, in terms of empirical data related to conflict and prayer, studies are rare and as such limited in variety. There is a need to collect more data in relation to prayer and marital conflict, and to include studies which explore prayer and conflict in other situations such as wider familial conflict, work-related conflict, and wider conflict in world or global terms.

Studies involving the use of prayer in more general coping situations raise an important issue which also has wider relevance for other studies. Overall, there are relatively few studies which monitor the use of prayer over time, providing information about changing trends. There is a need to replicate appropriate individual surveys at regular intervals and to access more frequently relevant data from regular national surveys.

Difficult finance and work-related problems are again areas in which the use of prayer would be anticipated, and a few studies have captured data to support this. Of most interest are the results of the unemployed study which show that there was increased likelihood of prayer use in the unemployed sample (in a young age group not expected to record high levels of prayer) alongside an increased likelihood of rejection of belief in God and the Church. It would be interesting to explore possible reasons for this. For example, one study has shown that there may be a connection between perceived control over personal affairs and use of prayer as a coping

strategy (Ellison and Taylor, 1996), and the relevance of this in relation to finance and work-related issues could be investigated (perhaps alongside prayer content).

The vast majority of studies in the review focus on patients or clients in medical contexts. However, a few studies have investigated the use of prayer within the difficult and challenging working situations of Christian health professionals such as physicians, clergy (in hospital contexts) and care-givers to the dying. These surveys have shown that Christians in these environments are likely to use prayer to varying degrees (however, again, on each occasion, prayer is not seen as a substitute for providing conventional care but rather is seen as a part of the whole care of the patient). In light of recent debates in the UK about appropriate visibility of religion and appropriate use of religious practice in the workplace, it would be useful to survey UK health professionals about their use of prayer and their views on its appropriateness. It would also be interesting to broaden these studies further to include representative samples from various care-giving professions, rather than focusing only on Christian samples.

Summary

The aim of this chapter is to provide an informed response to the question, ‘When do people pray?’ from an empirical perspective. Based on a representative review and evaluation of various surveys, people pray in circumstances which are challenging or extreme, including situations regarding health and personal illness, parental coping with ill children, volatile marital relationships, coping in non-medical contexts, finance and work-related problems, and working in often difficult caring contexts. There is also some evidence to suggest that there is a relationship between the use of

prayer for health and illness and being female, increased age, and poorer self-related health. Further empirical investigation is needed to explore the relationship between type of prayer and illness, to build on and broaden the relationship between prayer and conflict as well as finance and work-related problems, and to study prayer and the views and practices of UK healthcare professionals in relation to patients.

Chapter 4 Exploring the objective correlates of prayer

Introduction

Empirical studies concerned with the objective effects of prayer may be divided into two broad genres: studies concerned with the objective effects of prayer on people for whom prayers are offered and studies concerned with the objective effects of prayer on other living organisms for which prayers are offered (for example, plants). Academic interest in measuring the effects of prayer in this way can be traced back to the empirical enquiries of Sir Francis Galton (1872) in relation to people and to the experiments of Loehr (1959) in relation to other living organisms. Post-Galton, a comparatively large corpus of studies emerged concerned with measuring the objective effects of intercessory prayer in a number of different contexts. The aim of the present chapter is to identify the range and results of these studies and to consider their contribution to the question of the objective effects of prayer. For this purpose, a representative review is provided of pertinent examples of research, organised around the two predominant areas for which the objective effects of prayer have been tested: people and other living organisms. The review is followed by a synthesis and evaluation of the studies.

Review

People

Empirical studies concerned with the objective effects of prayer began with Sir Francis Galton (1872). In the formal state prayers for the Queen made throughout the

Church of England, Galton identified the petition 'Grant her in health long to live' and argued that state prayers for monarchs in other countries were comparable in spirit. This provided the basis for his hypothesis that if petitionary prayer worked, it was anticipated that monarchs should live longer than any other comparable group.

In order to test this hypothesis, Galton examined the mean age attained by males of various classes who had survived beyond the age of thirty from 1758 to 1843, excluding deaths by accident or violence. Included in the data were 1,632 gentry, 1,179 English aristocracy, 945 clergy, 569 officers of the army, 513 men engaged in trade and commerce, 395 men engaged in English literature and science, 366 officers of the royal navy, 294 lawyers, 244 men engaged in the medical profession, 239 men engaged in fine arts, and 97 members of royal houses. The gentry attained the highest mean age at 70.22 years and members of royal houses attained the lowest mean age at 64.04 years. Galton drew the conclusion that prayer had no observable efficacy because those who had the greatest advantage of influence were also the most short-lived.

Post-Galton, another strand of research concerned with the objective effects of prayer is exemplified by Byrd's (1988) study of the positive therapeutic effects of intercessory prayer in a coronary care unit population. Byrd's study built on two earlier pieces of research by Joyce and Welldon (1965) and Collipp (1969). Joyce and Welldon (1965) studied nineteen matched pairs of patients attending two outpatient clinics concerned with psychological or rheumatic disease. One patient from each pair was assigned to the prayer treatment group. Prayer was provided by 19 people, two as lone individuals and the rest in four groups which met as often as once every two weeks for sessions of up to an hour. All the prayer was supplied at least thirty miles from the hospital. Neither the patients nor the physicians were

aware that a trial was in progress. All medication and physical treatment prescribed by the consultant was continued in both groups. The clinical state of each patient was re-evaluated by the same physician between eight and eighteen months later. The final statistical analysis was based on the performance of twelve of the original nineteen matched pairs. For the first six pairs of patients, those in the prayer group did better; for five of the next six pairs, the controls did better. The authors suggest that the prayers' interest and commitment may have waned in the latter part of the study. Overall, seven of the twelve results showed an advantage to the group for whom prayer had been offered. This is not a statistically significant finding.

Collipp (1969) studied the progress of eighteen leukaemic children. The names of ten of the eighteen children were prayed for daily by ten families. Each family was sent a weekly reminder of its obligation to pray. At monthly intervals, parents and physicians independently answered a questionnaire which asked whether the illness, the child's adjustment, and the family's adjustment were better, unchanged or worse. Neither the children, their families nor the physicians knew of the experiment. After fifteen months of prayer, three of the ten children in the prayer group had died, compared with six of the eight children in the control group. This difference, however, does not reach statistical significance.

In Byrd's (1988) study, over a ten month period, 393 patients admitted to the coronary care unit were randomised, after signing informed consent, to an intercessory prayer group (192 patients) or to a control group (201 patients). The patients, staff, doctors, and Byrd himself were all unaware which patients had been targeted for prayer. The prayer treatment was supplied by 'born again' Christians. After randomisation each patient was assigned to at least three and up to seven intercessors. The intercessory prayer was done outside the hospital daily until the

patient was discharged from hospital. Under the direction of the coordinator, each intercessor was asked to pray daily for rapid recovery and for prevention of complications, and death, in addition to other areas of prayer they believed to be beneficial to the patient.

At entry to the coronary care unit, chi-square tests and stepwise logistic analysis revealed no statistical difference between the two groups of patients. After entry, all patients had follow-up for the remainder of their time in hospital. The group assigned to intercessory prayer had a significantly lower severity score after admission. The control patients required ventilatory assistance, antibiotics, and diuretics more frequently than patients in the intercessory prayer group. In the prayer group 85% of the patients were considered to have a good hospital course after entry, compared with 73% in the control group. An intermediate grade was given in 1% of the prayer group, compared with 5% of the control group. A bad hospital course was observed in 14% of the prayer group, compared with 22% of the control group. The chi-square test confirmed that this difference was significant beyond the one percent probability level.

More recent studies in the same tradition have produced mixed results. For example, Harris, Gowda, Kolb, Strychacz, Vacek, Jones, Forker, O'Keefe, and MacCallister (1999) studied the effects of distant intercessory prayer on the outcomes of 990 patients in a coronary care unit in a double-blind, randomised control trial. The results showed that those assigned to the prayer group experienced lower overall adverse outcomes than the control group, although length of hospital stay remained unaffected.

Aviles, Whelan, Hernke, Williams, Kenny, O'Fallon, and Kopecky (2001)

studied the effect of distant intercessory prayer on cardiovascular disease progression in a coronary care unit using 762 patients (383 assigned to the intercessory prayer group and 379 to the control group) in a double-blind, randomised control trial. The results showed no significant difference in outcomes between the prayer group and the control group, although the trend favoured the prayer group.

Benson, Dusek, and Sherwood et al (2006) studied the effects of distant intercessory prayer on 1,802 cardiac bypass patients in a double-blind, randomised control trial. Although, the results showed that receiving intercessory prayer had no statistically significant effect on patient recovery, the certainty of receiving intercessory prayer was associated with a higher incidence of complications.

Cha, Wirth, and Lobo (2001) studied the effects of distant intercessory prayer on the success of in vitro-fertilisation among 219 females who were receiving IVF treatment in a double-blind, randomised control trial. The results showed that overall women assigned to the prayer treatment group had a statistically significant higher pregnancy rate (50%) than women assigned to the control group (26%), with the difference most marked in the higher age brackets (post-30 years).

Matthews, Marlowe, and MacNutt (2000) examined the effects of intercessory prayer on 40 patients with rheumatoid arthritis including direct contact intercessory prayer and distant intercessory prayer in a double-blind, randomised control trial. The results showed that patients who received direct contact intercessory prayer had a significant overall improvement in the one-year follow-up, while there were no significant effects on those receiving distant intercessory prayer.

Matthews, Conti, and Sireci (2002) explored the effects of distant intercessory prayer, positive visualization, and expectancy on a range of medical and

psychological measures in relation to 95 kidney dialysis patients. Neither intercessory prayer nor positive visualization had an effect distinguishable from expectancy on any of the variables.

Krucoff, Crater, and Gallup et al (2005) explored the effects of distant intercessory prayer and music, imagery and touch (MIT) therapy on 748 patients undergoing percutaneous coronary intervention or elective catheterization in a double-blind, randomised control trial. Neither intercessory prayer nor MIT therapy demonstrated a significant effect on clinical outcomes, although the trend favoured the prayer group.

Walker, Tonigan, Miller, Comer, and Kahlich (1997) investigated distant intercessory prayer and recovery from alcohol dependence in a double-blind, randomised control study comprising 22 mainly Hispanic males. There were no significant findings.

Sicher, Targ, Moore, and Smith (1998) conducted a study among 40 mainly white males with AIDS in a double-blind, randomised control trial using distant intercessory prayer. Some results were significant in relation to a number of physical and psychological outcomes such as length of hospitalization and depression, for example. This study, however, was primarily concerned with distant healing with some prayer elements rather than intercessory prayer *per se*.

Harris, Thoresen, McCullough, and Larson (1999) explored the effects of distant intercessory prayer among a sample of 990 elderly cardiac patients in a double-blind, randomised control trial. Some results reached statistical significance. The prayer group recorded significantly enhanced global health outcomes.

Krucoff, Crater, and Green et al (2001) investigated the effects of distant

intercessory prayer among 150 males undergoing heart surgery in a double-blind, randomised control trial. Although the results were not significant, the trend favoured the prayer group.

Furlow and O'Quinn (2002) studied the effects of distant intercessory prayer among 38 elderly cardiac patients in a double-blind, randomised control trial. The results indicated that, on average, the prayer group experienced shorter stays in hospital which was of statistical significance.

Mathai and Bourne (2004) conducted a triple-blind, randomised control trial using distant intercessory prayer among 33 children with psychiatric disorders. There were no statistically significant findings.

Ikedo, Gangahar, Quader, and Smith (2007) explored the use of prayer and relaxation technique among 78 patients under general anesthetic in relation to their recovery outcomes post-cardiac surgery in a double-blind, randomised control trial. Patients were divided into three groups with one group undergoing CD-led relaxation, one group listening to prayer, and one group being given a placebo. No significant effects were observable.

In contrast to the other studies included in the review which focus on prospective intercessory prayer, Leibovici (2001) explored the effects of distant, retroactive intercessory prayer on the outcomes of 3,393 patients with bloodstream infections in a randomised control trial which took place four to ten years after their hospitalisation. The results showed that the group receiving distant, retroactive intercessory prayer had statistically significant shorter stays in hospital and shorter duration of fever.

Other living organisms

Empirical studies concerned with the objective effects of prayer on other living organisms was pioneered by the Revd Franklin Loehr (1959) and reported in his book, *The Power of Prayer on Plants*. This body of research involved 150 people, 700 unit experiments and 27,000 seeds and seedlings. In the experiment half the seeds received prayer and the other half did not receive prayer. In all respects the seeds were treated in the same way.

The original experiment comprised two sealed jars of water. One of the jars was brought to the Sunday prayer meeting and exposed to three prayer treatments: group prayer; personal prayer (with the jar passed on from hand to hand); and another group prayer. The three pairs of test plantings were prepared under identical conditions and contained eight kernels of corn, eight lima beans, and an unreported number of sweet-pea seeds. Both sets of test plantings were given the same amount of water, one set from the water which had been exposed to the prayer treatment and one set from the water which had not been exposed to the prayer treatment. After two weeks, seven of the corn prayer seedlings had sprouted, compared with three in the control pan; four of the prayer lima beans had sprouted, compared with none in the control pan; one of the prayer sweet-peas had sprouted, compared with three in the control pan. Repeated trials confirmed that two out of three times the prayed for plants came out ahead.

A second form of experiment involved the persons doing the praying coming into the laboratory and praying with as well as for the plants. A third, more complex, form of experiment involved the same individual cultivating three identical pots, praying for growth in relationship to one, offering no prayer in relationship to the second, and praying for non-growth in relationship to the third. For example, one

person chose to plant three ivy clips in each of his three pots. After five weeks, the non-growth prayer plants had died.

A fourth form of experiment involved dividing one pot in half, giving positive prayer treatment to one side and negative prayer treatment to the other side. For example, one person planted 23 corn kernels in each side and administered the prayer treatment several times a day for eight days. After this treatment he found that 16 seedlings emerged on the positive prayer treatment side and only one seedling emerged on the negative prayer treatment side.

A fifth form of experiment was known as the eight-day prayer partnership trials. In this experiment 649 seeds for which positive prayer was offered produced a total of 34,409 mm of growth. By way of comparison 635 seeds for which no prayer was offered produced a total of 31,313 mm of growth. The overall prayer growth advantage was 8.74%.

A sixth form of experiment involved six teams of people. Each team was required to target three pots with three treatments: prayer for growth, prayer for non-growth, and no prayer. This experiment involved a total of 720 seeds. The results demonstrated that the negated seedlings were running 10.95% behind the control plantings.

In addition to his work with plants, Loehr (1959) also explored prayer and silkworm eggs. In this experiment three groups of 100 eggs each were subject to prayer for growth, prayer for non-growth, or no prayer at all. According to Loehr, prayer-circle members provided the prayer for the eggs (and later for the worms) on Sunday afternoons. They found that only 46 of the eggs for which no prayer was offered hatched, compared with 73 for which prayer for growth was offered.

However, 84 of the eggs for which negative prayer was offered also hatched. This led Loehr to conclude that the prayer, both positive and negative, produced an effect. Later it was found that the non-growth group produced fewer eggs and that a lower percentage of these eggs fertilised. This led Loehr to conclude that the effects of prayer for non-growth may have materialised in a rather different form from that originally anticipated.

In spite of the remarkable claims made by Loehr's research for the objective effects of prayer, other researchers have generally failed to build on this tradition. Two exceptions are Miller (1972) and Lenington (1979).

Miller (1972) employed 'a very accurate method of measuring plant growth rate by using a rotary transducer connected to a strip chart recorder.' He selected rye grass as the experimental plant because 'the new growth occurs at the bottom of the blades,' with the consequence that a lever arm attached to the top of the blade of rye grass will measure total increase in length with accuracy. The prayer treatment was applied by a couple from their home six hundred miles away from the plants. The result was a growth rate increase of 840%. Miller concludes that:

the dramatic results of this experiment - an eight-fold increase in the growth rate of the rye grass occurring while distantly located 'agents' were trying to increase the growth rate - suggests that this sensitive experimental technique can be effectively used to accurately measure the effect of mind over matter.

(p. 25)

Lenington (1979) compared the growth rate of twelve radish seeds watered with holy water over which prayer had been offered with the growth rate of twelve radish seeds watered from the same source of water but without prayer. He found no

significant differences in growth rate between the two conditions.

The Spindrift Papers also belong to this tradition. *The Spindrift Papers* detail the series of experiments conducted between 1975 and 1993 and coordinated by Bruce Klingbeil and John Klingbeil (Spindrift Inc, 1993). Spindrift was a small group of Christian Science practitioners exploring ways to measure physically the effects of prayer on healing. Starting with seeds and yeast, they went on to cards, dice, and finally random event generators. Although the positive results from the experiments were remarkable, their work was largely unappreciated at the time. In a number of significant respects, these series of experiments stand apart from others reviewed in this section because they are set within a complex and very specific understanding of the interactions among God, the human consciousness, and the physical world. Comments on this body of research are made by Benor (1992), Rockwell (1993), and Rush (1993).

Although research concerning prayer and its objective effects on plants appears not to have developed any further, research concerning other related types of practice and their objective effects on plant growth persist. For example, Haid and Huprikar (2001) investigated the germination and growth of plants in relation to meditation, Roney-Dougal (2003) explored the growth of lettuce seeds in relation to a healer's intention, and Creath and Schwartz (2004) studied the effects of music, noise, and healing energy on seed germination.

Synthesis and evaluation of survey results

Post-Galton, empirical studies exploring the objective effects of prayer began to be pursued in clinical contexts during the late 1950s and the 1960s with the experiments

of Joyce and Welldon (1965) and Collipp (1969) in relation to humans and with the experiments of Loehr (1959) in relation to other living organisms. Both types of experiment utilized intercessory prayer, although there were differences in application; unlike studies involving other living organisms, those involving humans were distant and double-blind.

Given the diverse array of studies concerned with testing the objective effects of prayer in relation to humans, the field has benefited from published reviews which collate and assess studies according to quality and comparability. The lists produced from this exercise play a useful role in determining whether or not prayer has demonstrable objective effects within the parameters defined by the studies. Two reviews are of particular interest: Roberts, Ahmed, and Hall (2008) and Hodge (2007).

Roberts, Ahmed, and Hall (2008) collated and assessed intercessory prayer studies for the alleviation of ill health, which included 'any randomised trial of personal, focused, committed and organized intercessory prayer with those interceding holding some belief that they are praying to a God'. Studies which incorporated other techniques such as 'distance healing' were not included in the review. According to these criteria, ten studies were identified: Aviles (2001), Benson (2006), Byrd (1988), Cha (2001), Collipp (1969), Harris (1999), Joyce (1964), Krucoff (2001), Leibovici (1997), and Walker (1997). From these studies, only a few significant findings emerged. First, Cha, Wirth, and Lobo's (2001) IVF study suggests that intercessory prayer and the positive results may be linked. However, as the sample used for the study was small, the study needs replication before any conclusions are drawn. Secondly, Benson, Dusek, and Sherwood's (2006) study suggests that there may be a link between patient knowledge that prayer is

being offered on their behalf and medical complications for those undergoing operations (although significant, this finding is unrelated to the question of the objective effects of prayer). However, as only one study supports this result, further work needs to be undertaken before any conclusions are drawn. Roberts, Ahmed, and Hall (2008) concluded that, apart from a couple of studies, results attained so far show no clear links between intercessory prayer and objective effects. However, the following advice was offered to managers and policymakers:

In light of the best available data, there are no grounds to change current practices, although some caution may be wished to be exercised for praying at the bedside for those about to have a surgical operation. (p. 13)

Hodge (2007) also conducted a literature review with the aim of examining the relationship between intercessory prayer and its objective effects. Criteria for inclusion in the review were different to those employed by Roberts, Ahmed, and Hall (2008), and included an assessment of each study, an evaluation based on standards set out by Division 12 of the American Psychological Association, and a meta-analysis to provide a measure of clinical effects. In total, 17 studies were selected: Aviles (2001), Benson (2006), Byrd (1988), Cha (2001), Collipp (1969), Furlow (2002), Harris (1999), Joyce (1964), Krucoff (2001), Krucoff (2005), Leibovici (1997), Mathai (2004), Matthews (2000), Matthews (2001), Seskevich (2004), Sicher (1998), and Walker (1997). Although none of the studies met the strict guidelines set out by Division 12 of the American Psychological Association, which is necessary for its endorsement of intercessory prayer as an empirically-supported treatment, Hodge produced a meta-analysis in order to synthesise ‘results from multiple studies by providing a quantitative estimate of the size of an intervention’s effects’ (p.181) through weighing and averaging the studies’ outcomes. Effect size

was calculated using a fixed-effect model and a random-effect model. Although both models showed that the effects were significant, Hodge recommended conducting additional prayer studies and combining the results of the studies before support is given to the use of intercessory prayer as a treatment.

As the two sets of reviews indicate (alongside the review presented in this chapter), studies investigating the objective effects of prayer have produced mixed results, with some studies showing significant findings, others showing trends in favour of the prayer group, and others showing no observable effects. However, it is clear that certain studies may need to be replicated and refined to either support or to refute the proposition that prayer has objective effects which can be measured in this way and in these contexts.

Empirical prayer studies which explore the objective effects of prayer have been the most emotive and controversial, both within scientific communities and religious communities. With regard to scientific communities, most criticisms relate to methodology, and how these prayer studies meet the strict requirements expected of experiments which claim scientific validity. For example, a key requirement for such studies is that they are easily and reliably replicable. The studies exploring the objective effects of prayer are recognised as being diverse with only limited replication taking place, and even attempts to identify and to pool the results of similar studies are hindered by the lack of a standardized format for recording the experiments. Replicating the prayer studies is also problematic because insufficient information is provided about the specific content and use of the prayer ‘treatment’ in the experiments such as the words used, duration of prayer, and other distinguishing features. Therefore, until such prayer experiments reflect appropriate scientific methodology, they will continue to be criticised by the scientific

community. Other criticisms of the prayer studies have also been presented such as the argument that it is impossible to isolate the effects of the distant intercessory prayer being tested from the prayers being offered by family, friends, patients themselves, and unknown 'global' pray-ers. Many of these criticisms appear to be refuted fairly easily; in this case, it would be argued that with a large enough sample this 'background' prayer effect would be irrelevant, with both control group and prayer group receiving broadly similar amounts of 'background' prayer, making it possible to record the impact of the distant intercessory prayer. Behind this response is the hypothesis that objective effect of prayer may be, in part, a matter of numbers.

With regard to religious communities, the controversy caused by prayer experiments is perhaps less clear. Dossey and Hufford (2005) identify some of the popular complaints made in their article identifying twenty criticisms of prayer experiments. For example, for some, one problem with such experiments is that God is 'being put to the test' which is cautioned against in scriptural passages such as Matthew 4:7 and Luke 4:12. Dossey and Hufford (2005) argue that this position is difficult to maintain because prayer experiments may be able to show whether or not prayer has objective effects, but they cannot show the agent/s or mechanisms at work behind the effects. Other criticisms include the ethical problems of offering prayer to one group and denying it to another group, and the experiments' potential to set one religious community against another, if certain types of prayer from particular religious traditions are shown to be more effective than others. For some, there may also be the belief that it is inappropriate for religion to use science to validate its truths, which raises again a fundamental question about the relationship between religion and science. However, despite signs of unease among some concerning prayer experiments, as major world religions have included a focus on the objective

effects of prayer in their scriptures and traditions, and still have those among them who maintain that prayer has objective effects, this makes the claim a legitimate focus for scientific enquiry.

Of all the types of empirical prayer studies, those exploring the objective effects of intercessory prayer have been the most narrow and focused in their field of enquiry. They are concerned with establishing whether or not intercessory prayer produces objective effects through distant, double-blind, random control trials which minimize as many contaminating influences as possible. While appreciating the simplicity of this focus, there is a puzzling lack of interest in accessing a wider range of variables which may influence the outcomes of these experiments. This neglect seems to run counter to the work being done in other empirical prayer studies. It has already been demonstrated that this type of information is significant for understanding the subjective effects of prayer, and it may also be significant for testing and understanding the objective effects of prayer. For example, it would be interesting to access information about how the intercessors pray, what the intercessors pray, and what the intercessors believe about prayer. Further information about the patients may also prove useful such as religious background, beliefs, and practices. In addition, experiments which are selective in the samples used would allow focused studies to be conducted in different populations. Accessing much of this information would not compromise the double-blind foundation on which these studies have been built.

In the review of studies exploring the objective effects of prayer, two quite different types of experiment have been included: those using human beings and those using other living organisms. One major difference is apparent in the area of contact: human experiments are double-blind and prayer is administered at a

distance, while experiments on other living organisms involve direct contact between those administering the prayer and its recipients. The direct contact provided in the experiments concerned with other living organisms could conceivably influence the outcome of the experiments. It would be interesting, therefore, to see the effects of distant, double-blind prayer on plants, for example, which may also provide a 'purer' sample than their human counterparts. Another aspect of prayer experiments involving plants has highlighted a complementary area of research: the effects of 'negative' prayer. To date, experiments have focused almost exclusively on the offering of positive intercessory prayer. Although exploring 'negative' prayer is a logical step in experiments concerned with the objective effects of prayers, ethical considerations may well make this undesirable in practice.

Summary

The aim of this chapter is to provide an informed response to the question of whether intercessory prayer has any empirically discernable, objective effects on the external world. Based on a representative review and evaluation of a wide range of prayer experiments, there is no consistent evidence to suggest that distant, double-blind, intercessory prayer has measurable objective effects. However, there are some interesting findings with regard to intercessory prayer for women in IVF contexts and the effect of patient knowledge of prayer made on their behalf. In addition, although the majority of experiments did not reach statistical significance, trends in favour of the prayer group suggest that this field would benefit from further empirical investigation. Further empirical investigation should take account of specific methodological issues, support the need for replication and comparability of

studies, and consider the possible benefits of broadening the range of data collected with regard to those who perform the intercessory prayer and those who are the recipients of the intercessory prayer.

Chapter 5 Exploring the subjective correlates of prayer

Introduction

Empirical studies concerned with the correlates of prayer among those who themselves practise prayer began with Galton's (1872, 1869) classic studies which investigated the effect of leading a prayerful life on the constitution of the clergy. Neither study provided evidence that prayer had a positive effect on the clergy's life expectancy or measures of social standing and achievement. Galton's 1872 enquiry was part of a significant debate stimulated by Professor John Tyndall's essay of the same year in *The London Contemporary Review*, under the title, 'The prayer for the sick: hints towards a serious attempt to estimate its value.' Much of the discussion was republished by John O Means (1876) in the collection of essays, *The Prayer Gauge Debate*.

After a considerable period of neglect, post-Galton, in the study of the subjective effects of prayer on those who pray, a growing body of contemporary empirical studies concerned with measuring the subjective effects of prayer has emerged over the past 50 years. The aim of the present chapter is to identify the range and results of these studies and to consider their contribution to the question of the subjective effects of prayer. For this purpose, a representative review is provided of pertinent examples of research, organised around five predominant areas in which the subjective effects of prayer have been tested: behaviour and attitudes; positive self-perception; anxiety and related states; resilience and coping; and spiritual health. The review is followed by a synthesis and evaluation of the studies.

Review

Behaviour and attitudes

Examples of studies in this section focus on the relationship between prayer and personal conduct, prayer and relationships, prayer and attitudes towards school, prayer and alcohol use, prayer and social attitudes, and prayer and volunteering.

Morgan (1983) employed an interview survey to compare the self-reported personal behaviour of individuals who pray with that of individuals who do not pray. He concluded that:

Those who pray frequently, those who have integrated prayer into day-to-day life, seem to practise what they preach. The prayerful are less likely to 'intensely dislike anyone,' 'to feel resentful when they don't get their way,' to 'like to gossip' or to get very angry or upset (i.e. 'feel like smashing things'). On the other hand, the more prayerful are more likely to 'stop and comfort a crying child,' to be 'a good listener' and even to 'get along with loud-mouthed obnoxious people.' They apparently 'turn the other cheek' too.... Finally, our only chance to see if they actually practise what they preach occurs in the interview situation. In this context, interviewers judged the more prayerful as more cooperative and friendly.

Gruner (1985) sought to examine whether the frequency of religious practices of a devotional nature was correlated with marital adjustment in a survey of 208 couples (416 individuals) accessed through pastors and their churches, falling evenly among four religious categories: sect, evangelical, liberal, and institutional-authoritarian (Catholic). The couples, who were of comparable age and who had a comparable length of marriage, were asked the following question about their

practice of prayer: ‘How often have you used prayer in connection with your personal problems, problems of your children, and problems between you and your mate?’ Results indicated that there was a significant positive relationship between prayer use and marital adjustment. Although 15% of respondents with high marriage adjustment scores did not use prayer as a means of addressing such problems, 53% reported that they did so most of the time. In addition, results suggested that respondents who fell into the sect and evangelical religious categories were more likely to use prayer within this context than those falling into liberal and Catholic categories. Building on the work of earlier studies (Butler and Harper, 1994; Butler, Gardner, and Bird, 1998), Butler, Stout, and Gardner (2002) also investigated the use of prayer during marital conflict among 217 couples (434 individuals) using a 102-item Likert-scaled questionnaire. The couples had been married for at least seven years and were Christians, reflecting a distribution of 53% Latter-day Saint, 28% Protestant, and 19% Catholic. A significant positive relationship was found between prayer use and conflict resolution in a variety of ways:

Prayer was found to assist the conflict resolution process through lessening feelings of contempt, hostility, and enmity, and lessening emotional reactivity. Couple self-reports also indicated that prayer enhanced the spouses’ productive focus on the relationship and behaviors beneficial to their partner. An increased understanding of their partner’s perspective, and an increased commitment to focus on self-change independent of their partner were also reported to be enhanced by prayer. ... The findings of the study confirmed the hypothesis that prayer also engenders couple responsibility for reconciliation and problem solving. (p. 31)

Positive relationships between a couple’s religious activities (including prayer) and

aspects of marriage functioning were also observable in a study of 97 married couples conducted by Mahoney et al (1999).

Francis (1992) explored the relationship between prayer and attitude towards school among a sample of 3,762 eleven-year-old pupils. After controlling for individual differences in church attendance he found that pupils who prayed reported a more positive attitude towards school, English lessons, maths lessons, music lessons and religious education, but not towards games lessons. Long and Boik (1993) found an inverse relationship between frequency of prayer and alcohol use among a sample of 625 rural pupils from six Montana towns in grades six and seven. If pupils liked school, however, prayer had a smaller effect on alcohol use.

Webster and Perry (1989) studied the values and beliefs of a national probability sample of around 2,000 New Zealanders over 15-years-old, and relationships were significant between prayer and the following areas: social change (those who prayed most days and those who never prayed tended to be resistant to social change), gender-related attitudes (prayer was linked to the belief that women and men must have children to be fulfilled, although this was a minority view), attitudes to natural resources (those who prayed frequently were more likely to believe that the natural heritage should be conserved even if that required a different standard of living), important aspects of job or work (a slight effect was apparent between prayer and the concern that work did not disrupt family life, less concern about salary, and less concern for accessing further training), and justifiability of questionable social acts (those who prayed most days were the least likely to agree with the statement that homosexuality was always or sometimes justified while the equivalent statement on abortion produced a decline in agreement in relation to how regularly the respondents prayed, with those who prayed most frequently being less

likely to agree).

Bouma and Dixon (1986) found the following connections between religiosity (including prayer) and the following attitudes in their survey of 1,228 Australians: politics (the more religious favoured more conservative political parties, although the more religious were not always more conservative and traditional); attitudes toward various groups (the more religious were slightly 'more tolerant of groups that could be considered to be disadvantaged'); attitude to social change (the most religious were more likely to agree with the statement that 'By returning to the standards of our grandparents, Australia would be a better place to live'); social attitudes (the more religious were more likely to oppose the legalisation of drugs and to abstain from alcohol or drink less than most); and morality (the more religious were more likely to consider that sex under the legal age, homosexuality, prostitution and abortion were 'never justified' and to consider extra-marital affairs, divorce, taking human life, self harm and harm of others as 'never justified').

The US Religious Landscape Survey conducted in 2007 by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life (2008), involving 35,000 also explored the relationship between religiosity and social and political values. With reference to prayer, 44% of those who prayed daily were conservative compared with the rest (27%) and 40% had Republican leanings compared with the rest (30%). For abortion, 53% of those who prayed daily said that abortion should be illegal in all or most cases compared to 28% of the rest. For homosexuality, 49% of those who prayed daily felt that homosexuality should be discouraged by society compared to 26% of the rest.

Carson and Huss (1979) monitored the therapeutic effect of prayer among

chronic undifferentiated schizophrenics resident in a state mental institution. Twenty clients were assigned to a student nurse in a one-to-one relationship. Ten clients and the students volunteered to use prayer and scripture readings while the remaining ten clients and students used only the context of a therapeutic relationship without prayer. All the clients were Christians and 18 were female. Both the clients and the students completed assessment tools before and after a ten-week experience. The findings showed that the students who participated in the prayer group perceived greater changes in themselves and their peers, including greater sensitivity to others. The major changes in the clients with prayer revealed an increased ability to express feelings of anger and frustration, a more positive outlook about possible changes in their lives, and a decrease in somatic complaints.

Ozorak (2003) explored the relationship between religious involvement and volunteering among 224 college undergraduates. Prayer styles expressing a personal relationship to God were positively associated with the intrinsic motivation to volunteer which was identified as the strongest predictor of intention to repeat volunteer service. Loveland, Sikkink, Myers, and Radcliffe (2005) also investigated the correlations between prayer and participation in voluntary associations using the USA data from the God and Society in North America survey. Results supported the notion that prayer frequency and certain types of civic involvement were correlated, and that prayer frequency and participation in groups that emphasise responding to individual needs directly were significantly correlated.

Lambert, Fincham, Braithwaite, Graham, and Beach (2009) examined the relationship between prayer and gratitude among a sample of 1,832 undergraduates selected to participate at different stages of a connected series of four studies. Both *benefit-triggered gratitude* (arising in response to a benefit received from perceived

intentional giving by another person) and *generalised gratitude* (arising from a response to that perceived to be of value and meaningful in a person's life) were included in the studies, the results of which showed that increased prayer frequency was related to increased perceptions of gratitude, after controlling for other measures of religiosity.

Positive self-perception

Examples of studies in this section focus on the relationship between prayer and life satisfaction, prayer and purpose in life, and prayer and self-esteem.

In a series of three papers and a book, Poloma and Pendleton (1989, 1991a, 1991b) and Poloma (1993) presented and analysed the findings of a telephone survey conducted among 560 individuals exploring the relationship between different types of prayer and subjective perceptions of quality of life. From these data they identified four types of prayer, namely, meditative, ritualistic, petitionary and colloquial, as well as measures of frequency of prayer and prayer experience. Each type of prayer was found to relate differently to the five quality of life measures included in the survey. The index of prayer experiences generally proved the best predictor of quality of life. People who perceived themselves as having received a definite answer to a specific prayer request were more likely to enjoy a higher level of general satisfaction with life. On the other hand, Markides (1983) and Markides, Levin, and Ray (1987) failed to find a consistent relationship between prayer and life satisfaction in their longitudinal analysis of data on older Mexican-Americans and Anglos, with the second study extending and confirming the results of the first study.

In a study conducted among 345 members of a non-denominational

programme, *A Search for God*, distributed across the USA, Richards (1991) found a positive correlation between intensity of the prayer experience and self-reported purpose in life. In a study of 100 members of Alcoholics Anonymous, Carroll (1993) found a highly significant positive correlation between a variety of spiritual practices, including prayer, and purpose in life. In a study of two samples of 12 to 15-year-olds, Francis and Evans (1996) explored the relationship between personal prayer and perceived purpose in life. The first sample comprised 914 males and 726 females who never attend church. The second sample comprised 232 males and 437 females who attend church most weeks. The data demonstrated a significant positive relationship between frequency of personal prayer and perceived purpose in life among both groups. In other words, churchgoers who pray frequently report a greater sense of purpose in life than churchgoers who do not pray regularly. Similarly, non-churchgoers who pray regularly report a greater sense of purpose in life than non-churchgoers who do not pray regularly. This relationship between personal prayer and perceived purpose in life, after controlling for church attendance, is given further support in a study among 674 Roman Catholic adolescents by Francis and Burton (1994). In another study, Francis, Robbins, and Astley (2005) explored the relationship between personal prayer and purpose in life by comparing 7,083 males and 5,634 females who never attend church with 1,738 males and 2,006 females who attend church nearly every week alongside frequency of personal prayer. Results indicated that although frequency of personal prayer was much higher among churchgoers than non-churchgoers, 29% of young people who never attended church still prayed at least occasionally. There was also a positive relationship between frequency of prayer and a sense of purpose in life for both churchgoers and non-churchgoers, with 81% of weekly churchgoers and 61% of non-churchgoers who

prayed daily feeling that their lives had a sense of purpose. In addition, churchgoing *per se* did not appear to be connected with a positive sense of purpose in life, with churchgoers and non-churchgoers who never pray experiencing similar levels of purpose in life.

Krause (2004a), building on a previous study by Krause, Chatters, Meltzer, and Morgan (2000), investigated the relationship in late life among prayer expectancies (beliefs about whether prayers are answered, the timing of answers to prayer, and the ways in which prayer are answered), race (African Americans and White Americans), and self-esteem or well-being. Four study measures were employed. First, trust-based prayer expectancies were accessed through strength of agreement with the statements 'learning to wait for God's answers to my prayers is an important part of my faith' and 'When I pray, God does not always give me what I ask for because only He knows best'. Secondly, frequency of private prayer was measured on an eight-point scale ranging from 'never' to 'several times a day'. Thirdly, self-esteem was accessed through strength of agreement with the statements 'I feel I am a person of worth, or at least on an equal plane with others', 'I feel I have a number of good qualities', and 'I take a positive attitude to myself'. Fourthly, frequency of church attendance was measured on a nine-point scale ranging from 'never' to 'several times a week'. The fourth measure was included to isolate the effects of trust-based prayer expectancies from the effects of an important measure of religious involvement, church attendance. In addition, relationships among trust-based prayer expectancies, self-esteem, and race were analysed after controlling for age, sex, education, and marital status. Four main results emerged from the analyses. First, older African Americans were significantly more likely than older White Americans to display trust-based prayer expectancies which was a trend only partly

explained by frequency of church of attendance, suggesting that distinctive social factors pertinent to these two groups may account for this difference. Secondly, older adults who endorsed trust-based prayer expectancies were more likely to believe in their self-worth, Thirdly, the frequency of private prayer was not significantly related to self-esteem *per se*, suggesting that prayer expectancies rather than prayer frequency were related to perceptions of self-worth. Fourthly, perceptions of self-esteem among older White Americans were lower than perceptions of self-esteem among African Americans. Krause (2004a) concluded that although previous studies have shown the negative relationship between racism and self-esteem among African Americans, it would appear that trust-based expectancies were positively related to self-esteem among African Americans which may have an effect on their ability to cope with negative social issues associated with their racial group (although no measures for race-related social issues were included in the survey). The study, however, could not show whether higher self-esteem led to trust-based prayer expectancies or whether trust-based prayer expectancies led to higher self-esteem.

Black (1999) interviewed 50 older African American women who had experienced long-term poverty, and provided four illustrative case studies detailing the relationship between prayer and self-esteem and perception of life as meaningful. Black concluded that the women's close relationship with God in which 'they listen and respond to a God they believe listens and responds to them' provided a powerful sense of self-esteem and gave meaning and value to their lives.

Anxiety and related states

Examples of studies in this section focus on the relationship between prayer and

anxiety and prayer and other related negative mental states variously described as 'stress', 'tension', and 'distress'.

In a study of 708 elderly people attending senior lunch programmes sponsored by the Missouri State Division of Aging, Koenig (1988) found a significant inverse relationship between the use of prayer and religious beliefs during difficult times and death anxiety in later life. Therefore, respondents who were very likely to use religious beliefs and prayer during stressful situations were significantly more likely to report that they had low or negligible fear about death. This relationship was even more evident with increased age and with being female. Similar inverse relationships in studies of the elderly are found in studies conducted by Williams and Cole (1968) and Wittkowski and Baumgarner (1977).

Parker and St Johns (1957) monitored the effect of prayer among a sample of 45 volunteers suffering from either psychosomatic symptoms or experiencing considerable subjective emotional stress. The volunteers were invited to indicate a preference for participation in one of three groups of fifteen each. One group received weekly individual psychotherapy sessions. The second group agreed to pray daily that their specific problems would be overcome. They were called the random pray-ers. The third group followed a programme of prayer therapy. At the beginning of the study all participants completed five psychological tests: the Rorschach Inkblot Test, the Szondi Test, the Thematic Apperception Test, the Sentence Completion Test, and the Word Association Test. After a nine-month period these tests were re-administered. An 'impartial tester' identified an average of 72% improvement from the prayer therapy group and a 65% improvement from the individual psychotherapy group, compared with no improvement among the random pray-ers.

Elkins, Anchor, and Sandler (1979) monitored the effect of prayer on tension reduction after a ten day training period among a sample of forty-two individuals. Tension was measured both physiologically (using electromyogram readings for muscular tension) and subjectively (using Spielberger's State-Trait Anxiety Inventory). Although prayer was found to reduce tension levels on both measures, it was not sufficient to reach statistical significance, perhaps due to the small sample size. In addition, although not statistically significant, frequency of prayer and the perceived importance and effectiveness of prayer was predictive of tension reduction.

Carlson, Bacaseta, and Simanton (1988) conducted a similar experiment among 36 undergraduates enrolled in a Christian liberal arts college in the Chicago area, ranging in age from 17 to 25-years. Three groups were generated, each containing twelve students: one group followed a programme of progressive relaxation exercises, one group followed a programme of devotional meditation (a combination of prayer and reflection on biblical material) and one group served as a control. Rigorous psychophysiological assessment was conducted immediately prior to and after a systematic introduction to either the progressive relaxation exercises or devotional meditation. After two weeks, members of the prayer and biblical meditation group reported less anger and anxiety than members of the other two groups, and displayed less muscle tension.

Finney and Malony (1985) studied the use of Christian contemplative prayer as an adjunct to psychotherapy among a sample of three men and six women. The authors concluded that the 'results gave modest circumstantial support' for the hypothesis that the use of contemplative prayer would be associated with improvement in psychotherapy. Evidence for psychotherapeutic improvement was indicated by a decrease in distress on target complaints. However, the difficulty of

assessing the impact of contemplative prayer was recognised as well as the probable complexity of relationships with other factors.

However, Koenig, George, Blazer, Pritchett, and Meador (1993) failed to find a significant relationship between prayer or Bible study and anxiety symptoms in a sample of 1,299 adults aged sixty or over who took part in Wave II of the Piedmont NIMH Epidemiologic Catchment Area Survey. In addition, Ellison, Boardman, Williams, and Jackson (2001) found a slight inverse link between frequency of prayer and well-being and a weak positive association between frequency of prayer and distress in their analyses of data provided by a sample of 1,139 from the 1995 Detroit Area Study. In this study, the findings for prayer were in contrast to the stronger, positive findings for church attendance and religious belief.

Harris, Schoneman, and Carrera (2005) studied the relationship between the frequency with which individuals use prayer for various coping functions and their ability to control their level of anxiety in a survey of 85 self-identified Christians (17 to 32-years-old attending a Southwestern university in the USA. The survey utilised Bade and Cook's (1997) Prayer Functions Scale (yielding four factors: Provides Acceptance; Provides Calm and Focus; Deferring/Avoiding; and Provides Assistance), Rapee, Craske, Brown, and Barlow's (1996) Anxiety Control Questionnaire (measuring perceived control over emotional reactions and external threats), and Spielberger, Gorsuch, and Lushene's (1970) State-Trait Anxiety Inventory-Trait Scale (measuring state and trait anxiety). Results indicated that the PFS Provides Assistance scale (item example, 'Ask God to help me face difficult situations') was related to more perceived ability to control anxiety and less trait anxiety, while the PFS Deferring/Avoiding scale (item example, 'Pray for God to change the situation') was related to less perceived control of anxiety and more trait

anxiety.

Resilience and coping

Examples of studies in this section focus on the relationship between prayer and psychological 'hardiness', prayer and mortality, prayer and self-reported health over a three-year period, prayer and post-operative emotional health, and prayer and coping with chronic pain.

In a study of 100 subjects, who were either HIV-positive or diagnosed with ARC or AIDS, Carson (1993) found a significant positive correlation between prayer and psychological hardiness (that is, 'a resource in resisting the negative effects of stress, thus decreasing the incidence and severity of stress-related illnesses', p. 19). Ridge, Williams, Anderson, and Elford (2008) undertook a qualitative study of 44 HIV patients in the UK including heterosexual black Africans and white homosexual men. Prayer and meditation was found to promote subjective well-being by providing contexts to: create a dialogue with an absent councillor; construct a life plan; interrupt rumination; establish mindfulness; promote positive thinking; and get results. However, black Africans were more likely to follow traditional forms of prayer such as prayer to God, while white homosexual men were more likely to focus on self-development and meditation.

Krause (2003) studied the relationship between the practice of praying for others and the effects of financial strain on self-reported physical health status among a sample of 1,500 older whites and older African Americans. The results suggested that praying for others significantly reduced the harmful effects of severe financial difficulties on self-reported perceptions of physical health.

Helm, Hays, Flint, Koenig, and Blazer (2000) examined the relationship between private religious activity and survival. In a survey of a population-based, stratified random sample of 3,851 elderly adults in North Carolina, participants were asked ‘How often do you spend time in private religious activities, such as prayer, meditation, or Bible study?’ responses to which were placed alongside a range of sociodemographic and health variables. The results showed that elderly adults who engaged in private religious activity before the onset of impairment in activities of daily living (ADL) appeared to have a survival advantage over those who did not. Results also showed that no comparable effect in relation to prayer was present among elderly adults with ADL impairment.

Meisenhelder and Chandler (2000, 2001) studied the relationship between frequency of prayer and self-reported health among a national random sample of 1,014 Presbyterian church lay leaders and 1,412 Presbyterian pastors over a three-year period employing the Short-Form 36 Medical Outcomes Study (Ware and Sherbourne, 1992). The eight health subscales measured physical functioning, role functioning (physical), bodily pain, general health, vitality, social functioning, role functioning (emotional), and mental health. The results indicated a significant positive relationship between prayer frequency and mental health in lay leaders and between prayer frequency and general health, vitality, and mental health in pastors.

Ai, Dunkle, Peterson, and Bolling (1998) and Ai, Bolling, and Peterson (2000) examined the use of private prayer and psychological recovery among 151 coronary artery bypass patients accessed through the University of Michigan Medical Center. The majority of participants were white (97%) and male (74%). The results showed that a majority of patients reported using private prayer as a means of coping post-surgery and that private prayer was associated with better post-operative

emotional health, in terms of decreased depression and decreased general distress.

Saudia, Kinney, Brown, and Young-Ward (1991) investigated the role of prayer in patient preparation for cardiac surgery in a survey of 100 patients from a Southern hospital. Results indicated that 96% of respondents used prayer as a coping mechanism in dealing with the stress of cardiac surgery, and 70% rated prayer as extremely helpful. However, the timing of the survey may have influenced the positive outcome; patients were approached just prior surgery, therefore, reducing the likelihood of reporting that prayer was unhelpful.

Rosentel and Keefe (1983) and Keefe, Crisson, Urban, and Williams (1990) studied the role of prayer as a coping strategy predictive of behavioural and emotional adjustment to chronic pain among adults. Rosentel and Keefe (1983) employed the Coping Strategies Questionnaire with 61 patients to assess their cognitive and behavioural pain coping strategies. Three factors emerged from the responses which were predictive of behavioural and emotional adjustment to chronic pain: Cognitive Coping and Suppression; Helplessness; and Diverting Attention or Praying. Results contradicted those of other studies which offered some support for the notion that employing cognitive coping and suppression strategies and cognitive distraction are related to lower self-reported levels of pain. In this survey, patients who scored high on the Cognitive Coping and Suppression factor tended to be more functionally impaired and those who scored highly on the Diverting Attention or Praying factor tended to have more pain and be more functionally impaired, while patients scoring high on the Helplessness factor did not adjust well as indicated by their depression and anxiety scores. This may be due to the nature of the pain being studied with chronic pain (often described as continuous) being different to 'experimental' pain (which lasts for a period of time). Another study by Keefe,

Crisson, Urban, and Williams (1990) produced similar results, with the patients scoring high on the diverting attention and praying factor reporting significantly higher levels of pain. Praying and hoping were also related to poorer adjustment to chronic pain in a study by Geisser, Robinson, and Henson (1994), and to higher ratings of pain prior to treatment by Tuttle, Shutty, and DeGood (1991). Although one study by Turner and Clancy (1986), found that increased use of praying and hoping were related to decreases in self-reported pain intensity. Hill, Niven, and Knussen (1995) also made use of the Coping Strategies Questionnaire among other measures in a study of 228 adult outpatients in Scotland within the context of adjustment to phantom limb pain. While some of the results reinforced elements of the other two studies (i.e. the importance of ‘helplessness’ or catastrophising factor in poor adjustment), the hoping and praying strategy predicted only 1% variance in the pain report, and use of hoping and praying was negatively related to phantom limb pain but positively related to physical function perhaps because it is a physically passive strategy.

Brown and Nicasso (1987) studied adaptive (active) coping and maladaptive (passive) approaches to coping with chronic pain. In their study of 361 rheumatoid arthritis patients using the Vanderbilt Pain Management Inventory, two internally reliable scales for Active Coping and Passive Coping emerged, with ‘praying for relief’ falling into the maladaptive (passive) category. In contrast with Active Coping, Passive Coping was associated with reports of greater pain, greater functional impairment (in terms of mobility, physical activity, activities of daily living, and social role), greater depression, and lower general self-efficacy. Keefe and Dolan (1986) also found that prayer was a maladaptive coping strategy.

Laird, Snyder, Rapoff, and Green (2004) used a multidimensional measure

for prayer to evaluate the role of prayer as a coping strategy among adult arthritis patients at the University of Kansas Medical Center. The sample comprised 36 men and 126 women. Greater frequency of prayer was linked to reduced concerns about health and less use of the ‘confession’ type of prayer was also linked to reduced concerns about their health. Those with greater faith in the positive outcomes of prayer admitted fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety and were more socially active, especially for rheumatoid arthritis patients. For patients with osteoarthritis, frequency of prayer per day and frequency of prayer per week were the most important indicators of social activity and emotional health. In addition, prayers of thanksgiving were positively correlated to enhanced sense of well-being of patients with osteoarthritis. Aspects of prayer were also positively correlated with hope, although this was unrelated to patient faith in the outcomes of prayer. The authors noted that the specific nature of the problem (that is, type of arthritis and degree of disabilities experienced) was related to the perceived benefits gained from prayer. Therefore, the individuality of sufferers circumstances is seen as highly significant in this regard.

Spiritual health

The study in this section focuses on the relationship between prayer and the broad notion of spiritual health as defined by Fisher (1998). Using data from The Religion and Values Today Survey, Francis and Robbins (2005) examined the results of 23,418 young people who lived in urban areas in England and Wales in order to explore the relationship between personal prayer and spiritual health. Spiritual health was conceptualised using John Fisher’s (1998) model of spiritual health as ‘establishing good relationships across four areas of life which he [John Fisher]

characterises as the personal domain, the communal domain, the environmental domain, and the transcendental domain' (p. 39). Results indicated that there were significant relationships between spiritual health and personal prayer across all four domains when those who prayed were compared with those who never prayed. Respondents who prayed demonstrated better spiritual health in the personal domain with particular reference to a sense of purpose in life; in the communal domain with particular reference to perceived support from parents and close friends; in the environmental domain with particular reference to inclusive social attitudes and concern about global citizenship and sustainable development issues; and in the transcendental domain which covered religious beliefs. Despite the overall positive relationships between spiritual health and personal prayer, a few items indicated that those who prayed were more likely to have self doubts in the personal domain and were more likely to be concerned about their relationships with other people and bullying in the communal domain.

Synthesis and evaluation of study results

Studies exploring the subjective effects of private prayer have been collecting data for around fifty years, however, it is only fairly recently that sufficient comparable, cumulative data have been available to draw some conclusions about the possible subjective effects of prayer on those who practise it.

Results from studies have produced mixed results. However, a growing body of empirical evidence suggests that private prayer has measurable subjective psychological and physical benefits for those who practise it in certain contexts related to behaviour and attitudes, positive self-perception, anxiety and related states, resilience and coping, and spiritual health. Therefore, prayer is related to

psychologically 'healthy' behaviours and attitudes; prayer is related to positive self-perceptions in relation to self-esteem, life satisfaction, and purpose in life; prayer is often related to less anxiety, stress, tension, and distress; prayer is often related to greater resilience and coping in certain circumstances; and prayer is related to better spiritual health.

However, as the review indicates, a series of recent studies has shown that prayer may have a significant maladaptive effect in chronic pain situations when it is employed by individuals as a coping strategy. These lend support to the argument that people who pray more frequently may lean towards maladaptive, more passive styles of religious coping (Pargament 1997; Pargament et al 1988). However, closer scrutiny of these surveys suggests a need for clarification and possible alternative explanations for the results. First, there is some evidence to support the hypothesis that the relationship between prayer and pain is very complex. Pain exists in a number of different forms; it may be 'continuous' and chronic or time specific, with a discernable beginning and end. The former is of a very different nature to the latter and research suggests that coping strategies tend to be employed more often as situations become more uncontrollable (Bickel, Ciarrocchi, Scheers, Estadt, Powell, and Pargament, 1998). Therefore, the suggested maladaptive effect of prayer in the context of patients with chronic, continuous pain focuses on a very specific, extreme type of pain.

Secondly, it is important to take into account individual differences in patients suffering from the same medically-diagnosed complaint in terms of severity and nature of symptoms, as well as individual differences among patients with a variety of medically-diagnosed complaints within a study sample because this may affect results in relation to coping strategies and prayer (for example, Laird, Snyder,

Rapoff, and Green, 2004). Although a number of studies relating to coping strategies and pain have referred to considerable differences apparent in their samples, only in relatively few cases has this had an effect on the method employed and analysis.

Thirdly, in the surveys which suggest that prayer has a maladaptive effect as a coping strategy in the context of pain management, prayer is often classified as a passive coping strategy. For example, in the Coping Strategies Questionnaire the prayer questions are articulated as ‘I pray to God that it won’t last long’, ‘I pray for the pain to stop’, and ‘I rely on my faith in God’, which, apart from the ambiguous third statement, are clearly passive in nature insofar as a solution to pain is sought from outside the resources of the individual. Therefore, on the basis of the instruments used, some studies may provide useful evidence to support the notion that passive coping strategies have maladaptive effects on chronic pain and that this includes prayer which is ‘passive’ in its approach and content. What is not known is whether prayer which is ‘active’ (for example, collaborative) in its approach and content would have a different effect. In addition, what is not known, but may be the case in view of the generation of ‘passive’ prayer questions in these studies, is whether ‘passive’ prayer is a reflection of the main type of prayer used by these particular patients experiencing chronic pain, which may or may not be applicable to other chronic pain patients (sample sizes in most of the surveys are very small). However, possible maladaptive effects of prayer should be taken seriously and explored empirically in greater depth. It is reasonable to surmise that a person’s beliefs and expectations have important roles to play in the subjective effects of prayer and identifying which aspects are significant will increase knowledge in this area. For example, a number of studies have shown that religious doubt has a negative effect on health and well-being (Krause, Ingersoll-Dayton, Ellison et al

1999, Krause 2004b; Krause and Wulff, 2004) and it would be interesting to test this relationship in a prayer study context.

Some studies in the review draw attention to another significant issue, which is central to the way prayer is used and measured in studies concerned with the subjective effects of prayer on people who pray. A number of researchers have begun to emphasise the complexity of the practice of prayer and to question the stand-alone adequacy of conventional standard prayer measures employed in studies concerned with measuring its subjective effects. At its most basic, prayer measures usually include an item measuring prayer frequency. Often other measures of religiosity are included alongside the prayer measure and these recognise other possible influencing factors. However, some studies included in the review suggest that additional influencing factors should also be considered and that what people pray (the content) and what people believe about prayer is also very significant. Behind the practice of prayer are individual world views which may well have an influence on the subjective effects of prayer. For example, some studies in the review have noted the predictive effects of different types of prayer such as confession and thanksgiving; some studies have found that beliefs about the outcomes of prayer are significant such as how God answers prayer; some studies have found that who you pray for is significant; and other studies have included items which reflect certain relationships with God in prayer such as the 'assisting', collaborative role articulated in 'God help me to face the situation' and 'God help me change the situation'. Another example of the need to appreciate the complexity of prayer and to reflect this in research relates to studies focusing on Christian samples. In many of the studies included in the review, the effects (social, cultural, and theological) of belonging to a particular Christian denomination (or one's religious orientation) are not explored or measured,

but are theoretically likely to influence the effects observed. Therefore, although positive relationships between prayer and the subjective effects of prayer have been identified in many of the studies reviewed, a greater understanding of the role of prayer in these effects is required through including measures which explore the issues in greater depth.

In terms of samples used, studies exploring the subjective effects of prayer are either drawn from broadly-based social surveys or clearly targeted groups, with both making different and complementary contributions to mapping the subjective effects of prayer. With reference to broadly-based social surveys, prayer can be tested for relationships with a wide range of possible correlates within normal everyday life. With reference to clearly targeted groups, most studies usually focus on Christians, the elderly, and particular racial groups (black, Hispanic, and white) placed in challenging or extreme contexts. Although many of the studies focusing on clearly targeted groups are not representative samples and have acknowledged weaknesses in this regard, they have a number of important contributions to make to this area. For example, the samples used in the studies have been statistically shown to be more likely to pray (either because they are Christian, elderly, or in extreme situations), and this allows the practice of prayer and its subjective effects to be explored in greater depth with greater likelihood that results will reach statistical significance. These studies also recognise that each context and group is individual and that the effects of prayer in one may not be reflected in the same way, if at all, in another, as some studies in the review indicate. In addition, in practical terms, these studies amass evidence to show that for certain people in certain contexts, recognising and responding to their spiritual needs may have a significant effect on their mental and physical well-being.

Summary

The aim of this chapter is to provide an informed response to the question of whether private prayer has any empirically discernable, subjective effects on those who practise it. Based on a representative review and evaluation of a wide range of studies, evidence suggests that private prayer appears to have measurable subjective psychological and physical benefits for those who practice it. These perceived benefits are particularly apparent in certain areas such as behaviour and attitudes, positive self-perception in relation to self-esteem, life satisfaction and purpose in life, decreased anxiety, stress, tension, and distress, resilience and coping in certain circumstances, and spiritual health. Further empirical investigation is needed to explore some of these relationships with prayer in more detail in order to establish which characteristics of prayer are most significant in producing these effects in addition to frequency of prayer. Such empirical investigations would include attention paid to prayer type, prayer content, and underpinning beliefs.

Chapter 6 Exploring the content of prayer

Introduction

Empirical studies concerned with the content of prayer can be traced back to classic studies like the one reported by Pratt (1910). However, of the numerous empirical studies relating to prayer, those exploring the content of people's prayer have been least frequently conducted and it has been only fairly recently that this imbalance has begun to be addressed. The aim of the present chapter is to access the main findings of studies investigating the content of people's prayer. For this purpose, a representative review is provided of pertinent studies which fall into two categories: studies accessing the content of prayers through surveys of people's reported experiences and studies analysing the content of prayers directly. The review is followed by a synthesis and evaluation of survey results.

Review

Surveys of prayer content

Examples of surveys in this section focus on prayer content within the multidimensional characteristics of prayer among children and young people, the relationship between prayer content and one or more sociodemographic variable, and the connection between prayer content and coping processes.

Janssen, de Hart, and den Draak (1989, 1990) undertook a content analysis of the answers given by 192 Dutch high school pupils (mean age 16.8 years) to three open-ended questions: what does praying mean to you; at what moments did you feel

the need to pray; how do you pray? On the basis of these data, they concluded that the common prayer of youth can be summarised in one sentence containing seven elements:

because of some reason (1. need) I address (2. action) myself to someone or something (3. direction) at a particular moment (4. time), at a particular place (5. place) in a particular way (6. method) to achieve something (7. effect) (1989: 28).

In terms of need, in order of greatest frequency, respondents focused on personal problems, sickness, happiness, death, examinations, war/disaster, problems of others, change, habit, and sin. In terms of direction, in order of greatest frequency, respondents addressed God/Lord, spirit/power, someone, and Mary/Jesus. In terms of effect, in order of greatest frequency, respondents were seeking help/support, favour, remission, rest, trust, blessing, comfort, protection, strength/power, reflection, understanding, advice. In terms of action, in order of greatest frequency, respondents employed the media of tell/monologue, talk/dialogue, ask/wish, meditate, and thank/praise. In addition to providing a clear picture of what prayer looks like among the young people involved in the survey, the study also emphasised that prayer was usually motivated by problems and that there was a weak link between needs and effects. Effects were usually abstract as seen in the example of illness, where help, trust, or blessing was sought in preference to a concrete outcome such as immediate healing.

In a subsequent study, Janssen, Prins, van der Lans, and Baerveldt (2000) analysed the responses of 687 Dutch young people (mean age 23.9 years) who were asked to describe their praying behaviour and also to describe needs, actions,

methods, times, places, and effects. On the basis of these data they described four varieties of praying. In *petitionary* prayer the effect is central. Here individuals ask that ‘things will pass off as favourably as possible’, that ‘relations will be improved’, that ‘war will be prevented’, that ‘things will be good’, that there will be ‘a happy end’, and that ‘we can make things happen’. In *religious* prayer the direction toward God is central. Here individuals are talking with God, thanking God, hoping to experience God, building a relationship with God, inviting God to share their hopes and sorrows. In *meditative* prayer the action is central. Here individuals meditate, reflect, ponder, consider, concentrate, often looking inwards toward the inner-self. In *psychological* prayer the inner need is central. Here individuals pray ‘when my mother died’, ‘when my father had a heart attack’, ‘when my father and stepmother got divorced’, ‘when my father attempted suicide’, ‘when I was in crisis’, ‘when my friend did not come home’, or ‘when I got lost’. In practice, praying was recognised as a combination of the identified varieties of prayer.

Ladd and Spilka (2002) studied 368 students from a Midwestern state university (mean age 27) to examine the theory that prayer is related to the creation of connections in three ways: a connection with oneself (inward); a connection with others (outward); and a connection with the divine (upward). In the study, participants were asked to identify what they ‘thought about’ while praying, drawing from a list of words and phrases. Results confirmed the theory and indicated that inward prayers are found mainly in the context of outward and upward prayer. For example, in the case of outward prayer, self and sense of well-being emerge through comparison with others and in the case of upward prayer, personal coping is enabled through seeking external strength. A subsequent study by Ladd and Spilka (2006) of 570 students at the same university included two additional relevant observations.

The earlier a person started praying was linked to a broader range of practices of praying and the later a person started praying was linked to a decreased likelihood that self-examination and petition would feature.

McKinney and McKinney (1999) explored the praying habits of 127 psychology and undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 23-years-old. Of the 107 who claimed on the screening questionnaire to pray at least a few times a year, 77 accepted the invitation to keep a proper diary for seven days. A content analysis of the initial screening questionnaire identified six types of prayer within the students' definitions of prayer and in which they purported to engage: adoration, petition, thanksgiving, reparation, communication, and relaxation. When the prayers from the diaries were counted the following averages emerged.

Over a 7-day period the average number of prayers of adoration was 1.18; petition, 12.75; reparation, 0.79; thanksgiving, 4.28; simple communication, 1.21; and prayer as relaxation, 0.91. (p. 204)

Of the petitionary prayers, most were requests for personal favours, such as: 'to get back into my schoolwork', 'to get my job', 'for my Lord to guide me', 'to help me plan a date party', 'to afford graduate school and receive my financial loans'. The remainder included requests for family and friends ('my grandfather who has cancer', 'the prayer group') or for more global situations ('for the peace of the world', 'for the local community'). Although the majority of prayers were for the self, these were not necessarily 'narcissistic' and included requests to 'better understand your holy will' and requests that 'I can deal better with my anger', for example. In the next most frequent category, prayers for family, a number were concerned with deceased relatives and some addressed these relatives directly. In

terms of core concerns addressed by most respondents, relationships and success featured most prominently.

Mountain (2005) employed the method of grounded theory to analyse the responses of 60 ten-year-old children in Australia gathered through videotaped interviews, illustrations, and written exercises. These data suggested four main functions for prayer defined as: finding help for self through individual connection to God; finding social identity through communal ritual, activity, and belief; finding help for others, both close and distant; and expressing praise and thanksgiving.

Krause and Chatters (2005) examined race differences in prayer among 1,500 older African Americans and older white Americans. Two of the five dimensions of prayer under investigation indicated differences within prayer content between African Americans and white Americans: the substantive content of prayer and interpersonal aspects of prayer. In terms of the substantive content of prayer, older African Americans and older white Americans differed significantly on each of the eight prayer content measures identified, with blacks more likely than whites to pray that God's will be done; to offer prayers of thanksgiving; to ask for God's guidance; to engage in meditative prayer conceptualised as feeling God's presence in prayer and thinking about God in prayer; and to ask God to help them maintain their faith. However, whites were more likely than blacks to pray for material things and while both whites and blacks were likely to pray for their health, blacks did so more often. The adjusted mean indicated that the type of prayer asking that God's will be done was particularly important for blacks and that thanksgiving was particularly important for whites. In addition, the standard variations indicated that greater variance in responses was present among the white respondents suggesting that there was less variation in black responses than in white responses with the exception of

praying for material things. In terms of interpersonal aspects of prayer, two items explored how often respondents prayed for others and how often respondents felt others prayed for them. Results showed that older African Americans were significantly more likely than older white Americans to pray for people they know with the standard deviation for older white Americans being greater than that for older African Americans indicating that there was more variation among the older white Americans than the African Americans in the activity of praying for others.

Baker (2008) conducted an examination of the frequency and content of prayer using data from the 2005 Baylor Religion Survey, drawing on a national random sample of 1,721 USA adults. The aim of the study was to explore the relationship between prayer and sociodemographic factors in a multivariate context. In terms of content of prayer, those who claimed to pray were asked, 'The last time you prayed, did you pray about the following ...?' with a choice of 'yes/no' responses for each topic of prayer. Results showed that 89% prayed for their family, 75% for someone known to them, 66% for their relationship with God, 62% for general world concerns, 61% for confessing sins, 57% for personal health, 49% for praise and adoration, 47% for someone they did not know, and 33% for financial security.

Of these content items, four items were explored in greater detail: financial security and personal health (articulated as material needs – petitionary – prayer content) and confessing sins and personal relationship with God (articulated as personal spiritual concerns prayer content). In terms of material needs (petitionary) prayer content, with each increase in income category, there was a significant decrease in the likelihood of praying for financial security and a significant decrease in praying about personal health concerns. Secondly, with each increase on the education measure, there was a decrease in the likelihood of praying about personal

health concerns. Thirdly, African Americans were significantly more likely to pray about financial security and health concerns than whites. Fourthly, age was related negatively to praying for financial security with the likelihood decreasing with each additional year of age. Fifthly, gender was unrelated to either praying about financial security or health concerns. In terms of personal spiritual concerns prayer content, it was found that these were not significantly related to most of the sociodemographic variables included in the survey with the exception of income; with each increase in income category, it was less likely that respondents would pray about confession of sins and about their relationship with God. As with the interpretation of the results for frequency of prayer, Baker (2008: 180) also found some support for the hypothesis that underprivileged social groups are more likely to pray about petitionary concerns even after controlling for religious variables.

Bade and Cook (2008) studied the content of Christian prayer in order to access the effects or functions of prayer in the coping process. The study involved a small sample of 21 women and 15 men between 18 and 69 years, 89% white and 11% Hispanic who were drawn from Christian churches and Christian university centres in the south-central USA. Over 90% of the sample was Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, or Catholic, with over 50% praying more than once a day and all but one praying at least several times a week. Concept mapping was employed to describe and organise the participants' beliefs about the function of prayer when coping with personal difficulties (the method included item generation, item reduction, and sorting tasks). Subsequent multidimensional scaling and cluster analysis produced a cluster map to represent participant responses. The 58 items generated were organised into eleven clusters informed, in part, by the participants' sorting activity. Among the results, the four most frequently used prayer content items were: to ask

God to help through the difficult times; to pray for God to lead me in the right direction; to give thanks; and to pray for strength to handle difficulties. The four least frequently used items were: to give a ritual to fall back on; to ask for quick fixes to problems; to search for connectedness to the infinite; and to meditate. Relationships between the eleven clusters broadly reflected three bipolar dimensions: approach/avoidance (where coping activities are orientated toward the stressor or away from the stressor, supported by Roth and Cohen, 1986); internal focus/external focus (where coping effort is within the individual or outside the individual, supported by Lazarus and Folkman 1984); and self-directing/deferring (where the individual tends to work without God or wait for God to solve the problem, and the bipolar midpoint is collaborative working to cope, supported by Pargament, Ano, and Wachholtz, 2005; and Pargament et al, 1988).

Analyses of prayer

Examples of surveys in this section focus on the analyses of prayers left in a variety of Christian settings such as church, shrine, and hospital.

Schmied (2002) analysed 2,674 prayers inscribed in the prayer intention books provided by seven Roman Catholic churches in Germany from the 1970s to the 1990s: four parish churches, one pilgrimage church associated with an education centre, a chapel of a university hospital, and a chapel of an international airport. The analyses examined four main issues: the addressees of the prayers; the kinds of prayers; the reference persons and groups; and the prayer intentions. First, just 72% of the prayers specified an addressee, which included 27% addressed to God, 21% to Mary, and 5% to Jesus. Secondly, 91% of the prayers included some form of

petition, while 23% included thanksgiving, 3% trust, 2% praise, 1% complaint, 1% love, and 2% some other concept (acknowledging that individual prayers can contain more than one kind of prayer). Thirdly, 59% of the prayers made petition only for others, 11% for self and others, 16% only for self, and the remaining 15% made no statement. Fourthly, the prayer intentions were allocated to seven categories, with some prayers embracing more than one category. Over a quarter (28%) of the prayers referred to health or to recovery of health, 22% to protection in general, 16% to religious matters (including vocations and forgiveness), 9% to specific projects (including surgical operations and long journeys), 8% to peace, 7% to faith, and 34% to other issues (acknowledging that individual prayers can contain more than one intention).

Working on a much smaller scale, Brown and Burton (2007) analysed 61 prayer requests left in a rural Anglican parish church over an eight-month period in 2004. The majority of the prayers were for people who were ill, in hospital, about to undergo operations, or recovering from illness or operations (43%), or for people who had died (26%). The other prayer requests fell into the categories of general thanksgiving, other, strength to cope, world situations, and new personal situations.

Burton (2010) undertook a more comprehensive study of prayer requests left on a prayer tree in an English parish church over a twelve-month period in 2007-08. Of the 2,107 prayers left, 620 (29%) were concerned with prayers for the dead, and these prayers provided the focus for the analyses. The analyses covered addressees and subject areas: addressees included the deceased, the church, God, and the memorial-style prayer, while subject areas included emotions and feelings (59%), hopes for the dead (13%), prayers for God to act (8%), and prayers relating to concepts of the afterlife (20%). Burton (2010) concluded that the prayers appeared to

indicate that many of the prayer authors believed in traditional concepts of life and death. In addition, for a majority of prayer authors, written prayer requests provided an opportunity to express their grief for the deceased and their hopes about the afterlife, and as such acted as an instrument for coping in these contexts.

Lee (2009) conducted a content analysis of around 500 prayers written to Maria and God left by visitors at a religious shrine in Germany called 'Maria of the Oak'. The prayers fell into two basic concerns: requests for Maria 'to help' and recognition of Maria's help (often with instances of help received being precisely cited). Most of the prayers were concerned with everyday problems, with the most common request being for health issues. Prayers also related to relationships, financial assistance, legal issues, and school or career success. The role allocated to Maria was to make the transcendent immanent in response to pilgrim's petitions at specific points in time for specific reasons. Although the pilgrims leaving the prayers were understood as being 'operationally closed' to one another in sociological terms, in another sense there was real societal participation because they all conformed to and supported specific, acceptable types of behaviour expected at the shrine, which was necessary for the positive outcome of requests. This conformity extended to the content of the prayers themselves, which followed the same basic patterns, stylistically. Lee (2009) concluded that:

At the sacred place investigated here, vernacular religion continues to produce accounts of divine intervention within contemporary society. Participating pilgrims corroborate one another's testimonies that everything is virtually religious and everything that happens reflects God's will. ... In the writings of faithful pilgrims, medical, economic, legal, educational, and other specialized problems and solutions reappear as religious problems and

solutions. ... With her multiple functions, Maria appears to sabotage the autonomy and operational closure of all functional systems. She can solve every problem with a sacred solution. (p.229)

Three studies have focused on prayer requests left in hospital settings. Grossoehme (1996) analysed 63 prayers (within which there were 75 separate expressions) in a chapel prayer book at a paediatric hospital in Ohio, USA, covering a six-month period in an attempt to discover how the prayer authors viewed God and God's nature. Most of the prayers were intercessory prayers (51 of 75) followed by thanksgiving (ten of 75). In terms of addressee, the following figures are provided: some prayers were addressed to the worshipping community and began with the words, 'Please prayer for' (15 of 63); most prayers were addressed to God either explicitly (17 of 63) or implicitly (18 of 63); a minority were addressed to Jesus (7 of 63); and no prayers were addressed to the Holy Spirit. The prayer authors perceived God as one who helps, intervenes, heals, and provides revelation. Grossoehme (1996) concluded that such prayers provide an important point of access to people's images of God and that the majority of prayer authors, at particularly vulnerable times in their lives, appear to believe that God is able to act in response to prayer or at least to desire God's action. In addition, a special relationship is created between the prayer authors and the praying community.

Hancocks and Lardner's study (2007) involved the analysis of 952 prayers from prayer boards and books left in 2005 at the chapels and prayer/quiet rooms of three of the six hospitals which comprise Leeds Teaching Hospitals, England. Categorized according to type, 58% were concerned with specific intention (for named individuals who were sick), 8% for general intention (for the sick but of a more general nature), 19% for death (including people who were dying), 10% for

thanksgiving (in instances of recovery, the life of the dead, and the hospital), 1% for forgiveness (for themselves or others), and 4% for hospital staff and carers. In terms of addressee, 35% were addressed to God explicitly, 21% to God implicitly, 19% to the worshipping community, 17% to an uncertain addressee, and 8% to a person or persons directly. The different names used for God were also identified and quantified as were thirty separate categories illustrating content. Most frequent content referred to in the prayers were illness/treatment, thanks, strength, recovery/wellness, and love. The most infrequent content employed was faith and forgiveness. Hancocks and Lardner compared their results to Grosseohme's (1996) findings, concluding that they were largely similar although some differences were evident.

Cadge and Daglian (2008) analysed the prayers left in the prayer book at John Hopkins University Hospital between 1999 and 2005. Results indicated that the prayers were usually petitionary (28%), or with elements of petition and thanksgiving (28%), followed by thanksgiving (22%). God was portrayed as 'accessible, listening, and a source of emotional and psychological support' and desired outcomes for petitions were usually presented in abstract terms, focusing on requests for affective change rather than physical change.

Synthesis and evaluation of study results

Studies exploring the content of prayer have appeared only recently in relation to the comparative history and number of many other groups of prayer studies. In part, this is a response to a growing recognition among researchers that prayer is a complex, multi-dimensional activity and if prayer and its subjective effects are to be

adequately measured, its various components need to be taken seriously as possible influencing factors. Although measuring the practice of prayer in terms of frequency has proved useful and predictive, prayer content (broadly conceived) can provide a far more detailed and richer picture of which aspects of prayer are significant in particular contexts. This is important from both an academic perspective and a practical perspective, in terms of applying appropriately and effectively the results of studies to clinical or pastoral care contexts. Studies of the content of prayer have also arisen, in part, because of an emerging interest in ordinary people's prayers left in religious settings, which are of relevance to both churches and hospital chaplaincy. Although these initial studies may or may not employ the term 'ordinary prayer', which is understood as a significant source of ordinary theology, they acknowledge the value of ordinary people's prayers by making them worthy of study with a view to influencing practice.

Presented in the review are two different but complementary approaches to the study of the content of prayer: the analysis of the content of prayers through surveys of peoples' reported experiences and the analysis of the content of prayers directly. With regard to the former, the advantages of this approach include the researcher's control over the type of data gathered because every element in the studies is devised to respond to specific concerns and interests. As a result, a far broader and controlled picture of prayer can be formulated. However, as some studies included in the review reflect, it is important to have large enough samples, if results are to reach statistical significance. With regard to the latter, the advantages of this approach include the capacity to access prayers directly, without creating artificial prayer scenarios for participants and without eliciting information about participants' experiences of prayer through the processes of self-reflection and

evaluation. Real prayers are the focus, produced by people who exercise choice in specific religious and cultural contexts, at specific moments in time. Prayers can also be accessed in large quantities which mean that analyses have the potential to provide reliable support for areas of interest such as identified subjects of prayer, expectations, and images of God, for example. However, it should also be noted that these real prayers are likely to be affected by the religious and cultural contexts as well as the solitary participation in a collective ritual act (Lee, 2009). The main disadvantage of using data of this nature is the absence of basic information pertaining to key sociodemographic variables such as age and gender, for example, which are routinely collected in most prayer studies.

Taken collectively, the studies included in the review show some common areas of agreement. Prayer is largely motivated by need, arising primarily from problems or difficulties in life. Most prayers appear to be petitionary (although petitionary is used in a narrower sense in studies which are related to psychology than those related to theology), followed by prayers for thanksgiving. Therefore, on the basis of evidence accumulated so far, it appears that other traditionally recognised forms of prayer such as confession and adoration are unfamiliar to many of those engaging in prayer. Most petitions are concerned with health (illness) and death, supporting the common recognition that prayer is often used when people are experiencing circumstances over which they have little control. Many prayers focus on other people (family and friends) rather than the self directly, although some studies suggest that this may be age related, with younger people being more likely to focus on the self and particular subjects such as personal favours, relationships, and success. In most prayers, God is usually the primary addressee, which is either articulated explicitly or implied. This raises questions about how people understand

the central Christian belief in God as Trinity and the purpose and value of the Trinity in ordinary people's lives and prayers. Grosseohme (1996: 38), for example, speculates that many people may not have an adequate understanding of the Trinity, and is puzzled why the most directly accessible person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, is rarely addressed or referred to. In addition, he surmises that people may associate particular activities and concerns with specific persons of the Trinity and that the Trinity may be viewed in a hierarchical way with the Father at the top, followed by Son, then Holy Spirit.

In response to their prayers, studies show that people expect either a physical outcome, which in some way relates directly to their petition or they expect an affective, abstract outcome, which relates less directly to their petition. The nature of the expectation may in part be driven by the prayer context; for example, an extreme case of this would be the Marian shrine in Lee's (2009) study which seems to require petitions for concrete outcomes. Both types of requested outcome are significant insofar as they reflect a person's attitude to and relationship with the external world: one approach attempts to effect change in the external world in order to bring the external world in line with their internal world, while the other approach attempts to effect change in their internal world in order to adjust to circumstances presented in the external world.

In more specific terms, some pioneering prayer studies, which fall under the umbrella of psychology, have begun exploring prayer content in order to learn more about its processes. In these studies, the idea of prayer as connection has been useful, with the understanding of prayer as connection with self, connection with others, and connection with the divine as well as the relationships among them. Exploration of the role of prayer as coping strategy has also been useful, with the understanding that

different forms of prayer provide different ways of coping, which has significant implications for practice if some ways of praying are identified as more effective than others.

Prayer content and sociodemographic connections have also begun to be studied. These search for and recognise differences (and similarities) among groups of people in various categories, which are defined by age, gender, race, income, education, and location, for example. Particularly striking differences are emerging between prayer content and race. These variations may be a result of cultural differences and race-related life circumstances. There has also been some indication that income levels and education may be related to frequency of prayer for financial security and health concerns, and that those belonging to underprivileged groups are more likely to engage in petitionary prayer. This type of research is important because it recognises broad individual differences among certain groups of people and that certain groups may be using prayer in different ways.

Overall, the recent interest in the content of prayer has only begun to address the imbalance clearly apparent in empirical prayer studies. However, initial results indicate that investigating prayer content has a valuable role to play in the study of prayer and its effects. The initial results also indicate that the study of ordinary people's prayers may provide a rich source of information about people's concerns, beliefs, and expectations. There is a need for more studies to be conducted, which identify and incorporate relevant aspects of prayer content in order to broaden and deepen our understanding of prayer.

Summary

The aim of this chapter is to access the main findings of studies investigating the content of people's prayers. Based on a representative review and evaluation of pertinent studies, which include studies accessing the content of prayers through surveys of people's reported experiences and studies analysing the content of prayers directly, a number of conclusions are drawn. Overall, the studies demonstrate some basic agreement about the content of prayer: prayers are usually about problems; prayers are often for other people; prayers are usually concerned with health and death; prayers usually address God; and prayers often have either concrete or abstract anticipated outcomes. In addition, a number of studies conducted so far have suggested that prayer content may well produce related, discernable effects and that prayer content may be linked to key sociodemographic variables. However, it is acknowledged that prayer content in a developed sense is present in only a small minority of studies concerned with prayer, although its significance has now begun to be appreciated by researchers. Substantial work still needs to be done mapping prayer content and the effects of prayer content on those who pray in different contexts to ensure that practical applications based on the results of prayer studies are properly informed and effective.

Chapter 7 Proposing a new methodology

Introduction

The aim of the present chapter is to evaluate the significance of empirical studies of ordinary prayer in relation to Astley's (2002) construct of ordinary theology, and to propose a new methodology for analysing ordinary prayer with the aim of facilitating further the dialogue Astley envisages taking place between the ordinary theologian and the 'professional' theologian. For this purpose, prior to the presentation of a new methodology, an analytical review is provided of the material presented in the thesis thus far, followed by a consideration of key practical implications, which set the context for the new methodology.

Analytical review

Ordinary prayer has been placed in the context of ordinary theology according to the Astley tradition, and has been defined as the prayer of ordinary people or 'those believers who have received no scholarly theological education'. It has been argued that the empirical study of ordinary prayer is able to make a useful contribution to the study of ordinary theology at a fundamental and formative level by accessing a different kind of data which focuses on the ordinary theologian (or pray-er) rather than the doctrine, and is experiential rather than consciously analytical or reflective.

It has been suggested that a thorough study of ordinary prayer should focus on self-reported private experiences of prayer, draw on a wide range of ordinary pray-ers (who are both church-ed and unchurch-ed), and investigate a number of key

areas. These key areas included a study of who prays, when people pray, the content of people's prayer, and the effects of people's prayer (both from a subjective perspective and an objective perspective). Each of these key areas was then explored in detail through a literature review and an evaluation, which highlighted relevant issues and included suggestions for further study.

The results of this exercise are useful to the empirical exploration of ordinary theology because they provide valuable information about both ordinary pray-ers and ordinary prayer. It has been argued in chapter one that behind the practice of prayer is some kind of understanding of God, the world, and the relationship between the two, which is a fundamental starting point for theologies located largely in experience. This means that the information provided is also directly related to both ordinary theologians and ordinary theologies, broadly conceived.

As Astley (2002:126) observes, empirical studies in ordinary theology will undoubtedly show differences between certain generic groups of people (in addition to individual differences) and these differences are expected to have an impact on individual theologies. The empirical studies in ordinary prayer help to indicate where these differences may lie as well as create profiles of what ordinary theologians may look like. For example, if it is understood that the ordinary theologian is very likely to engage in private prayer (which has been shown to be central to religion and extends beyond traditional indicators of religious belonging), certain conclusions may be tentatively drawn from the results presented in the preceding chapters. To cite some examples: ordinary theologians are more likely to be female than male (in contrast to the traditional balance among theologians of the Church and Academy), and this may affect their theologies; ordinary theologians may well undergo certain changes depending on their age and stage of life, and this may affect their theologies;

ordinary theologians will be influenced by their social status, ethnicity, cultural background, and religious tradition, and these may affect their theologies; and ordinary theologians may be affected by the circumstances in which they pray (that is, when they pray), reflecting what is considered important in their lives, and this may affect their theologies.

In terms of the subjective effects of prayer, ordinary theologians will gain mainly positive effects from their prayer, although insufficient evidence is available to specify with certainty which aspects of their beliefs and practices might deliver such effects. Conversely, a minority of ordinary theologians will gain negative effects from their prayer, although insufficient evidence is available to specify with certainty which aspects of their beliefs and practices might deliver such effects. It is not unreasonable to suppose that both positive and negative effects are related to types of ‘fundamental and formative’ theology expressed in prayer.

In terms of the objective effects of prayer, studies have tried to test a particular strand of belief which maintains that intercessory prayer can cause observable changes in the objective world, which would not occur without the action of intercessory prayer. This is relevant to both the ordinary theologians who incorporate this belief into their ordinary theologies and the ordinary theologians who have alternative views about how God and the world interact, and this category of research should be considered alongside emerging empirical data which suggest that prayer expectation may be correlated to certain aspects of mental health.

For each of the five key areas, relevant issues and suggestions for further development were identified, and further work in relation to these will help to refine what is known about ordinary theologians and their ordinary theologies. It is

envisaged that this will make a positive contribution to the dialogue between the ordinary theologian and the ‘professional’ theologian.

Practical implications

Central to the notion of ordinary theology is the perceived need to make theology an activity which is relevant to the lives of all believers, including the vast majority who are technically unqualified in this area. This relevance is not achieved without appropriate interaction and a sense of ‘buying into’ the resultant activity. The need to recognise the significance of ordinary theology is particularly acute for the Church rather than the Academy (although the two are not entirely separate), and where the benefits of ‘looking, listening and learning’ to ordinary theologians will be most productive. To cite an important point made by Astley (2002: 146) for a second time: the study of ordinary theology provides the Church with significant information about the people it serves which is essential if the Church is properly to ‘exercise its ministry of pastoral care, worship, Christian education, apologetics, preaching and evangelism ...’. If a wide divide exists between ordinary theology and ‘professional’ theology, this service and ministry will not be as effective.

In practical terms, it should be asked how relevant the Church’s ministry is to the people it claims to serve in Britain today, using conventional markers. Evidence suggests that Britain is becoming an increasingly unchurched nation (Richter and Francis, 1998; Francis and Richter, 2007). All statistics on the main line denominations in England and Wales paint a consistent picture of declining membership, declining attendance, and declining employment of ministers and leaders (see, for example, Francis and Brierley, 1997 and Brierley and Miles, 2006).

An apparently inevitable consequence of such decline is reflected in the closure of church buildings. The pattern of such closure has been recently charted as it affects Anglican churches in rural areas (Roberts and Francis, 2006) and as it affects Methodist chapels in both rural and urban areas (Burton, 2007). Although the rate of closure is considerably greater among Methodists, it is by no means negligible among Anglicans. For example, according to Roberts and Francis (2006), between 1970 and 2000 the number of churches in the Diocese of Lincoln declined from 721 to 648, a reduction of 10%.

However, this does not mean that Britain is necessarily becoming a totally secularised nation. Many argue that conventional religion is giving way to the spiritual revolution (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005) or to alternative spiritualities (Partridge, 2004). In addition, as demonstrated earlier, statistics relating to religious belief and practice have consistently shown that belief in God (broadly conceived) and the practice of prayer are far from limited to those who profess religious service attendance.

The evidence suggests, therefore, that the Church cannot afford not to listen and not to respond to ordinary believers (both the churched and the unchurched), and a key tool in this response may be ordinary theology.

Introducing a new methodology

The new methodology is concerned with the study of intercessory prayer requests left in churches, and develops an original framework for analysing the content of these prayers.

Rationale

The methodology is shaped by five main factors. First, it is evident that Astley's main interest in ordinary theology is primarily Church-focused with a view to effecting change in the practice of doing theology for the benefit of all believers. Secondly, the practical consequences of taking ordinary theology seriously are recognised as being particularly appropriate for the circumstances in which the Church finds itself today. Thirdly, the review of empirical studies relating to the content of ordinary prayer concluded with the observation that the study of the content of ordinary prayer needed particular development within the corpus of empirical prayer study. Fourthly, the benefits of studying prayer which is largely 'natural' (that is, not controlled by the researcher or set in an artificial context) has been appreciated for its ability to offer another perspective on prayer research. In this context, the main source of data has been intercessory prayer requests left in various religious locations, but there have been few analyses of these data and as yet no clear replicable frameworks for analyses have been constructed. Fifthly, prayer requests left in churches offer a ready supply of data concerning ordinary prayer, which can access a wide range of people in addition to the ordinary churchgoers. It has been shown that people pass through churches and cathedrals for a variety of different reasons, and that the religious motivation is only one of those reasons (Williams, Francis, Robbins, and Annis, 2007). However, the fact that significant numbers of visitors are willing to respond to the invitation to leave a prayer request reveals that prayer requests are meeting some kind of need on the part of those who may be only passing through. Studying these prayer requests, in turn, offers insights into the theologically untutored (and often implicit) religious yearnings of ordinary people.

A framework for studying ordinary intercessory prayer

A general analytical framework (with two modifications) has been developed to explore the content of intercessory prayers, and includes three main components: prayer *reference*, prayer *intention* and prayer *objective*. The general analytical framework and its modifications were developed in response to the empirical prayer studies reviewed in the first part of this thesis (with particular reference to those which deal with the subjective effects of prayer and the content of prayer) and an initial content analysis of a random sample of around 200 prayer cards. The initial content analysis identified and organised the concerns of the prayer authors, which were then placed within the conceptual categories of prayer *reference*, prayer *intention*, and prayer *objective*.

The initial general analytical framework defines the three constructs in the following way. *Prayer reference* distinguishes between four key foci with which the individual prayer authors are concerned: themselves, other people who are known personally to the prayer authors, animals which are known personally to the prayer authors, and the world or global context. *Prayer intention* distinguishes between nine key areas with which the individual authors are concerned: illness, death, growth, work, relationships, conflict or disaster, sport or recreation, travel, open intention, and general. *Prayer objective* distinguishes between two effects which the individual authors envisaged as a consequence of their prayers in terms of primary control and secondary control. In primary control prayer authors explicitly suggested the desired consequences of their prayers. In secondary control prayer authors placed prayers and their consequences entirely in the hands of another.

The first modification of the general framework has been designed to explore the content of prayer with specific reference to health and well-being. The modification retains the two components of prayer *reference* and prayer *objective*, while modifying the component of prayer *intention*. In the modification, prayer *intention* distinguishes between four areas with which the individual authors were concerned in relation to health and well-being: physical health, mental health, affective communication, and direct communication. The categories selected for the *intention* component are not mutually exclusive, and identify both the concrete and the affective, and, as a result, individual prayer requests may fall into one or more of these categories. However, for the *reference* and *objective* components, individual prayer requests fall into only one category for each.

The second modification of the general framework has been designed to explore the content of prayer with specific reference to the activity of God in the world. The modification retains the two components of prayer *reference* and prayer *objective*, while modifying the component of prayer *intention*. In the modification, prayer *intention* distinguishes nine views of God drawn from God's perceived activity in the world with which individual prayer authors were concerned. These are articulated as: gift-bestower, confidant/e, intervener, protector, intermediary, revealer, strength-giver, helper (general), and comforter.

Differentiating between primary control and secondary control is uncommon in this field. The inclusion of this differentiation within the current framework was stimulated by the work of Janssen, de Hart, and den Draak (1989, 1990), Janssen, Prins, van der Lans, and Baerveldt (2000), and Janssen and Bänziger (2003) in their studies of the praying practices of Dutch youth. The differentiation between primary control and secondary control was considered important because it provides valuable

insights into prayer authors' perceptions of the purpose of prayer and the benefits which may be gained from it, which in turn reflects the prayer authors' beliefs about the nature of the relationship between the pray-er and God and how God acts in the world.

Three of the five case studies presented in the second part of the thesis utilize the general content framework: two to test the framework and one to capture examples of implicit religion in an explicit religious context. The other two case studies test the modifications of the general framework with reference to health and well-being and the activity of God in the world.

All five case studies draw on prayer-cards from the same location. St Mary's church is situated in a rural location, somewhat away from the village centre, in an area of middle England highly attractive to tourists. The church itself is medieval, with a highly distinctive nineteenth century memorial chapel. As visitors enter the highly atmospheric space of the memorial chapel, they are greeted by a notice inviting them to pause, to reflect, and to pray. They are also invited to commit their prayers to a postcard-sized prayer-card and to leave these cards to be prayed by the local priest and congregation. All the prayers are prefaced by the words 'Please pray for', which are printed on the prayer-cards.

Summary

The aim of the present chapter is to evaluate the significance of empirical studies of ordinary prayer in relation to Astley's (2002) construct of ordinary theology, and to propose a new methodology for analysing ordinary prayer. Empirical studies of ordinary prayer are shown to be useful to the study of ordinary theology because they

provide a detailed portrait of the ordinary theologian and the influencing factors on their ordinary theologies at a fundamental and formative level. They also focus on the ordinary theologian rather than the doctrine or theological concept. It is argued that the relevance of ordinary theology combined with the study of ordinary prayer is particularly acute for the Church and the people it serves, as well as those outside the Church who continue to express themselves through the central religious practice of prayer. In this context, a new methodology is proposed for accessing the content of ordinary prayer through the analysis of prayer-cards left in churches. The new methodology should make a significant contribution to the dialogue that Astley envisages taking place between the ordinary theologian and the ‘professional’ theologian, and bring with it potentially beneficial practical consequences.

Part two

Chapter 8 Case study 1: A general content analysis of ordinary prayer

Introduction

The aim of this case study is to provide a detailed content analysis of 917 prayer-cards left in St Mary's church over a 16-month period, using the general analytical framework to explore prayer *intention*, prayer *reference*, and prayer *objective*. The exercise is designed to test the robustness of the general framework and to provide qualitative and quantitative information about the concerns of ordinary pray-ers expressed through intercessory and supplicatory prayer. The results also give rise to a number of hypotheses regarding prayers authors' perceptions of how prayer works.

Method

Of the 917 prayer-cards analysed in the study, 893 were entirely concerned with intercessory and supplicatory prayer forms (97%). Of the remaining 24 prayer-cards, 19 included elements of thanksgiving, four included elements of confession and repentance, and one included elements of adoration. Within the prayer-cards concerned with intercession and supplication, a total of 1,330 requests were made. It is these 1,330 individual requests which form the basis of the following analyses.

The general analytical framework used for analysing the content of the intercessory and supplicatory prayers distinguished between three elements defined as *intention*, *reference*, and *objective*. The notion of *intention* is applied to distinguishing between ten key areas with which the individual authors were concerned: illness, death, growth, work, relationships, conflict or disaster, sport or

recreation, travel, open intention, and general. The notion of *reference* is applied to distinguishing between four key foci with which the individual authors were concerned: themselves, other people who were known personally to the authors, animals which were known personally to the authors, and the world or global context. The notion of *objective* is applied to distinguishing between two effects which the individual authors envisaged as a consequence of their prayers of intercession or supplication in terms of primary control and secondary control. In primary control prayer authors explicitly suggest the desired consequences of their prayers. In secondary control prayer authors place prayers and their consequences entirely in the hands of another. Secondary control is further sub-divided into explicit secondary control and implicit secondary control, where control is given to either God or those interceding on behalf of the prayer author, respectively.

Results

Quantitative analyses

The results of the quantitative analyses are presented in a table at the end of this chapter.

Reference

Of the 1,330 individual prayer requests, 841 (63%) had people known personally to the prayer author as the key focus, 361 (27%) had a world or global context as the key focus, 71 (5%) had animals known personally to the prayer author as the key focus, and 57 (4%) had the prayer authors as the key focus.

Intention

Of the 1,330 individual prayer requests, 314 (24%) were concerned with open intention, followed by 284 (21%) for illness, 213 for death (16%), 190 (14%) for conflict or disaster, 113 (8%) for general, 73 (5%) for relationships, 66 (5%) for growth, 44 (3%) for work, 18 (1%) for travel, and 15 (1%) for sport or recreation.

Open intention was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for 216 (69%) of cases, followed by 48 (15%) for a world or global context, 41 (13%) for animals known personally to the prayer author, and 9 (3%) for the prayer author.

Illness was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for 232 (82%) of cases, followed by 44 (15%) for a world or global context, 5 (2%) for the prayer author, and 3 (1%) for animals known personally to the prayer author.

Death was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for 180 (85%) of cases, followed by 19 (9%) for animals known personally to the prayer author, 14 (7%) for a world or global context, and none (0%) for the prayer author.

Conflict or disaster was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus a world or global context, accounting for 182 (96%) of cases, followed by 8 (4%) for people known personally to the prayer author, none (0%) for animals known personally to the prayer author, and none (0%) for the prayer author.

General was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for 88 (78%) of

cases, followed by 14 (12%) for a world or global context, 6 (5%) for the prayer author, and 5 (4%) for animals known personally to the prayer author.

Relationships was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for 34 (47%) of cases, followed by 23 (32%) for the prayer author, 13 (18%) for a world or global context, and 3 (4%) for animals known personally to the prayer author.

Growth was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for 36 (55%) of cases, followed by 24 (36%) for a world or global context, 6 (9%) for the prayer author, and none (0%) for animals known personally to the prayer author.

Work was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for 29 (66%) of cases, followed by 9 (20%) for a world or global context, 6 (14%) for the prayer author, and none (0%) for animals known personally to the prayer author.

Travel was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for 15 (83%) of cases, followed by 2 (11%) for a world or global context, 1 (6%) for the prayer author, and none (0%) for animals known personally to the prayer author.

Sport or recreation was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus a world or global context, accounting for 11 (73%) of cases, followed by 3 (20%) for people, 1 (7%) for the prayer author, and none (0%) for animals known personally to the prayer author.

Objective

Overall, of the 1,330 individual prayer requests, secondary control was preferred over primary control, with 753 cases of secondary control (57%) and 577 cases of primary control (43%).

In relation to prayer reference, of the 1,330 individual prayer requests, secondary control was employed more frequently than primary control in requests relating to: people who were known personally to the prayer author, with 467 cases of secondary control (56%) and 374 cases of primary control (44%); a world or global context, with 212 (59%) cases of secondary control and 149 cases of primary control (41%); and animals known personally to the prayer author, with 58 cases of secondary control (82%) and 13 cases of primary control (18%). Requests relating to only the prayer author employed primary control more often than secondary control, with 41 cases of primary control (72%) and 16 cases of secondary control (28%).

In relation to prayer intention, of the 1,330 individual prayer requests, secondary control was employed more frequently than primary control in requests relating to open intention, with 314 cases of secondary control (100%) and no cases of primary control (0%). This was followed by death, with 133 cases of secondary control (62%) and 80 cases of primary control (38%); conflict or disaster, with 99 cases of secondary control (52%) and 91 cases of primary control (48%); and sport or recreation, with 11 secondary control (73%) and 4 primary control (27%). Travel had equal numbers of secondary control and primary control, with 9 cases of secondary control (50%) and 9 cases of primary control (50%). Primary control was employed more frequently than secondary control in requests relating to the general category, with 113 cases of primary control (100%) and no cases of primary control

(0%). This was followed by illness, with 151 cases of primary control (53%) and 133 cases of secondary control (47%); growth, with 52 cases of primary control (79%) and 14 cases of secondary control (21%); work, with 28 cases of primary control (64%) and 16 cases of secondary control (36%); and relationships, with 49 cases of primary control (67%) and 24 cases of secondary control (33%).

Qualitative analyses

The qualitative analyses of the content of prayers explore prayer *intention* and prayer *objective* in relation to prayer *reference*. Examples of secondary control are denoted by an asterisk (*). Only implicit secondary control examples were present.

Self

Of the 1,330 individual prayer requests, 57 (4%) had the prayer authors as the key focus, and were concerned mainly with relationships, followed by open intention, growth, work, general, illness, sport or recreation, and travel. The prayer objectives were examples of either primary control or implicit secondary control.

Relationships. Of the 73 prayer requests concerned with relationships, 23 (32%) had the prayer author as the key focus. Most requests referred to pre-marital or marital relationships in which the prayer authors were involved. In most cases these were indicative of primary control where the authors suggested a desired outcome such as happiness, love, and longevity in the relationships. For a few (possibly younger) authors the desired outcome was more concrete, referring to the hope of establishing or re-establishing specific relationships with named or unnamed individuals. One of

the rare examples of secondary control referred to an author's forthcoming marriage.

[Please pray for] NAME and myself that we will be happy together forever.

[Please pray for] Myself, that I may get back with the boy I love, thus easing my tormented mind. Let him know I love him. Please.

[Please pray for] Me and my new wife and forthcoming marriage.*

Some requests were concerned with relationships between the authors and their families or friends, where primary control was evident in requests for family harmony and the mending of family relationships as well as maintaining the closeness and longevity of friendships.

[Please pray for] Me and my family to get on and for me to go home,
THANKS gods.

[Please pray for] NAME [author] and NAME to be best mate forever tilt
Death Do us pas.

In addition, there was one prayer request set within the context of the absence of relationships, and illustrative of secondary control.

[Please pray for] For me because I am lonely.*

Open intention. Of the 314 prayer requests concerned with open intention, 9 (3%) had the prayer author as the key focus. These prayers did not include a specific intention but explicitly named the prayer author as the subject of the prayer, and in some cases, the author was placed within the wider social contexts of family and

friends. Most prayers were examples of secondary control, with no indication of desirable outcome, and the desirable outcome for the one primary control request was known to the author alone.

[Please pray for] Me my family and friends.*

[Please pray for] Me and my family in a special way.

Growth. Of the 66 prayer requests concerned with growth, 6 (9%) had the prayer author as the key focus. The types of personal growth identified by the authors included: direction or constancy on the ‘right path’; increased moral awareness; faith development; and guidance in relation to personal quest. In one case the patron saint of the church was invoked directly. All these requests were examples of primary control.

[Please pray for] Me I need as much help as I can get. To show me the right path in life.

[Please pray for] NAME [author] for the things for I wish I didn’t get in trouble anymore.

[Please pray for] Dear St NAME [of church] let me no when I am doing wrong and wright.

[Please pray for] Give me the strength to be kind and loving to both friends and enemies and have the courage to do your work.

Work. Of the 44 prayer requests concerned with work, 6 (14%) had the prayer author as the key focus. These included requests for examination success, which was often

linked to getting a good job, passing a driving test, and attending a new school. All these requests, apart from one, were examples of primary control.

[Please pray for] Pass 'A' levels with A's and get a good job.

[Please pray for] Me at my new school.*

General. Of the 113 prayer requests placed in the general category, 6 (5%) had the prayer author as the key focus. These prayer requests were not specific or concrete enough to be accommodated within the existing intention categories and included requests for 'happiness' and 'safekeeping', and the veiled request for a 'private intention'. All these were examples of primary control.

[Please pray for] Pray for my happiness.

Illness. Of the 284 prayer requests concerned with illness, 5 (2%) had the prayer author as the key focus. These related to physical ailments suffered by the prayer author and hospitalisation as well as mental illness in the form of depression.

Primary control examples requested healing or improvement, and secondary control examples stated the context with no indication of desirable outcome.

[Please pray for] Me, as I enter hospital next week.*

[Please prayer for] my healing from arthritis in most of my joints.

Sport and recreation. Of the 15 prayer requests concerned with sport and recreation, one (7%) had the prayer author as the key focus. This was an example of primary control and was a request for 'nice weather'.

Travel. Of the 18 prayer requests concerned with travel, one (6%) had the prayer author as the key focus, and this was an example of primary control, requesting a safe journey.

Other people

Of the 1,330 individual prayer requests, 841 (63%) had people who were known personally to the prayer author as the key focus, and were concerned mainly with illness, followed by open intention, death, general, relationships, growth, work, travel, conflict or disaster, and sport or recreation. The prayer objectives were examples of implicit secondary control and primary control.

Illness. Of the 284 prayer requests concerned with illness, 232 (82%) had people known to the prayer author as the key focus. These prayer requests were mainly related to family members and friends, and employed secondary control more often than primary control. Requests referred to illnesses in general, non-specific terms or provided more detail about the nature of the problems, identifying diseases, accidents, mental health issues, handicap, operations, addiction, and pregnancy and birth, and if the conditions were terminal. Some of the requests included the families' of the ill. In a number of requests additional details concerning the age, location, and personal qualities of the ill people were included. Primary control requests had desirable outcomes which included, for the ill person, improvements in health, freedom from pain, and closeness to God, and for the ill person's family, help, strength, patience, and ability to cope. A few requests included statements of faith in God's ability to heal and help the ill. Some requests focused on the prevention of

illness and the promotion of health. Secondary control requests were characterised by their identification of context, with no desired outcomes.

[Please pray for] NAME age 17 in coma after falling from bike 9 years ago.*

[Please pray for] NAME (and his family) who is in the grip of tobacco and alcohol.*

[Please pray for] My family – may they remain healthy.

[Please pray for] NAME's recovery from her accident and her family to have patience to help her through her troubles.

[Please pray for] My nan in hospital after a stroke – I know you can help her.

Open intention. Of the 314 prayer requests concerned with open intention, 216 (69%) had other people known to the prayer author as the key focus. These prayers did not include a specific intention but explicitly named the individuals who were the subjects of the prayer. These individuals were mainly family and friends, although there were references to girlfriends, boyfriends, and neighbours, and occasional references to a specific group in a parish. Extensive lists of names were not uncommon, although a few prayers preferred all-inclusive appellations, such as 'family', 'friends', and 'everyone I know'. Some of these prayers may have referred to family or friends who had died.

A feature of many of these prayers was the additional information provided about the named individuals and the prayer author's emotions in relation to them. Additional information included location, age, personal circumstances, and personal qualities. The emotion experienced by the authors in relation to the individuals was

most often identified as love. All these were examples of secondary control.

[Please pray for] All my family and friends.*

[Please pray for] Friends who I love dearly.*

[Please pray for] My family, because they are very kind to me and sometimes very helpful to me and to pray for my aunties and uncles.*

Death. Of the 213 prayer requests concerned with death, 180 (85%) had people known to the prayer author as the key focus. These prayer requests concerned dead family and friends, and often provided dates and the time lapse since the deaths, which ranged from very recent to a few years previous or more. In many cases the prayer author's emotions relating to the dead person were noted, and, less often, the dead person's personal qualities. In some cases, the prayer author appeared to be addressing the dead person directly. Some requests stated the belief that the dead person was with God or was reunited with other loved ones. A number of requests were directed towards those who were left behind. The circumstances of the deaths were recorded mainly in very general terms, although some specific contexts were mentioned, for example, cancer, stroke, heart attack, and suicide.

There were more secondary control requests than primary control requests. Secondary control examples presented the context for the prayer, but suggested no desirable outcomes. Primary control requests appeared to be directed more explicitly towards God than was apparent in many of the other categories, and they asked for God to take care of the dead, give peace to the dead, and love or bless the dead. In some cases a request was made for a dead person to go to heaven. With regard to the bereaved, a few primary control requests asked for their recovery from the death and

to experience peace. Another aspect of primary control examples was the anticipation of future deaths of family and friends with requests for long life or, in one case, for God to look after ‘loved ones’ when they died.

[Please pray for] NAME – husband, dad and grandfather who died Easter Sunday – Merry Christmas NAME – Love always.

[Please pray for] My Mum and Dad who have passed to a higher life. Missed so very much.*

[Please pray for] Auntie who passed away.*

[Please pray for] My family and loved ones – to be well-looked after when they die.

General. Of the 113 prayer requests placed in the general category, 88 (78%) had people known to the prayer author as the key focus. These prayer requests were not specific or concrete enough to be accommodated within the existing intention categories and included requests for ‘happiness’, ‘safekeeping’, ‘peace’, ‘peace of mind’, ‘contentment’, and ‘strength’. Many other requests employed common expressions asking for God’s blessing, and a few requests alluded to specific situations, although these were too vague to place in an existing intention category. The requests were usually made on behalf of family and friends, although there were some references to neighbours and a girlfriend. Extensive lists of names were not uncommon, although a few prayers preferred all-inclusive appellations, such as ‘family’, ‘friends’, ‘neighbours’, and ‘everyone I know’. All these were examples of primary control.

[Please pray for] All my family – may we live in peace all our days.

[Please pray for] Give NAME and NAME peace of mind and happiness.

[Please pray for] God bless my family.

[Please pray for] Mum to go through a difficult time.

Relationships. Of the 73 prayer requests concerned with relationships, 34 (47%) had people known to the prayer author as the key focus. Many of these referred to people in marital or pre-marital relationships, who were relations, friends, or acquaintances of the prayer author. In most cases these were indicative of primary control where the authors suggested a desired outcome in the relationships such as happiness, longevity, and the mending of difficult and broken relationships. Occasionally, there were cases of implicit secondary control where the authors' attitudes were recorded, but no explicit outcomes were suggested.

[Please pray for] NAME and NAME that they will find happiness in each other.

[Please pray for] For my brother and his wife in australia that they will mend their marriage and get back together again.

[Please pray for] NAME who is going with NAME. I feel sorry for him.*

Many prayers were concerned with difficult relationships within the authors' own families or other people's families, including those who were separated from their families or missing. Both primary control and secondary control examples were present. A few prayers expressed the hope of unity and peace in family relationships, and were examples of primary control.

[Please pray for] Mum and Dad, who are so unforgiving.*

[Please pray for] NAME and NAME who have left their homes and for all their families who are worried about them.*

[Please pray for] Amanda to come home, wherever she is.

[Please pray for] My family, unite us all together, in peace.

Occasionally, relationships within wider social groupings associated with the author feature, for which primary control is also a factor.

[Please pray for] Pray for no more back stabbing in the group [committee].

Growth. Of the 66 prayer requests concerned with growth, 36 (55%) had people known to the prayer author as the key focus. Many prayers were requests for conversion experiences on behalf of others (mainly family members), those with problems in relation to their faith, and the presence, retaining, and growth of faith during times of adversity or life in general. Most of these were examples of primary control, although a few were examples of secondary control, stating the context for the prayer with no suggested desirable outcome.

[Please pray for] Our son, NAME. He is an alcoholic ... more than anything we would like him to become a Christian.

[Please pray for] NAME and NAME who have problems with their faith.*

[Please pray for] NAME [daughter of woman in a coma] that she may keep faith and cope with whatever comes.

Other prayers requested God's guidance in non-specified situations and for God's help with decision making and the development of certain qualities or attributes such as wisdom, honesty, self control, understanding, patience, good citizenship, and leading a 'good' life. These referred mainly to family and friends and were examples of primary control.

[Please pray for] NAME to make the right decision.

[Please pray for] NAME so he doesn't lose his temper so often.

[Please pray for] My 3 daughters they will grow up in wisdom.

In a few cases prayers related to the faith development of a wider social group from the perspective of primary control and secondary control.

[Please pray for] ... help us find a new spiritual leader who will teach us more about Christ and others and not just ourselves.

[Please pray for] All who are getting confirmed at NAME church on Tue 30th Oct.*

Work. Of the 44 prayer requests concerned with work, 29 (66%) had people known to the prayer author as the key focus. Many of these requests were related to educational achievement in respect of examination success, progress at school, meeting the requirements for higher education, and passing a driving test. Others focused on new beginnings in respect of starting a new school, college, job, or retirement. In addition, there were a few requests for jobs for named individuals.

Most of these were examples of primary control, with desirable outcomes expressed mainly in concrete terms, for example, requests to pass exams or to gain employment, but there were a few expressed in abstract terms, for example, requests for 'peace of mind', 'peace', and 'happiness'. The cases of secondary control stated the context, and made no reference to desirable outcome.

[Please pray for] NAME to continue to do well at school so that his life is a happy one.

[Please pray for] NAME starting work on Monday.*

[Please pray for] my son to find employment soon.

[Please pray for] NAME to find peace of mind in her new career.

Travel. Of the 18 prayer requests concerned with travel, 15 (83%) had people known to the prayer author as the key focus. Most requests concerned people who had travelled abroad either on holiday or for unspecified reasons, and who were mainly family members or, less frequently, friends. One prayer referred to a family who lived abroad. Both primary control and secondary control examples were equally evident, with primary control focusing on safety, enjoyment, and God's presence with those travelling. Secondary control examples stated the context with no reference to desirable outcome.

[Please pray for] Gran NAME on her trip to the holy Land.*

[Please pray for] My son NAME and NAME. Students – Hitch hiking around Greece. God be with them.

[Please pray for] Happiness and contentment for the family of NAME in

Hong Kong.

Conflict or disaster. Of the 190 prayer requests concerned with conflict or disaster, 8 (4%) had people known to the prayer author as the key focus. Primary control and secondary control examples were equally represented. Most requests related to individuals known to the author who were living in countries affected by war or who were in the army.

[Please pray for] For brother NAME who's in the army and going away soon.*

Sport or recreation. Of the 15 prayer requests concerned with sport and recreation, 3 (20%) had people known to the prayer author as the key focus. These included two secondary control examples, which stated the sporting context with no desirable outcomes, and a primary control request for good weather.

[Please pray for] my brother when goes camping for nice weather.

Animals

Of the 1,330 individual prayer requests, 71 (5%) had animals which were known personally to the prayer author as the key focus, and were concerned mainly with open intention, followed by death, general, illness, and relationships. The prayer objectives were examples of either implicit secondary control or primary control.

Open intention. Of the 314 prayer requests concerned with open intention, 41 (13%)

had animals known to the prayer author as the key focus. None of these prayers included a specific intention but identified a pet or pets, often by species or personal name, for which prayer was intended. Most pets were the authors' own but with occasional reference to the pets of others. In a few examples, the authors expressed their emotions in relation to the pets, which they usually identified as love. All these were examples of secondary control.

[Please pray for] My pony NAME (I love him).

Death. Of the 213 prayer requests concerned with death, 19 (9%) had animals known to the prayer author as the key focus. Most of these requests concerned a variety of pets ranging from cats and dogs to goldfish, which had died at specific times in the past or recently. The animals were referred to by name or species. Most requests were examples of secondary control, and these noted the pets' deaths, and occasionally the circumstances and the owners' emotions in relation to the pet, with no desirable outcome. Primary control requests asked for their pets to rest in peace, and included an additional focus on extant pets, that they should experience long lives and eternal life.

[Please pray for] NAME who had to be put down – we still love him but we had to do it, before he hurt someone too much.*

[Please pray for] NAME the Gerbil RIP.

[Please pray for] My nan's dog to live a long time.

General. Of the 113 prayer requests placed in the general category, 5 (4%) had animals known to the prayer author as the key focus. These requests were not

sufficiently explicit to place within any of the other intention categories, and they were all examples of primary control.

Illness. Of the 284 prayer requests concerned with illness, 3 (1%) had animals known to the prayer author as the key focus. The two cases of primary control requested the cessation of suffering and the taking ‘care of’ the pet in question, and the one case of secondary control stated the context without indicating a desirable outcome.

[Please pray for] Please take care of my dog who is seriously ill.

[Please pray for] My dog who was poisoned.*

Relationships. Of the 73 prayer requests concerned with relationships, 3 (4%) had animals known to the prayer author as the key focus. All the examples in this category referred to troubled or broken relationships, occurring as a result of the disappearance of a pet. Each of these prayers was an example of secondary control, identifying the animal and noting its disappearance at a specified or unspecified time in the past with no attempt to identify a desirable outcome.

[Please pray for] My dog that is lost.*

World or global

Of the 1,330 individual prayer requests, 361 (27%) had a world or a global context as the key focus, and were concerned mainly with dissent and war, followed by open intention, illness, growth, death, general, relationships, sport and recreation, work, and travel. The prayer objectives were examples of either implicit secondary control or primary control.

Conflict or disaster. Of the 190 prayer requests concerned with conflict or disaster, 182 (96%) had a world or global context as the key focus. In these prayer requests, both general and specific groups were selected for prayer. The general included the starving, the poor, victims of war, the dying, the homeless, and abused and killed animals, with no geographical or other contextualising information provided. The specific included named examples of countries, groups of people, events, and disasters. Many of these probably referred to the same contexts as the general groups. These were often related to Africa and the Middle East, with a few European and American examples.

There were slightly more secondary control requests than primary control requests. Secondary control requests stated the contexts, with desired outcomes. Primary control requests included many concrete outcomes, relating to the provision of food for the starving, rain for drought, guidance for world leaders, the end of capitalism, and freedom from war, for example. In addition, there were many abstract outcomes, relating to peace, love, justice, strength, comfort, and faith.

[Please pray for] All the starving all over the world.*

[Please pray for] Peace in the world.

[Please pray for] Starving innocent of 3rd World countries – let rain fall.

[Please pray for] all the people who died in Hiroshima and Nakasaki.*

[Please pray for] all the beaten, helpless animals in the world.*

Open Intention. Of the 314 prayer requests concerned with open intention, 48 (15%) had a world or a global context as the key focus. These prayers were either all-

inclusive, for ‘everyone’ and ‘all the world and its people’, for example, or more specific, citing a well-known person, children (both at home and abroad), families, the less fortunate, and those with problems or in need. Some requests named counties, villages, and parishes as the subjects of prayer. All these were examples of secondary control.

[Please pray for] Everything you’ve given to us.*

[Please pray for] The whole wide world.*

[Please pray for] Staffordshire.*

Illness. Of the 284 prayer requests concerned with illness, 44 (15%) had a world or a global context as the key focus. Most of these were examples of secondary control, where the contexts for the requests were stated without identified desirable outcomes. These contexts related usually to those with physical illnesses and occasionally to mental health issues, and included the ill, handicapped, hospitalised, infertile, cancer patients, and depressed. In the examples of primary control, the desirable outcomes related mainly to physical illnesses but also included mental illness, phobia, and addiction. These requests ranged from global health and healing of the ill to the curing of specific groups of people such as Legionnaires disease sufferers, arthritics, the disabled, schizophrenics, agoraphobics, and drug addicts.

[Please pray for] all who are depressed.*

[Please pray for] all the handicapped and ill and disabled.*

[Please pray for] Drug addicts to kick the habit.

[Please pray for] a cure for arthritis.

Growth. Of the 66 prayer requests concerned with growth, 24 (36%) had a world or a global context as the key focus. Many prayers were requests for conversions or ‘turning to God’ at two levels: in England with reference to individual churches and missions, and in the world with reference to people or categories of people in general. Both primary control and secondary control examples were evident.

[Please pray for] ...the Christians in China.*

[Please pray for] All young people everywhere. Lord please show them the way you want them to live. Open their ears to hear your word and open their hearts to receive you into their lives. Let them not be ashamed to dedicate their lives to you even when others laugh at them.

One prayer, employing primary control, expressed ecumenical hopes.

[Please pray for] reconciliation among the Holy Churches of Christ.

A number of prayers included requests to develop certain qualities or attributes for application on a global level both within the human world and the natural world, for example, fairness, responsibility, selflessness, care, cooperation, and love. These were all examples of primary control.

[Please pray for] So that all creatures and beings on earth are treated the same. As then the world will be fair.

[Please pray for] Help us to be unselfish and share what we have.

[Please pray for] All people to be good to each other and be good to the earth

and the animals.

Death. Of the 213 prayer requests concerned with death, 14 (7%) had a world or a global context as the key focus. These prayer requests were concerned mainly with those who had died in non-specific contexts, or those who were experiencing bereavement. Most were examples of secondary control, and stated the context, often in religious terms, with no desirable outcome. Primary control requests focused on peace and God's blessing for the dead.

[Please pray for] all loved ones who are in God's care.*

[Please pray for] all suffering – bereavement.*

[Please pray for] All holy souls to find peace.

It should be noted that many of the prayer requests in the sport or recreation and the conflict or disaster categories which had world or global concerns as the key focus could have been placed under death, either explicitly or implicitly.

General. Of the 113 prayer requests placed in the general category, 14 (12%) had a world or a global context as the key focus. These prayers requests were not specific or concrete enough to be accommodated within the existing intention categories and included broad and inclusive requests for 'happiness', 'love', 'peace of mind,' and 'fulfilment'. All these were examples of primary control.

[Please pray for] Peace of mind and fulfilment and happiness for all people in their lives.

Relationships. Of the 73 prayer requests concerned with relationships, 13 (18%) had a world or a global context as the key focus. Some prayers were for those lacking either relationships or positive relationships in their lives such as the lonely, the friendless, or those in need of love. Some of these prayers were examples of secondary control, where the context for the prayer was stated without an explicit objective, and others were examples of primary control where specific qualities were requested to characterise global relationships among human beings and between human beings and the natural world.

[Please pray for] Please pray for all those who are lonely and depressed.*

[Please pray for] Please pray for world of goodnes and kindness among all people and among people and the earth.

[Please pray for] Please pray for the World, that mankind can live together in love and peace.

[Please pray for] Give us each more tolerance to love one another.

Sport or recreation. Of the 15 prayer requests concerned with sport or recreation, 11 (73%) had a world or a global context as the key focus. All of the prayers related to a football tragedy which resulted in loss of life or injuries, and had as their subjects the victims (injured and dead) and their families. Most of these were examples of secondary control, where only the prayer context was stated, and the primary control examples included the directive ‘God bless.’

[Please pray for] Everyone who died ... - God bless.

[Please pray for] the people’s families who were involved in the disaster.*

Work. Of the 44 prayer requests concerned with work, 9 (20%) had a world or a global context as the key focus. These included broad all-inclusive requests relating to certain categories of people such as the unemployed and hospital surgeons. In one case, the royal family was identified as the subject for prayer. There were similar numbers of primary and secondary control examples. Secondary control examples stated the context with no desirable outcomes identified. In primary control prayer authors presented either concrete or abstract desirable outcomes, for example, getting a job or being given the necessary emotional or spiritual resources to cope.

[Please pray for] hospital surgeons that they may carry out operations successfully.

[Please pray for] The unemployed and their families. Give them strength and faith through all bad times.

[Please pray for] the many people who are unemployed.*

[Please pray for] The Queen, Prince Charles and all the family Royal in service of this country.*

Travel. Of the 18 prayer requests concerned with travel, 2 (18%) had a world or a global context as the key focus. Both requests were concerned with transport accidents, either at home or abroad, which resulted in loss of life or injuries. The secondary control example stated the context for the request with no desirable outcome identified, while the primary control example included a directive.

[Please pray for] Those that were seriously injured and those that died in the terrible air crash.*

[Please pray for] Dear God Please help those children who were hurt in the coach crash.

Conclusion

The aim of this case study was to provide a detailed content analysis of 917 prayer-cards left in St Mary's church over a 16-month period, using the general analytical framework to explore prayer *intention*, prayer *reference*, and prayer *objective*. The findings demonstrate that a considerable number of people are willing to commit prayer requests to paper, if they are given the opportunity to do so, and that the content of their requests provides material which enriches the understanding of contemporary beliefs and expressions of ordinary prayer. Ordinary prayer, as demonstrated by the qualitative analyses, is largely motivated by the pray-ers' everyday personal experiences and wider 'global' concerns of relevance at the time of composing the prayer requests.

The conceptual framework employed in this analysis comprises three constructs: prayer *reference*, prayer *intention*, and prayer *objective*. A number of conclusions can be drawn from the findings using this conceptual framework. In respect of prayer *reference*, only 4% of prayer requests had the prayer author as the key focus, which was slightly less than animals known personally to the author (5%), and substantially less than people known personally to the prayer author and world or global contexts (90%).

Questions arise regarding why so many people, when given the opportunity to write prayer requests, choose not to write intercessory and supplicatory prayers which relate directly to themselves, and regarding what this may indicate about the

prayer authors' perceptions of prayer and its purpose. Perhaps a prayer request relating directly to oneself was viewed by many as inappropriate, unnecessary, or not considered an option. Behind this, there may be a view that Christian prayer is essentially an altruistic activity, performed for other people and world or global contexts, and that the self is deemed not to be a natural subject of prayer. This basic perception of prayer may be influenced, in part, from awareness of the forms Christian prayers take in the public domain and the emphases of Christian beliefs in respect of relationship with others. It may also be influenced by the content of other prayer requests, which are present for others to read, and as such may provide a broad template for selecting 'appropriate' recipients of prayer in that particular religious context (Schmied, 2002; Lee, 2009). Another view may be that the needs of the prayer authors are met primarily through prayer requests for other people and world or global contexts, because the prayer authors understand themselves primarily as social beings whose stability and happiness is intimately connected to those around them. This may explain, in part, prayer authors' frequent expressions of emotion and descriptions of attributes in relation to the people for whom they request prayer. In these prayer requests there is often little evidence of a reflective acknowledgement and appreciation of the self outside the self's social context.

In respect of prayer *intention*, 29% of prayer requests were either open intention or general, with no reference to specific concrete issues. Questions arise regarding why so many people, when given the opportunity to write prayer requests, did not express themselves in specific concrete terms. Perhaps these prayer authors experienced reluctance or difficulty expressing their requests in concrete ways, or perhaps they believed that providing a concrete context for their requests was unnecessary. If the former is the case, it may indicate that although some people are

motivated to write prayer requests when given the opportunity to do so, they may experience difficulty identifying and articulating their needs. If the latter is the case, it may indicate that a significant number of ordinary people felt that those praying on their behalf, and perhaps God, did not require this type of information. However, 71% of prayer requests were concerned with specific and concrete contexts and 76% of these were related to personal, local, or global 'life-and death' issues involving illness, death, and conflict or disaster. This indicates that prayer is especially important in challenging and often extreme circumstances where an individual's ability to control situations will be weakest. This supports the results of surveys presented in chapter 3, 'When do people pray?', and likewise, does not imply that other conventional support mechanisms are not utilised in response to the issues in addition to prayer.

In respect of prayer *objective*, there were more examples of secondary control (57%) than primary control (43%). It may be argued that religiously or spiritually mature individuals do not attempt to fashion a world in accordance with their own inclinations and desires. Rather, the religiously or spiritually mature relinquish personal control in order that they may change and adapt appropriately to an external world. If this model of religious or spiritual maturity is applied to the concepts of primary control and secondary control, it would appear that, in this study, many of the prayer-card authors may be reflecting such a maturity in the prevalence of secondary control prayer requests, in certain circumstances. However, in opposition to this, it may be an indication that some prayer authors find it difficult, or are unable, to articulate their requests. Where prayer authors used primary control in their requests, two main features are apparent. First, secondary control was dominant in prayer requests with people, animals, and a world or global context as key foci,

but primary control was dominant where prayer requests had prayer authors as a key focus. This indicates that when prayer authors request prayers on behalf of themselves, there may be a greater immediate concern to ensure a desired outcome. However, this may also be a trait of prayer authors who choose to ask for prayers for themselves. Secondly, primary control was dominant in illness, growth, work, relationships, and general requests, and secondary control was dominant in open intention, death, conflict or disaster, and sport or recreation requests. This indicates that, in certain circumstances, prayer authors may have a greater immediate concern to ensure a desired outcome. However, this may mean that prayer authors envisage that positive responses to prayers are either more realistic or appropriate in some contexts than others. It should also be acknowledged that primary control is understood in two ways: control on the affective level and control on the physical level. Affective control and physical control are two very different orientations towards the world and the prayer authors' relationship with it. The relevance of these different approaches has been highlighted in chapter 5, 'Exploring the subjective correlates of prayer'.

The analyses were also designed to test the robustness of the general framework as a method for exploring in detail the content of ordinary prayer. As the results of the qualitative and quantitative analyses show, the framework generally worked well in identifying the content of prayer in relation to prayer *intention*, prayer *reference*, and prayer *objective*. The general framework now needs further testing through replication, using a second set of prayer-cards.

These findings have relevance for generating interest in the significance of ordinary prayer by listening to the prayer intentions of ordinary people who respond to the simple invitation to commit their prayers to paper within the prayerful

atmosphere of an open and inviting church. The present analyses have drawn attention to the ways in which contemporary people, living in a largely secularised society understand prayer in terms of appropriate subject matter and appropriate expectations regarding the outcome of prayer.

Case study 1: Content of intercessory and supplicatory prayer by intention, reference, and objective

intention	people		global		animals		self		total		TOTAL
	pc	sc	pc	sc	pc	sc	pc	sc	pc	sc	
illness	133	99	14	30	2	1	2	3	151	133	284
death	70	110	4	10	6	13	0	0	80	133	213
growth	30	6	16	8	0	0	6	0	52	14	66
work	18	11	5	4	0	0	5	1	28	16	44
relationships	23	11	6	7	0	3	20	3	49	24	73
conflict/disaster	4	4	87	95	0	0	0	0	91	99	190
sport/recreation	1	2	2	9	0	0	1	0	4	11	15
travel	7	8	1	1	0	0	1	0	9	9	18
open intention	0	216	0	48	0	41	0	9	0	314	314
general	88	0	14	0	5	0	6	0	113	0	113
total	374	467	149	212	13	58	41	16	577	753	
TOTAL	841		361		71		57				

Chapter 9 Case study 2: A general content analysis replication of ordinary prayer

Introduction

The aim of this case study is to replicate the general content analysis conducted in case study 1, which employed the general analytical framework to explore prayer *intention*, prayer *reference*, and prayer *objective*. Data for the replication is drawn from a new batch of 1,067 prayer-cards left in St Mary's church over a 16-month period. The exercise is designed to test the robustness of both the general analytical framework and the results emerging from the analyses conducted in case study 1, with reference to the concerns of ordinary pray-ers and their perceptions of how prayer works.

Method

Of the 1,067 prayer-cards analysed in the study, 1,022 were entirely concerned with intercessory and supplicatory prayer forms (96%). Of the remaining 45 prayer-cards, 33 included elements of thanksgiving, five included elements of confession and repentance, and seven included elements of adoration. Within the prayer-cards concerned with intercession and supplication, a total of 1,370 requests were made. It is these 1,370 individual requests which form the basis of the following analyses.

The general analytical framework used for analysing the content of the intercessory and supplicatory prayers distinguished between three elements

defined as *intention*, *reference*, and *objective*. The notion of *intention* is applied to distinguishing between ten key areas with which the individual authors were concerned: illness, death, growth, work, relationships, conflict or disaster, sport or recreation, travel, open intention, and general. The notion of *reference* is applied to distinguishing between four key foci with which the individual authors were concerned: themselves, other people who were known personally to the authors, animals which were known personally to the authors, and the world or global context. The notion of *objective* is applied to distinguishing between two effects which the individual authors envisaged as a consequence of their prayers of intercession or supplication in terms of primary control and secondary control. In primary control prayer authors explicitly suggest the desired consequences of their prayers. In secondary control prayer authors place prayers and their consequences entirely in the hands of another. Secondary control is further subdivided into explicit secondary control and implicit secondary control, where control is given to either God or the person praying on behalf of the prayer author, respectively.

Results

Quantitative analyses

The results of the quantitative analyses are presented in a table at the end of this chapter.

Reference

Of the 1,370 individual prayer requests, 1024 (75%) had people known

personally to the prayer author as the key focus, 222 (16%) had a world or global context as the key focus, 67 (5%) had the prayer authors as the key focus, and 57 (4%) had animals known personally to the prayer author as the key focus.

Intention

Of the 1,370 individual prayer requests, 401 (29%) were concerned with illness, followed by 278 (20%) for death, 242 for open intention (18%), 163 (12%) for general, 91 (7%) for relationships, 64 (5%) for growth, 60 (4%) for conflict or disaster, 42 (3%) for work, 14 (1%) for travel, and 15 (1%) for sport or recreation.

Illness was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for 350 (87%) of cases, followed by 33 (8%) for a world or global context, 9 (2%) for the prayer author, and 9 (2%) for animals known personally to the prayer author.

Death was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for 240 (86%) of cases, followed by 30 (11%) for animals known personally to the prayer author, 7 (3%) for a world or global context, and one (0.3%) for the prayer author.

Open intention was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for 180 (74%) of cases, followed by 43 (18%) for a world or global context, 13 (5%) for animals known personally to the prayer author, and 6 (2%) for the prayer author.

General was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key

focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for 125 (77%) of cases, followed by 28 (17%) for a world or global context, 6 (4%) for the prayer author, and 4 (2%) for animals known personally to the prayer author.

Relationships was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for 50 (55%) of cases, followed by 32 (35%) for the prayer author, 9 (10%) for a world or global context, and none (0%) for animals known personally to the prayer author.

Growth was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for 32 (50%) of cases, followed by 27 (42%) for a world or global context, 5 (8%) for the prayer author, and none (0%) for animals known personally to the prayer author.

Conflict or disaster was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus a world or global context, accounting for 58 (97%) of cases, followed by 2 (3%) for people known personally to the prayer author, none (0%) for animals known personally to the prayer author, and none (0%) for the prayer author.

Work was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for 29 (69%) of cases, followed by 7 (17%) for a world or global context, 6 (14%) for the prayer author, and none (0%) for animals known personally to the prayer author.

Travel was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for 12 (86%) of cases, followed by one (7%) for the prayer author, one (7%) for animals known

personally to the prayer author, and none (0%) for a world or global context,.

Sport or recreation was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus a world or global context, accounting for 10 (67%) of cases, followed by 4 (27%) for people, 1 (7%) for the prayer author, and none (0%) for animals known personally to the prayer author.

Objective

Overall, of the 1,370 individual prayer requests, primary control was preferred over secondary control, with 757 cases of primary control (55%) and 613 cases of secondary control (45%).

In relation to prayer reference, of the 1,370 individual prayer requests, primary control was employed more frequently than secondary control in requests relating to: people who were known personally to the prayer author, with 557 cases of primary control (54%) and 467 cases of secondary control (46%); a world or global context, with 126 (57%) cases of primary control and 96 cases of secondary control (43%); and the prayer author with 54 (81%) cases of primary control and 13 cases of secondary control (19%). Requests relating to animals known personally to the prayer author employed secondary control more often than primary control with 37 cases of secondary control (65%) and 20 cases of primary control (35%).

In relation to prayer intention, of the 1,370 individual prayer requests, primary control was employed more frequently than secondary control in requests relating to the general category with 163 cases of primary control (100%) and no cases of secondary control (0%). This was followed by illness,

with 253 cases of primary control (63%) and 148 cases of secondary control (37%); relationships, with 75 cases of primary control (82%) and 16 cases of secondary control (18%); growth, with 57 primary control (89%) and seven cases of secondary control (11%); conflict or disaster, with 37 cases of primary control (62%) and 23 cases of secondary control (38%); work, with 30 cases of primary control (71%) and 12 cases of secondary control (29%); sport, with 13 cases of primary control (87%) and 2 cases of secondary control (13%); and travel, with 10 cases of primary control (71%) and 4 cases of secondary control (29%). Secondary control was employed more frequently than primary control in requests relating to the open intention category, with 242 cases of secondary control (100%) and no cases of primary control (0%). This was followed by death, with 159 cases of secondary control (57%) and 119 cases of primary control (43%).

Qualitative analyses

The qualitative analyses of the content of prayers explore prayer *intention* and prayer *objective* in relation to prayer *reference*. Examples of secondary control are denoted by an asterisk (*). Only implicit secondary control examples were present.

Self

Of the 1,370 individual prayer requests, 67 (5%) had the prayer authors as the key focus, and were concerned mainly with relationships, followed by illness, open intention, work, general, growth, sport or recreation, travel, and death. The

prayer objectives were examples of either primary control or implicit secondary control.

Relationships. Of the 91 prayer requests concerned with relationships, 32 (35%) had the prayer author as the key focus. Most requests referred to pre-marital or marital relationships in which the prayer authors were involved. In most cases these were indicative of primary control where the authors suggested a desired outcome such as protection, help, blessing (usually in relation to having children), love, and longevity in the relationships. For a few (possibly younger) authors the desired outcome was more concrete, referring to the hope of re-establishing specific relationships with named or unnamed individuals. The rare examples of secondary control referred to an author's marriage and thwarted love.

[Please pray for] For our marriage.*

[Please pray for] Me as I am so mixed up. I love him so but he loves another.*

[Please pray for] My boyfriend NAME that we may get back together because he knows I will forgive him for all the trouble he has caused me because I love him very much.

Some requests were concerned with relationships between the authors and their families or friends, where primary control was evident in requests for re-establishing family relationships which have been broken through adoption as well as maintaining the longevity of friendships.

[Please pray for] I also pray that one day I will have a chance to see my real mother as I am adopted although I love my mum lots.

[Please pray for] NAME and help to keep her as my friend.

In addition, there was one prayer request set within the context of the absence of relationships, and illustrative of primary control, and one request addressed directly to an ex-partner.

[Please pray for] Please find me a nice man.

[Please pray for] NAME. Thanks for your memory. May you live a happy life and have a happy marriage. An old boyfriend.

Illness. Of the 401 prayer requests concerned with illness, 9 (2%) had the prayer author as the key focus. These related to physical ailments suffered by the prayer author and an operation as well as mental health in the form of depression and hypochondria. A couple of requests related to preservation of health. Primary control examples requested healing, improvement, or protection, and the one secondary control example stated the context with no indication of desirable outcome.

[Please pray for] Me to get rid of bad pains in my lungs.

[Please pray for] NAME Myself to come out of this depression and find peace of mind with her husband and son.

[Please prayer for] keep me free from cancer and heart trouble.

[Please pray for] Me as I am a dreadful hypochondriac.*

Open intention. Of the 242 prayer requests concerned with open intention, 6 (2%) had the prayer author as the key focus. These prayers did not include a specific intention but explicitly named the prayer author as the subject of the prayer. All the prayers were examples of secondary control, with no indication of desirable outcome.

[Please pray for] Me.*

[Please pray for] Pray for me.*

Work. Of the 42 prayer requests concerned with work, 6 (14%) had the prayer author as the key focus. These included requests for examination success, debt relief, and returning to school. These requests were equally divided between primary control and secondary control.

[Please pray for] My friend and I as we are approaching our 'A' level exams. Pray that we will reach our goals in life and make some contribution to the happiness and love of the world.

[Please pray for] For money to pay of debt.

[Please pray for] My first piano exam.*

[Please pray for] Me as I start school soon and I can't stand p.e. and games.*

General. Of the 163 prayer requests placed in the general category, 6 (4%) had the prayer author as the key focus. These prayer requests were not specific or

concrete enough to be accommodated within the existing intention categories and included requests for ‘peace of mind’, and the veiled request for that which had been given. All these were examples of primary control.

[Please pray for] Please give me peace of mind now.

[Please pray for] the one thing you have given me Lord. I pray you do not take it.

Growth. Of the 60 prayer requests concerned with growth, 5 (8%) had the prayer author as the key focus. The types of personal growth identified by the authors included increased moral awareness and faith development. All these requests were examples of primary control apart from one.

[Please pray for] Most of all help me to find the path I once had.

[Please pray for] make me a channel of your peace.

[Please pray for] Help me to be a better person.

[Please pray for] Me that I will try to put Christ first in my life constantly.

Sport and recreation. Of the 15 prayer requests concerned with sport and recreation, one (7%) had the prayer author as the key focus. This was an example of primary control, requesting help on a Duke of Edinburgh training camp.

Travel. Of the 14 prayer requests concerned with travel, one (7%) had the prayer author as the key focus, and this was an example of primary control, requesting a safe journey.

[Please pray for] Keep me safe on my journey.

Death. Of the 278 prayer requests concerned with death, one (0.3%) had the prayer author as the key focus, and this was an example of primary control, requesting protection from death.

[Please pray for] Me to live forever.

Other people

Of the 1,370 individual prayer requests, 1024 (75%) had people who were known personally to the prayer author as the key focus, and were concerned mainly with illness, followed by open intention, death, general, relationships, growth, work, travel, conflict or disaster, and sport or recreation. The prayer objectives were examples of implicit secondary control and primary control.

Illness. Of the 401 prayer requests concerned with illness, 350 (87%) had people known to the prayer author as the key focus. These prayer requests were mainly related to family members and friends, and employed primary control more often than secondary control. Requests referred to illnesses in general, non-specific terms or provided more detail about the nature of the problems, identifying diseases, accidents, mental health issues, operations, addiction, and pregnancy and birth, and if the conditions were terminal. Some of the requests included the families' of the ill. In a number of requests additional details concerning the age, location, and personal qualities of the ill people were included. Primary control requests had desirable outcomes which included, for the ill person, improvements in health, freedom from pain, and strength, and for the ill person's family, help,

strength, and ability to cope. Some requests focused on the prevention of illness and the promotion of health. Secondary control requests were characterised by their identification of context, with no desired outcomes.

[Please pray for] NAME who is going into hospital.*

[Please pray for] NAME who is bearing her illness so bravely.*

[Please pray for] All members of my family that they may find health and happiness.

[Please pray for] NAME that he may recover from schizophrenia.

[Please pray for] My wife NAME who has been unlucky with illness – give her strength to carry on and enjoy life.

[Please pray for] NAME and NAME that his suffering will soon end and for NAME his wife to have the strength she needs.

[Please pray for] NAME a sweet child fighting hard against a vile illness. Give her strength please to be completely well.

Death. Of the 278 prayer requests concerned with death, 240 (86%) had people known to the prayer author as the key focus. These prayer requests concerned dead family and friends, and often provided dates and the time lapse since the deaths, which ranged from very recent to a few years previous or more. In many cases the prayer author's emotions relating to the dead person were noted, and, less often, the dead person's personal qualities. In some cases, the prayer author addressed the dead person directly. Some requests stated the belief that the dead person was with God, reunited with other loved ones, or in heaven. A number of

requests were directed towards those who were left behind. The circumstances of the deaths were recorded mainly in very general terms, although some specific contexts were mentioned, for example, cancer.

There were more secondary control requests than primary control requests. Secondary control examples presented the context for the prayer, but suggested no desirable outcomes. Primary control requests asked for God to take care of the dead, to give peace to the dead, and to love or to bless the dead. In some cases a request was made for a dead person to go to heaven, and one request asked for a dead friend to be brought back to life. With regard to the bereaved, a few primary control requests asked that they may be helped during that difficult time. Another aspect of primary control examples was the anticipation of future deaths of family and friends with requests for long life.

[Please pray for] My dear mother who departed this life on August 24th and also for my father in law, who passed away in July. That they may enjoy the wonders of heaven.

[Please pray for] NAME my mate who died a year ago and make this all a nightmare and bring her back so that we can all be happy again.

[Please pray for] NAME who died a year ago. Please may she be in heaven and please look after her all the time and let her be by her friend and family all the time.

[Please pray for] My Nan who died two month ago. She was a great person. I'll never forget you Nan. Thinking of you always.*

[Please pray for] My godmother who sadly died a few years ago from

cancer.*

One prayer request asks that ‘unseen friends’ are present at a marriage.

[Please pray for] NAME and NAME as they start their life together on Saturday, DATE. May all our unseen friends be with us. Especially NAME, NAME and NAME.

Open intention. Of the 242 prayer requests concerned with open intention, 180 (74%) had other people known to the prayer author as the key focus. These prayers did not include a specific intention but explicitly named the individuals who were the subjects of the prayer. These individuals were mainly family and friends, although there were references to girlfriends, boyfriends and neighbours, and occasional references to a specific group in a parish. Extensive lists of names were not uncommon, although a few prayers preferred all-inclusive appellations, such as ‘family’, ‘friends’, and ‘everyone I know’. Some of these prayers may have referred to family or friends who had died.

A feature of some of these prayers was the additional information provided about the named individuals and the prayer author’s emotions in relation to them. Additional information included location and age. The emotion experienced by the authors in relation to the individuals was most often identified as love. All these were examples of secondary control.

[Please pray for] For my mama and grandad who are getting on and for all my family.*

[Please pray for] For a good new friend NAME.*

[Please pray for] My Grandma and Grandad who I miss deeply and for my mum and dad who I love.*

[Please pray for] NAME my darling son. All my love Mum x

General. Of the 163 prayer requests placed in the general category, 125 (77%) had people known to the prayer author as the key focus. These prayer requests were not specific or concrete enough to be accommodated within the existing intention categories and included requests for ‘happiness’, ‘safekeeping’, ‘peace’, ‘peace of mind’, ‘love’, and ‘strength’. Many other requests employed common expressions asking for God’s blessing, and a few requests alluded to specific situations, although these were too vague to place in an existing intention category. The requests were usually made on behalf of family and friends. Extensive lists of names were not uncommon, although a few prayers preferred all-inclusive appellations, such as ‘family’, ‘friends’, ‘neighbours’, and ‘everyone I know’. All these were examples of primary control.

[Please pray for] Bless mum and dad.

[Please pray for] NAME, NAME and baby that they will have great pleasure in their blessing.

[Please pray for] NAME and NAME to live after being scared by noises that no one has ever heard.

[Please pray for] NAME and NAME that their future may be brighter.

[Please pray for] St NAME all my family and friends, that I love, peace,

happiness and joy fills their lives.

[Please pray for] My family and friends. May God keep them safe and protect them.

Relationships. Of the 91 prayer requests concerned with relationships, 50 (55%) had people known to the prayer author as the key focus. Many of these referred to people in marital or pre-marital relationships, who were relations, friends, or acquaintances of the prayer author. In most cases these were indicative of primary control where the authors suggested a desired outcome in the relationships such as happiness, longevity, and the mending of difficult and broken relationships. Occasionally, there were cases of implicit secondary control where the authors' attitudes were recorded, but no explicit outcomes were suggested.

[Please pray for] NAME and NAME that they may reach 50 years of marriage safely. Worth more than gold.

[Please pray for] My mum and dad. Hope they get back together.

[Please pray for] NAME and NAME – their marriage.*

Many prayers were concerned with difficult relationships within the authors' own families or other people's families, including those who were separated from their families. Both primary control and secondary control examples were present. A few prayers expressed the hope of unity in family relationships which were problematic or that current strong relationships would continue, and these were examples of primary control.

[Please pray for] Family to be united as we are all going through a bad patch.

[Please pray for] NAME that he will return to his mother and family.

[Please pray for] Keep my family happy and together for always.

[Please pray for] NAME – I hope her dad learns to look after her when he realises she loves him.

Growth. Of the 60 prayer requests concerned with growth, 32 (50%) had people known to the prayer author as the key focus. Many prayers were requests for conversion experiences on behalf of others (family and friends), the growth of faith, the discovery or adherence to the right path, truth, or direction, and self knowledge. Most of these were examples of primary control, although a few were examples of secondary control, stating the context for the prayer with no suggested desirable outcome.

[Please pray for] For NAME that he will learn in his last year of college to know himself.

[Please pray for] My two daughters NAME and NAME that they may come to know the love of Jesus in a personal way and put their trust in him.

[Please pray for] My brother who is a confessed occultist witch. Please pray that he has no rest until he comes to Christ.

[Please pray for] My nana and granddad and other nana who chose not to believe in God and Jesus.*

One prayer requested that a person be provided with ‘security’ and ‘love’ so that he would mature into ‘a caring, loving’ person.

Work. Of the 42 prayer requests concerned with work, 29 (69%) had people known to the prayer author as the key focus. Many of these requests were related to achievement in respect of examination success, passing driving tests, or finding a job. Others focused on new beginnings in respect of starting a new school, a job interview, or retirement. In addition, work-related issues were included in some prayer requests. Most of these were examples of primary control, with desirable outcomes expressed mainly in concrete terms, for example, requests to pass exams or to gain employment, but there were a few expressed in abstract terms, for example, requests for ‘peace’, and ‘enjoyment’. The cases of secondary control stated the context, and made no reference to desirable outcome.

[Please pray for] NAME so that she might pass her nursing exam.

[Please pray for] NAME that he will settle down in his new school.

[Please pray for] Please pray that my grand dad NAME enjoys his retirement and that my granny NAME be also able to enjoy his retirement.

[Please pray for] NAME’s dad who is on the dole. My dad who is working his fingers to the bone.*

[Please pray for] My brother who is due to take his exams.*

Travel. Of the 14 prayer requests concerned with travel, 12 (86%) had people known to the prayer author as the key focus. Most requests concerned family or friends who were on holiday or about to emigrate, and, in some cases, the author was included in the group. Most requests were primary control focusing on safety and enjoyment. Secondary control examples stated the context with no reference to desirable outcome.

[Please pray for] Our son NAME who will shortly depart on a long motor trip around Europe and for NAME who will leave for holidays in France.*

[Please pray for] Please pray that all the members of our camping holiday arrive home safely.

[Please pray for] NAME that she finds happiness in Australia.

Sport or recreation. Of the 15 prayer requests concerned with sport and recreation, 4 (27%) had people known to the prayer author as the key focus. All of these were primary control examples, requesting help for the Duke of Edinburgh award.

[Please pray for] Me and my friends. We have D of E tomorrow. Stop us from collapsing.

Conflict or disaster. Of the 60 prayer requests concerned with conflict or disaster, 2 (3%) had people known to the prayer author as the key focus. Primary control and secondary control examples were equally represented. The primary

control request asked for protection from disaster and the secondary control request stated the context without indicating a desirable outcome.

[Please pray for] All those who died in the fight for freedom.*

[Please pray for] Dear God please make us not get killed or anything like that.

Animals

Of the 1,370 individual prayer requests, 57 (4%) had animals which were known personally to the prayer author as the key focus, and were concerned mainly with open intention, followed by death, general, illness, and relationships. The prayer objectives were examples of either implicit secondary control or primary control.

Death. Of the 278 prayer requests concerned with death, 30 (11%) had animals known to the prayer author as the key focus. Most of these requests concerned a variety of pets including cats, dogs, hamsters, and a pig which had died at specific times in the past or recently. The animals were referred to by name or species. Most requests were examples of secondary control, and these noted the pets' deaths, their place in heaven, and occasionally the circumstances surrounding the death and the owners' emotions in relation to the pet, with no desirable outcome. Primary control requests asked for their pets to rest in peace, to be blessed, or looked after, and included an additional focus on extant pets, that they should experience long lives.

[Please pray for] My hamster NAME who was very ill, and died three weeks ago. I loved him very much. May you God, look after him for me,

and keep him in your care. I spent many hours with him.

[Please pray for] My bull dog. May he rest in peace.

[Please pray for] Dog NAME who died at Christmas. She was a wonderful spaniel. God bless her.

[Please pray for] My cat NAME who has recently been knocked over and killed.*

[Please pray for] My dog NAME who will be gone from our lives sometime but not from our memories.*

Open intention. Of the 242 prayer requests concerned with open intention, 13 (5%) had animals known to the prayer author as the key focus. None of these prayers included a specific intention but identified a pet or pets, often by species or personal name, for which prayer was intended. Most pets were the authors' own but with occasional reference to the pets of others. In a few examples, the authors expressed their emotions in relation to the pets, which they usually identified as love. All these were examples of secondary control.

[Please pray for] NAME my cat, and NAME my other cat.*

[Please pray for] My dog we all love him and he is getting old.*

Illness. Of the 401 prayer requests concerned with illness, 9 (2%) had animals known to the prayer author as the key focus. The cases of primary control requested that sick pets were looked after, and, in one case, that a pet stayed healthy. The cases of secondary control stated the context without indicating a

desirable outcome.

[Please pray for] Please look after my dog who is not well.

[Please pray for] For my dog NAME who is not well and the vet does not know what is wrong.*

[Please pray for] NAME my hamster. He is losing the hair out of his bottom.*

General. Of the 163 prayer requests placed in the general category, 4 (2%) had animals known to the prayer author as the key focus. These requests were not sufficiently explicit to place within any of the other intention categories, and they were all examples of primary control.

Travel. Of the 14 prayer requests concerned with travel. One (7%) had an animal known to the key author as the key focus, and is an example of primary control.

[Please pray for] all the small swallows who have found sanctuary in this porch for so generations. God give them safe journey.

World or global

Of the 1,370 individual prayer requests, 222 (16%) had a world or a global context as the key focus, and were concerned mainly with dissent and war, followed by open intention, illness, growth, death, general, relationships, sport and recreation, work, and travel. The prayer objectives were examples of either implicit secondary control or primary control.

Conflict or disaster. Of the 60 prayer requests concerned with conflict or disaster, 58 (97%) had a world or global context as the key focus. In these prayer requests, both general and specific groups were selected for prayer. The general included the starving, the poor, the dying, and the abused and killed animals, with no geographical or other contextualising information provided. The specific included named examples of countries, groups of people, events, and disasters. Many of these probably referred to the same contexts as the general groups. These were often related to Africa and the Middle East, with a few European examples.

There were more primary control requests than secondary control requests. Secondary control requests stated the contexts, with desired outcomes. Primary control requests included some concrete outcomes, relating to the provision of food for the starving, rain for drought, destruction of nuclear weapons, and freedom from war, for example. In addition, there were many abstract outcomes, relating to peace, love, justice, and strength.

[Please pray for] the 3rd world.*

[Please pray for] Starving people in the world.*

[Please pray for] Peace in the world and that all the starving people will get enough food and water.

[Please pray for] Peace throughout the world and the destruction of all nuclear weapons.

[Please pray for] All the animals that are experimented on, killed, shot,

and run over. Help them seek a better life.

[Please pray for world peace especially in the Middle East.

Open Intention. Of the 242 prayer requests concerned with open intention, 43 (18%) had a world or a global context as the key focus. These prayers were either all-inclusive, for ‘everyone’ or ‘the world’, for example, or more specific, citing children or those in need. Some requests named counties, villages, and parishes as the subjects of prayer. All these were examples of secondary control.

[Please pray for] Everyone who is not evil.*

[Please pray for] all the people of St Andrews.*

[Please pray for] Everyone that is honest and goes to church*

[Please pray for] those who are cold, hungry and tired in whichever country they may be.*

Illness. Of the 401 prayer requests concerned with illness, 33 (8%) had a world or a global context as the key focus. There were slightly more examples of secondary control than primary control, where the contexts for the requests were stated without identified desirable outcomes. These contexts related usually to those with physical illnesses and occasionally to mental health issues in general, and included the ill, hospitalised, and cancer patients. In the examples of primary control, the desirable outcomes related mainly to physical illnesses but also included mental illness in general, and ranged from global health, healing, and help for the ill (including animals) to the discovery of a cure for AIDS.

Occasionally, primary control was expressed in terms of receiving divine gifts such as grace and peace, and in a number of cases God was asked to bless the sick. In both primary control and secondary control there were occasional requests for the carers of the ill.

[Please pray for] All the people who suffer from mental health disorders and all the people who treat and care for them.*

[Please pray for] All people with cancer.*

[Please pray for] The sick in mind and body. May your grace shine upon them and those who care of them. Giving divine strength and love as Jesus had.

[Please pray for] All the sick and suffering to get well again.

General. Of the 163 prayer requests placed in the general category, 28 (17%) had a world or a global context as the key focus. These prayers requests were not specific or concrete enough to be accommodated within the existing intention categories and included broad and inclusive requests for ‘happiness’, ‘love’, and ‘peace’, for example. All these were examples of primary control.

[Please pray for] Joy, happiness and togetherness in our family and the larger family of mankind.

[Please pray for] Everyone who is lonely, scared and needing security. May they be fed, kept warm and live happy lives.

[Please pray for] all those who suffer, those we know and those we do not know and especially our animal friends who give so much and receive so

little. May they all find peace, comfort and most of all love.

Growth. Of the 64 prayer requests concerned with growth, 27 (42%) had a world or a global context as the key focus. Many prayers were requests for conversions or ‘turning to God’ on two levels: in England, with reference to individual churches and missions, and in the world, with reference to people or categories of people in general. A few of these prayers referred to more extensive global change brought about by the power of God or the return of Jesus. In addition some prayers focused on established Christian communities or Christians in general and their faith development. Most were examples of primary control, although a few examples of secondary control were evident.

[Please pray for] For all who follow Christ as his apostles, taking up their cross daily.*

[Please pray for] the world and Jesus to come again to save us.

[Please pray for] The healing of our nation and a return to Biblical truth.

[Please pray for] All Christian that more of what they want will decrease and more of God’s will increase.

[Please pray for] That the evils of our day may be overcome through the power of Almighty God.

A number of prayers included requests to develop certain qualities or attributes for application on a global level, for example, kindness, truthfulness, contentment, and moral strength. These were all examples of primary control.

[Please pray for] All the little children. May they grow up to be kind and

truthful.

[Please pray for] Every thing we have. Help us not to want more.

Sport or recreation. Of the 15 prayer requests concerned with sport or recreation, 10 (67%) had a world or a global context as the key focus. All of the prayers related to named football teams or England in the world cup. Most of these were examples of primary control, requesting the success of the team, while the two secondary control prayers stated only the context.

[Please pray for] Leicester City football club.*

[Please pray for] Derby County and help them win promotion.

Relationships. Of the 91 prayer requests concerned with relationships, 9 (10%) had a world or a global context as the key focus. All the prayers were concerned with relationships which were viewed as imperfect, and (either implicitly or explicitly) pointed towards ideal states. Two prayers were examples of secondary control, where the context for the prayer was stated without an explicit desirable outcome, and others were examples of primary control, where specific qualities were requested to characterise global relationships among human beings such as love, trust, harmony, peace, and unity.

[Please pray for] All the children of the world who are devoid of the love of caring parents and families – a thing which we all find to easy to take for granted.*

[Please pray for] All homeless animals with no one to feed and care for

them.*

[Please pray for] All the peoples of the earth that they can learn to love and trust each other and live as one nation.

[Please pray for] Families that they may be reunited in family love.

Death. Of the 278 prayer requests concerned with death, 7 (3%) had a world or a global context as the key focus. These prayer requests were concerned mainly with those who had died in non-specific contexts, or those who were experiencing bereavement. There were slightly more examples of secondary control than primary control, and these stated the context with no desirable outcome. Primary control requests focused on peace and God's blessing for the dead, with one request related to purgatory.

[Please pray for] All the souls of the faithfully departed including NAME R.I.P.

[Please pray for] Everyone who has died. And those who are in purgatory to go into heaven soon.

[Please pray for] Bereaved and needy people.*

It should be noted that some of the prayer requests in the conflict or disaster category which had world or global concerns as the key focus could have been placed under death, either explicitly or implicitly.

Work. Of the 42 prayer requests concerned with work, 7 (17%) had a world or a

global context as the key focus. These included broad all-inclusive requests relating to certain categories of people such as the unemployed, nurses, and teachers. There were more examples of primary control than secondary control. Secondary control examples stated the context with no desirable outcomes identified. In primary control prayer authors requested help, strength, or a change in circumstances.

[Please pray for] Help those who are out of work or who can't.

[Please pray for] NAME school that they might receive a proper headmaster soon.

[Please pray for] All those out of work.*

[Please pray for] People and teachers who help us in hard stadges in life.*

[Please pray for] All nurses that they may find courage to continue their work despite the heavy burdens which they are forced to carry. May God bless them and watch over them, helping them to ease the dissolution of their work.

Conclusion

The aim of this case study is to replicate the general content analysis conducted in case study 1, which employed the general analytical framework to explore prayer *intention*, prayer *reference*, and prayer *objective*.

The results of the replication in relation to the framework's three constructs, prayer *reference*, prayer *intention*, and prayer *objective*, are largely

similar to the results of the initial study presented in the first case study. In terms of prayer *reference*, prayers which had the prayer authors and animals as key foci (5% and 4 %, respectively) were significantly fewer than prayers which had people known personally to the prayer author and world or global contexts as key foci (75% and 16%, respectively). Figures for prayer authors and animals were almost identical to those recorded in the first study. In the present study, however, the proportion of prayers relating to world or global contexts (16%) and prayers for people known personally to the prayer author (75%) differed from those recorded in the first study, where 27% of prayers related to world or global contexts and 63% of prayers were for people known personally to the prayer author. This shift may be explained by the temporary effects of high profile national and international events such as disasters, war, and famine on the content of ordinary people's prayer, which was particularly evident in the first study. The figures also suggest that when people are not praying for world or global issues, they will pray for others, namely, their family and friends. This reinforces the significance of family and friends in the context of ordinary prayer, and indicates that this reference category may be a default position for the majority of prayer authors.

In terms of prayer *intention*, 29% of prayer requests were concerned with illness, followed by 20% for death, 18% for open intention, 12% for general, 7% for relationships, 5% for growth, 4% for conflict or disaster, 3% for work, 1% for travel, and 1% for sport or recreation. These results reflect a generally similar balance of concerns as those presented in the first study, indicating the primary importance of illness and death in prayer requests as well as the trait of open intention, where prayer requests are not expressed in any concrete

contextualising terms. The only intention category to vary markedly from the first study was that of ‘conflict or disaster’. The sharp decrease in prayer requests relating to conflict or disaster may be directly related to the corresponding sharp decrease in prayers set in a ‘world or global’ context. The figures may also suggest that when people are not praying for issues relating to conflict or disaster, they may pray for illnesses relating to family and friends.

In terms of prayer *objective*, there were more examples of primary control (55%) than secondary control (45%), which is almost the direct inverse of the results for the first study (57% secondary control and 43% primary control). However, some of the results remained consistent over the two studies. In relation to prayer *reference*, the use of primary control for prayer requests relating to the prayer author remained consistently high and the use of secondary control for prayer requests relating to animals known to the prayer author remained evident. In relation to prayer *intention*, primary control was largely employed in prayer requests concerned with illness, relationships, growth, and work across the two studies, and secondary control was largely employed in prayer requests concerned with death across the two studies. These shared results help to support the significance of primary control and secondary control within some categories of prayer *reference* and prayer *intention*, while suggesting that the reasons for the differentiation between primary control and secondary control may be more subtle and complex for other categories.

In conclusion, the results emerging from the replication of the general framework support the results of the initial study, and work well in identifying the main elements of this type of ordinary prayer in a consistent and structured manner. At the same time, the replication has refined the interpretation of results

offered in the first case study in light of the few key differences emerging between the two studies. This illustrates the importance of replicating studies in the same location in order to test both the robustness of a framework and its results. The general framework now needs to be tested in different rural locations and in urban locations.

Case study 2: Content of intercessory and supplicatory prayer by intention, reference, and objective

intention	people		global		self		animals		total		TOTAL
	pc	sc	pc	sc	pc	sc	pc	sc	pc	sc	
illness	227	123	15	18	8	1	3	6	253	148	401
death	103	137	3	4	1	0	12	18	119	159	278
growth	29	3	24	3	4	1	0	0	57	7	64
work	22	7	5	2	3	3	0	0	30	12	42
relationships	38	12	7	2	30	2	0	0	75	16	91
conflict/disaster	1	1	36	22	0	0	0	0	37	23	60
sport/recreation	4	0	8	2	1	0	0	0	13	2	15
travel	8	4	0	0	1	0	1	0	10	4	14
open intention	0	180	0	43	0	6	0	13	0	242	242
general	125	0	28	0	6	0	4	0	163	0	163
total	557	467	126	96	54	13	20	37	757	613	
TOTAL	1024		222		67		57				

Chapter 10 Case study 3: Ordinary prayer and implicit religion

Introduction

The aim of this case study is to explore the content of ordinary prayers for the presence of implicit religion within an explicit religion context. The study builds on the results of the second batch of 1,067 prayer-cards analysed in case study 2 using the general analytical framework, which map the broad content of intercessory and supplicatory prayers. Lord's (2006) nine-type definition of implicit religion is then employed to identify examples of implicit religion within the prayer content. In order to define and to contextualise the implicit religion component in this case study, an outline of the relevant aspects of implicit religion is provided.

Implicit religion

Part of the study of implicit religion involves listening to that which is often not fully heard or taken seriously in its own right within the study of religion.

Implicit religion is an intentionally broad construct, and, as a result, it needs to rely on general 'working' frameworks or definitions which can allow practical applications of the construct to be coherent and meaningful. Bailey (2002: 2) provides three definitions of implicit religion, which describe implicit religion as being concerned with commitment, integrating foci, and intensive concerns with

extensive effects. Building on Bailey's research tradition, Lord (2006) offers a clear definition of implicit religion through identifying settings for implicit religion and types of implicit religion. In relation to settings, implicit religion is found in the secular world, informal religion, and organised religion where it is 'less easily discerned.' In relation to types, implicit religion is found in nine forms. The first three types are located in the secular world, followed by individual experience ('ecstasy, transcendence and mysticism'), societal consensus ('civil religion, civic religion, hidden curricula and national identity'), effect of explicit religion ('popular religion, culture and residual religion'), source of explicit religion ('folk religion and phenomenology'), group experience (which overlaps with societal consensus but on a smaller scale), and the pre-conscious ('unitary identity, spontaneous religion and mythological worldview'). An important understanding within this definition is the acknowledgement that any belief or practice under scrutiny within the context of implicit religion may have elements which fall into more than one type and that there are 'degrees of sacredness or secularity depending on the cultural context.' Lord argues that the last five types 'are particularly useful for studies that examine implicit religion as it relates to explicit or formal religion.'

A useful understanding of movement and relationships between the explicit and the implicit is articulated by Homan. Homan (2000: 102) describes 'the intermediate zone between the implicit and explicit [where] there is a traffic of ideas, beliefs, sentiments and practices.' For Homan this 'traffic' is two-directional: it can move from the implicit to the explicit and from the explicit to the implicit, but the direction of movement is defined by the nature of the explicit and the attitudes of the explicit toward the implicit.

A number of studies which refer overtly to implicit religion have focused on areas where the boundaries which exist between the church and secular world are permeable and as such provide contexts for the study of implicit religion. Applying Lord's categorisation of implicit religion according to setting and type in relation to these studies, it can be seen that they are concerned with examples of implicit religion located within the setting of organised religion, and within the types of societal consensus, effect of explicit religion, and source of explicit religion. An example of research concerned with the 'societal consensus' type is a study by Smith, Francis, and Robbins (2002), which involved a survey of 256 clergy within the Church of England regarding their views on Establishment and disestablishment. The key foci of the study were attitude toward Establishment, the shape for the future, appointment of bishops, election of bishops, bishops and parliament, parliamentary control, reshaping relationships with parliament, status of the monarchy, power of the monarchy, the parish system, and ecclesiastical and secular jurisdictions. The main conclusion drawn from the survey was that the majority of clergy surveyed wished to keep Establishment and recognised particular benefits that Establishment conveyed, for example, bishops' seats in the House of Lords and the right of all members of a parish to a funeral and burial. However, many clergy also wished to see modifications made which would give the Church of England more control over its internal affairs. Some of the disadvantages of Establishment cited by the clergy included: the prime minister's role in appointing bishops and parliament's control over the prayer book, Church Commissioners, the General Synod, and Church legislation. This study falls into the 'societal consensus' type, insofar as it explores the relationships which exist between an Established church and the state.

Examples of research concerned with the ‘effect of explicit religion’ type and the ‘source of explicit religion’ type include a study by Francis, Littler, and Thomas (2000) which involved a survey of 242 clergy in the Church in Wales regarding their views on baptism. The key foci of the study were open baptismal policy, restrictive baptismal policy, questioning infant baptism, baptism and pastoral care, baptismal liturgy, and baptismal theology. Three main conclusions were drawn from the survey. First, the existence of three stances towards infant baptism was confirmed, and identified as: the replacement of infant baptism by adult baptism; restriction of access to infant baptism; and an open approach to infant baptism. Secondly, the majority of clergy preferred an open approach to baptism in keeping with the perspective of the Church in Wales, which demonstrates an unwillingness ‘to draw firm boundaries between the secular and sacred (world and church)’. Thirdly, clergy emphasised the importance of preparation for baptism. This study falls into the ‘effect of explicit religion’ type, insofar as open approaches to baptism provide contexts for engagement with explicit religious practice without demanding accompanying beliefs, and therefore this may be regarded as a potential area for residual religion. However, from the perspective of the clergy who support an open baptism policy, it may be argued that there is an acceptance of the implicit religion of those who wish to have access to the font without meeting explicit Christian criteria, combined with a view to maintaining contacts with the secular world, and providing opportunities for Christian education in terms of baptismal preparation. As a result, this may be seen as an example of the ‘source of explicit religion’ type also, insofar as culture can be seen to affect explicit religion, even though the culture element is not integrated into Christian beliefs and practices in the same

way as harvest festival celebrations, for example.

Another example of research concerned with the ‘effect of explicit religion’ type is a study by Francis, Williams, and Robbins (2006) which involved a survey of 65 men and 93 women attending eight Anglican churches in Wales about their beliefs, attitudes and practices. The purpose of the study was to explore conventional Christian belief and practice alongside unconventional belief and practice (relating to good luck and bad luck). Analysis of the data showed that a wide range of beliefs and practices was present among the churchgoers, including beliefs about good luck and bad luck (although some of these unconventional belief items were more popular than others, none was in a majority), and luck-related behaviour (which, for some items, were in the majority). This study falls into the ‘effect of explicit religion’ type insofar as it is concerned with the presence of superstitious beliefs and practices among churchgoers which have neither Christian origins nor endorsement on the part of the Church.

Against this background, it is evident that Lord’s definition of implicit religion recognises implicit religion within organised religion as well as within secular contexts. As a consequence, Lord’s broad, yet precisely articulated definition of implicit religion provides a valuable tool for studying how implicit religion relates to explicit religion. This has been clearly demonstrated by relating key aspects of studies set within formal religious contexts to Lord’s ‘types’ of implicit religion. It is within this framework, therefore, that the present study of ordinary prayer within an explicit religious context is articulated in relation to implicit religion.

Method

Of the 1,067 prayer-cards analysed in the study, 1,022 were entirely concerned with intercessory and supplicatory prayer forms (96%). Of the remaining 45 prayer-cards, 33 included elements of thanksgiving, five included elements of confession and repentance, and seven included elements of adoration. Within the prayer-cards concerned with intercession and supplication, a total of 1,370 requests were made. It is these 1,370 individual requests which form the basis of the following analyses.

The general analytical framework used for mapping the content of the intercessory and supplicatory prayers distinguished between three elements defined as *intention*, *reference*, and *objective*. The notion of *intention* is applied to distinguishing between ten key areas with which the individual authors were concerned: illness, death, growth, work, relationships, conflict or disaster, sport or recreation, travel, open intention, and general. The notion of *reference* is applied to distinguishing between four key foci with which the individual authors were concerned: themselves, other people who were known personally to the authors, animals which were known personally to the authors, and the world or global context. The notion of *objective* is applied to distinguishing between two effects which the individual authors envisaged as a consequence of their prayers of intercession or supplication in terms of primary control and secondary control. In primary control prayer authors explicitly suggest the desired consequences of their prayers. In secondary control prayer authors place prayers and their consequences entirely in the hands of another. Secondary control is further sub-

divided into explicit secondary control and implicit secondary control, where control is given to either God or the person praying on behalf of the prayer author, respectively.

After completing this first stage of analysis which is designed to map the broad content of intercessory and supplicatory prayers, Lord's (2006) nine-type definition of implicit religion was applied to identify any examples of implicit religion within the prayer content.

Results

The first stage in the analysis of the 1,370 individual prayer requests identified the range of the prayer authors' concerns, employing the three constructs of prayer *intention*, prayer *reference* and prayer *objective*. In relation to prayer intention, 401 (29%) requests were concerned with illness, 278 (20%) death, 242 (18%) open intention, 163 (12%) general, 91 (7%) relationships, 64 (5%) growth, 60 (4%) conflict or disaster, 42 (3%) work, 15 (1%) sport or recreation, and 14 (1%) travel. In relation to prayer reference 1024 (75%) were requests for other people who were known to the prayer author, 222 (16%) for global concerns, 67 (5%) for the prayer authors themselves, and 57 (4%) for animals known to the prayer author. In relation to prayer objective, primary control was employed in 757 (55%) of requests and secondary control was employed in 613 (45%) of requests.

The results of the quantitative analyses are presented in a table at the end of this chapter, and their full exemplification is provided in case study 2. For the present study, these results were then examined to identify examples of the

presence of implicit religion within explicit religious contexts as defined by Lord (2006). Three areas relevant to implicit religion emerged relating to prayer authors' beliefs about death and afterlife, manipulation of the environment, and common expressions of implied efficacy.

In the following exemplification, examples of secondary control are denoted by an asterisk (*).

Death and afterlife

Of the 1,370 individual prayer requests, 278 (20%) were concerned with death and afterlife. These concerns were found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for 240 (86%) of cases, followed by 30 (11%) for animals known personally to the prayer author, 7 (3%) for a world or global context, and one (0.3%) for the prayer author.

Other people. These prayer requests concerned dead family and friends, and often provided dates and the time lapse since the deaths, which ranged from very recent to a few years previous or more. In many cases the prayer author's emotions relating to the dead person were noted, and, less often, the dead person's personal qualities. In some cases, the prayer author addressed the dead person directly. Some requests stated the belief that the dead person was with God, reunited with other loved ones, or in heaven. A number of requests were directed towards those who were left behind. The circumstances of the deaths were recorded mainly in very general terms, although some specific contexts

were mentioned, for example, cancer.

There were more secondary control requests than primary control requests. Secondary control examples presented the context for the prayer, but suggested no desirable outcomes. Primary control requests asked for God to take care of the dead, give peace to the dead, and love or bless the dead. In some cases a request was made for a dead person to go to heaven, and one request asked for a dead friend to be brought back to life. With regard to the bereaved, a few primary control requests asked that they may be helped during that difficult time. Another aspect of primary control examples was the anticipation of future deaths of family and friends with requests for long life.

[Please pray for] My dear mother who departed this life on August 24th and also for my father in law, who passed away in July. That they may enjoy the wonders of heaven.

[Please pray for] NAME my mate who died a year ago and make this all a nightmare and bring her back so that we can all be happy again.

[Please pray for] NAME who died a year ago. Please may she be in heaven and please look after her all the time and let her be by her friend and family all the time.

[Please pray for] My Nan who died two month ago. She was a great person. I'll never forget you Nan. Thinking of you always.*

[Please pray for] My godmother who sadly died a few years ago from cancer.*

One prayer request asks that ‘unseen friends’ are present at a marriage.

[Please pray for] NAME and NAME as they start their life together on Saturday, DATE. May all our unseen friends be with us. Especially NAME, NAME and NAME.

Animals. Most of these requests concerned a variety of pets known to the prayer author including cats, dogs, hamsters, and a pig which had died at specific times in the past or recently. The animals were referred to by name or species. Most requests were examples of secondary control, and these noted the pets’ deaths, their place in heaven, and occasionally the circumstances and the owners’ emotions in relation to the pet, with no desirable outcome. Primary control requests asked for their pets to rest in peace, to be blessed, or looked after, and included an additional focus on extant pets, that they should experience long lives.

[Please pray for] My hamster NAME who was very ill, and died three weeks ago. I loved him very much. May you God, look after him for me, and keep him in your care. I spent many hours with him.

[Please pray for] My bull dog. May he rest in peace.

[Please pray for] Dog NAME who died at Christmas. She was a wonderful spaniel. God bless her.

[Please pray for] My cat NAME who has recently been knocked over and killed.*

[Please pray for] My dog NAME who will be gone from our lives

sometime but not from our memories.*

World or global. These prayer requests were for those who were not known personally to the prayer author and focused on those who had died in non-specific contexts or those who were experiencing bereavement. There were slightly more examples of secondary control than primary control, and these stated the context with no desirable outcome. Primary control requests focused on peace and God's blessing for the dead, with one request related to purgatory.

[Please pray for] All the souls of the faithfully departed including NAME
R.I.P.

[Please pray for] Everyone who has died. And those who are in purgatory
to go into heaven soon.

[Please pray for] Bereaved and needy people.*

It should be noted that some of the prayer requests in the conflict or disaster categories which had world or global concerns as the key focus could have been placed under death, either explicitly or implicitly.

Self. Of the 278 prayer requests concerned with death, one (0.3%) had the prayer author as the key focus, and this was an example of primary control, requesting protection from death.

[Please pray for] Me to live forever.

Manipulation of the environment

Of the 1,370 individual prayer requests, primary control (where prayer authors explicitly try to control the prayer outcome) was preferred over secondary control (where control is placed in the hands of another), with 757 cases of primary control (55%) and 613 cases of secondary control (45%). Primary control was employed more frequently than secondary control in requests relating to: people who were known personally to the prayer author, with 557 cases of primary control (54%) and 467 cases of secondary control (46%); a world or global context, with 126 (57%) cases of primary control and 96 cases of secondary control (43%); and the prayer author with 54 (81%) cases of primary control and 13 cases of secondary control (19%). Requests relating to animals known personally to the prayer author employed secondary control more often than primary control with 37 cases of secondary control (65%) and 20 cases of primary control (35%).

In addition, primary control was employed more frequently than secondary control in requests relating to illness, with 253 cases of primary control (63%) and 148 cases of secondary control (37%). This was followed by general, with 163 cases of primary control (100%) and no cases of secondary control (0%); relationships, with 75 cases of primary control (82%) and 16 cases of secondary control (18%); growth, with 57 primary control (89%) and seven cases of secondary control (11%); conflict or disaster, with 37 cases of primary control (62%) and 23 cases of secondary control (38%); work, with 30 cases of primary control (71%) and 12 cases of secondary control (29%); sport, with 13 cases of primary control (87%) and 2 cases of secondary control (13%); and travel, with 10 cases of primary control (71%) and 4 cases of secondary control

(29%). Secondary control was employed more frequently than primary control in requests relating to the open intention category, with 242 cases of secondary control (100%) and no cases of primary control (0%). This was followed by death, with 159 cases of secondary control (57%) and 119 cases of primary control (43%).

The following exemplification of primary control prayer requests focuses on selected prayer intention categories which are explored through the four prayer reference categories with the aim of illustrating the full range of prayer intentions (primary control prayer requests relating to death and afterlife have already been exemplified and as such are not included in this section).

Other People

Illness. Primary control prayer requests were mainly related to family members and friends. The requests referred to illnesses in general, non-specific terms or provided more detail about the nature of the problems, identifying diseases, accidents, mental health issues, operations, addiction, and pregnancy and birth, and if the conditions were terminal. Some of the requests included the families' of the ill. In a number of requests additional details concerning the age, location, and personal qualities of the ill people were included. Primary control requests had desirable outcomes which included, for the ill person, improvements in health, freedom from pain, and strength, and for the ill person's family, help, strength, and ability to cope. Some requests focused on the prevention of illness and the promotion of health.

[Please pray for] All members of my family that they may find health and

happiness.

[Please pray for] NAME that he may recover from schizophrenia.

[Please pray for] My wife NAME who has been unlucky with illness – give her strength to carry on and enjoy life.

[Please pray for] NAME and NAME that his suffering will soon end and for NAME his wife to have the strength she needs.

[Please pray for] NAME a sweet child fighting hard against a vile illness. Give her strength please to be completely well.

Work. Primary control requests were related to achievement in respect of examination success, passing driving tests, or finding a job. Others focused on new beginnings in respect of starting a new school, a job interview, or retirement. In addition, work-related issues were included in some prayer requests. Desirable outcomes were expressed mainly in concrete terms, for example, requests to pass exams or to gain employment, but there were a few expressed in abstract terms, for example, requests for ‘peace’, and ‘enjoyment’.

[Please pray for] NAME so that she might pass her nursing exam.

[Please pray for] NAME that he will settle down in his new school.

[Please pray for] Please pray that my grand dad NAME enjoys his retirement and that my granny NAME be also able to enjoy his retirement.

Travel. Primary control requests concerned family or friends who were on

holiday or about to emigrate, and, in some cases, the author was included in the group. Most requests focused on safety and enjoyment in these travel contexts.

[Please pray for] Please pray that all the members of our camping holiday arrive home safely.

[Please pray for] NAME that she finds happiness in Australia.

General. Primary control prayer requests were not specific or concrete enough to be accommodated within the existing intention categories and included requests for ‘happiness’, ‘safekeeping’, ‘peace’, ‘peace of mind’, love, and ‘strength’. Many other requests employed common expressions asking for God’s blessing, and a few requests alluded to specific situations, although these were too vague to place in an existing intention category. The requests were usually made on behalf of family and friends. Extensive lists of names were not uncommon, although a few prayers preferred all-inclusive appellations, such as ‘family’, ‘friends’, ‘neighbours’, and ‘everyone I know’.

[Please pray for] Bless mum and dad.

[Please pray for] NAME, NAME and baby that they will have great pleasure in their blessing.

[Please pray for] NAME and NAME to live after being scared by noises that no one has ever heard.

[Please pray for] NAME and NAME that their future may be brighter

[Please pray for] St NAME all my family and friends, that I love, peace, happiness and joy fills their lives.

[Please pray for] My family and friends. May God keep them safe and protect them.

World or Global

Conflict or disaster. In these primary control prayer requests, both general and specific groups were selected for prayer. The general included the starving, the poor, the dying, and abused and killed animals, with no geographical or other contextualising information provided. The specific included named examples of countries, groups of people, events, and disasters. Many of these probably referred to the same contexts as the general groups. These were often related to Africa and the Middle East, with a few European examples.

All these primary control requests included some concrete outcomes, relating to the provision of food for the starving, rain for drought, destruction of nuclear weapons, and freedom from war, for example. In addition, there were many abstract outcomes, relating to peace, love, justice, and strength.

[Please pray for] Peace in the world and that all the starving people will get enough food and water.

[Please pray for] Peace throughout the world and the destruction of all nuclear weapons.

[Please pray for] All the animals that are experimented on, killed, shot, and run over. Help them seek a better life.

[Please pray for] world peace especially in the Middle East.

Growth. Many of the primary control prayers were requests for conversions or ‘turning to God’ at two levels: in England with reference to individual churches and missions, and in the world with reference to people or categories of people in general. A few of these prayers referred to more extensive global change brought about by the power of God or the return of Jesus. In addition some prayers focused on established Christian communities or Christians in general and their faith development.

[Please pray for] the world and Jesus to come again to save us.

[Please pray for] The healing of our nation and a return to Biblical truth.

[Please pray for] All Christian that more of what they want will decrease and more of God’s will increase.

[Please pray for] That the evils of our day may be overcome through the power of Almighty God.

A number of prayers included requests to develop certain qualities or attributes for application on a global level, for example, kindness, truthfulness, contentment, and moral strength.

[Please pray for] All the little children. May they grow up to be kind and truthful.

[Please pray for] Every thing we have. Help us not to want more.

Sport or recreation. All of the primary control prayers related to named football teams or England in the world cup, and requested the successful outcomes.

[Please pray for] Derby County and help them win promotion.

Self

Illness. Primary control prayer requests related to physical ailments suffered by the prayer author and an operation as well as mental health in the form of depression. A couple of requests related to preservation of health. Examples requested healing, improvement, or protection.

[Please pray for] Me to get rid of bad pains in my lungs.

[Please pray for] NAME Myself to come out of this depression and find peace of mind with my husband and son.

[Please prayer for] keep me free from cancer and heart trouble.

Relationships. Most primary control requests referred to pre-marital or marital relationships in which the prayer authors were involved, and often suggested a desired outcome such as protection, help, blessing (usually in relation to having children), love, and longevity in the relationships. For a few, possibly younger, authors the desired outcome was more concrete, referring to the hope of re-establishing specific relationships with named or unnamed individuals.

[Please pray for] My boyfriend NAME that we may get back together because he knows I will forgive him for all the trouble he has caused me because I love him very much.

Some requests were concerned with relationships between the authors

and their families or friends, where primary control was evident in requests for re-establishing family relationships which have been broken through adoption as well as maintaining the longevity of friendships.

[Please pray for] I also pray that one day I will have a chance to see my real mother as I am adopted although I love my mum lots.

[Please pray for] NAME and help to keep her as my friend.

In addition, there was one prayer request set within the context of the absence of relationships, and illustrative of primary control, and one request addressed directly to an ex-partner.

[Please pray for] Please find me a nice man.

[Please pray for] NAME. Thanks for your memory. May you live a happy life and have a happy marriage. An old boyfriend.

Animals

Illness. The cases of primary control requested that sick pets were looked after, and, in one case, that a pet stayed healthy.

[Please pray for] Please look after my dog who is not well.

Common expressions of implied efficacy

Certain common expressions were employed frequently in the prayer requests, for example, 'bless him/her/them/you' was particularly popular in a wide range

of contexts as well as appearing on its own, without an obvious context. Another recurring phrase used in connection with requests concerning death and afterlife was 'R.I.P'. or 'rest in peace'.

Conclusion

On the basis of the present study, two conclusions emerge from the analyses of prayer requests. First, the conceptual frameworks employed in the analysis of prayer requests are helpful for the broad identification and illustration of concerns and beliefs of ordinary people and the role that implicit religion may play within them.

Secondly, although the full exemplification of the prayer requests according to the constructs of prayer *reference*, prayer *intention*, and prayer *objective* (case study 2) indicates that there was not a large proportion of material which was clearly at variance with mainstream Church of England doctrines (perhaps due to the practical constraints of the short prayer request format), three interesting features were identified which relate to beliefs about death and afterlife, manipulation of the environment, and common expressions of implied efficacy. Some of these may be explained, in part, by the presence of residual religion ('effect of explicit religion' type) influencing some of the prayer authors. For death and afterlife, some prayer authors took the opportunity to communicate directly with dead loved ones. This stands in opposition to biblical injunctions to resist communication with the dead (for example, Deuteronomy 18:10), which is the line taken by mainstream churches today. Therefore, in these cases, prayer authors appear to be drawing on paranormal beliefs which lie outside the Church

context. In addition, some prayer authors requested that their dead loved ones be protected and looked after. Why protection and care was deemed necessary and how this was envisaged, would be another interesting area to explore further.

For manipulation of the environment, a large number of prayer authors appeared to believe that prayer could have an effect on the natural, physical world as well as on the mental processes of other people. Again, it would be interesting to explore how such effects are conceived in more detail, and to what extent these are consistent with Church of England perspectives. In their present succinct form they might be viewed by Church and academic theologians today as naïve and religiously immature.

With regard to common expressions of implied efficacy, a recurring expression used by many prayer authors was ‘bless him’, ‘her’ or ‘you’. This expression appears to be viewed as appropriate for all contexts, and is also able to stand alone, context-free. It appears to be used in similar ways in everyday language today. These qualities, combined with frequency of usage, may indicate that among the prayer authors generally the ‘bless you’ invocation has become an ‘all-purpose’ good luck charm albeit in a Christianised form. Again, it would be interesting to explore further what people believe they are doing when they employ expressions of this nature. Similar observations can be made about the popular use of ‘RIP’ or ‘rest in peace’ found regularly in prayer requests relating to death and afterlife.

In addition to these examples of belief relevant to the ‘effect of explicit religion’ type of implicit religion, from a Church perspective any learning and subsequent dialogue stimulated by the content of the prayer requests would be an

example of the requests acting as a 'source of explicit religion' type of implicit religion.

Case study 3: Content of intercessory and supplicatory prayer by intention, reference, and objective

intention	people		global		self		animals		total		TOTAL
	pc	sc	pc	sc	pc	sc	pc	sc	pc	sc	
illness	227	123	15	18	8	1	3	6	253	148	401
death	103	137	3	4	1	0	12	18	119	159	278
growth	29	3	24	3	4	1	0	0	57	7	64
work	22	7	5	2	3	3	0	0	30	12	42
relationships	38	12	7	2	30	2	0	0	75	16	91
conflict/disaster	1	1	36	22	0	0	0	0	37	23	60
sport/recreation	4	0	8	2	1	0	0	0	13	2	15
travel	8	4	0	0	1	0	1	0	10	4	14
open intention	0	180	0	43	0	6	0	13	0	242	242
general	125	0	28	0	6	0	4	0	163	0	163
total	557	467	126	96	54	13	20	37	757	613	
TOTAL	1024		222		67		57				

Chapter 11 Case study 4: Ordinary prayer and health and well-being

Introduction

The aim of this case study is to explore the content of ordinary prayers for material relevant to health and well-being. The study analyses the second batch of 1,067 prayer-cards using a modification of the general analytical framework, which is designed to provide a focused study of aspects of health and well-being. In the modified framework, the general *intention* categories are replaced by health and well-being categories, which include physical health, mental health, affective communication, and direct communication.

Method

Of the 1,067 prayer-cards analysed in the study, 1,022 were entirely concerned with intercessory and supplicatory prayer forms (96%). Of the remaining 45 prayer-cards, 33 included elements of thanksgiving, five included elements of confession and repentance, and seven included elements of adoration. Within the 1,022 prayer-cards concerned with intercession and supplication, a total of 1,370 requests were made. It is these 1,370 individual requests which form the basis of the following analyses.

The modified framework used for analysing the content of the intercessory and supplicatory prayers distinguished between three elements defined as *intention*, *reference*, and *objective*. The notion of *intention*

distinguishes between four areas with which the individual authors were concerned: physical health, mental health, affective communication, and direct communication. The notion of *reference* distinguishes between four key foci with which the individual authors were concerned: themselves, other people who were known personally to the authors, animals which were known personally to the authors, and the world or global context. The notion of *objective* distinguishes between two effects which the individual authors envisaged as a consequence of their prayers of intercession or supplication in terms of primary control and secondary control. In primary control prayer authors explicitly suggest the desired consequences of their prayers. In secondary control prayer authors place prayers and their consequences entirely in the hands of another. Secondary control is further sub-divided into explicit secondary control and implicit secondary control, where control is given to either God or the person praying on behalf of the prayer author, respectively.

The categories selected for the *intention* component, are not mutually exclusive, and identify both the concrete and the affective, and, as a result, individual prayer requests may fall into one or more of these categories. However, for the *reference* and *objective* components, individual prayer requests fall into only one category for each.

Results

Within the 1,370 prayer requests, there were 971 examples of prayer request content which fell into the four intention categories identified in this study: physical health, mental health, direct communication, and affective

communication.

Quantitative analyses

The results of the quantitative analyses are presented in a table at the end of this chapter.

Reference

Of the 971 examples, 787 had people known personally to the prayer author as the key focus (81%), 104 (11%) had a world or global context as the key focus, 49 (5%) had the prayer authors as the key focus, and 31 (3%) had animals known personally to the prayer author as the key focus.

Intention

Of the 971 examples, 444 (46%) were concerned with affective communication, followed by 381 (39%) for physical health, 112 (12%) for direct communication, and 34 (4%) for mental health.

Mental health was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for 27 (79%) of cases, followed by 5 (15%) for the prayer author, 2 (6%) for a world or global context, and 0 (0%) for animals known personally to the prayer author.

Physical health was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for 334 (88%) of cases, followed by 31 (8%) for a world or global context, 9 (2%) for

animals known personally to the prayer author, and 7 (2%) for the prayer author.

Direct communication was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for 82 (73%) of cases, followed by 17 (15%) for the prayer author, 12 (11%) for a world or global context, and 1 (1%) for animals known personally to the prayer author.

Affective communication was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for 344 (77%) of cases, followed by 59 (13%) for a world or global context, 21 (5%) for animals known personally to the prayer author, and 20 (5%) for the prayer author.

Objective

Overall, of the 971 examples, primary control was preferred over secondary control, with 667 cases of primary control (69%) and 304 cases of secondary control (31%). In relation to prayer reference, of the 971 examples, primary control was employed more frequently than secondary control in requests relating to: people who were known personally to the prayer author, with 527 cases of primary control (67%) and 260 cases of secondary control (33%); a world or global context, with 79 (76%) cases of primary control and 25 cases of secondary control (24%); the prayer author with 45 (92%) cases of primary control and 4 cases of secondary control (8%); and animals known personally to the prayer author, with 16 cases of primary control (52%) and 15 cases of secondary control (48%).

In relation to prayer intention, of the 971 examples, primary control was employed more frequently than secondary control in requests relating to affective communication with 303 cases of primary control (68%) and 141 cases of secondary control (32%). This was followed by physical health, with 239 cases of primary control (63%) and 142 cases of secondary control (37%); direct communication, with 97 cases of primary control (87%) and 15 cases of secondary control (13%); and mental health, with 28 cases of primary control (82%) and 6 cases of secondary control (18%).

Qualitative analyses

The qualitative analyses of the content of prayers explore prayer *reference* and prayer *objective* in relation to prayer *intention*. Examples of secondary control are denoted by an asterisk (*). Only implicit secondary control examples were present.

Mental health

Of the 971 examples, 34 (4%) had explicit mental health as the key focus, and were mainly related to other people, followed by self, and a world or global context. The prayer objectives were examples of either primary control or implicit secondary control.

Other people. Of the 787 examples concerned with other people, 27 (3%) had explicit mental health as a key focus. These were concerned with partners, close family, and friends, and were mainly examples of primary control. The most

common mental health issues were depression or ‘peace of mind’, and alcohol addiction. Primary control examples had help and recovery as desirable outcomes, and secondary control examples stated the context without indicating a desirable outcome.

[Please pray for] NAME that he may recover from schizophrenia.

[Please pray for] my mother and father and help them with their drinking problem.

[Please pray for] my brother who is depressed.*

[Please pray for] For NAME that she may find peace of mind.

Self. Of the 49 examples concerned with the prayer author, 5 (10%) had explicit mental health as a key focus. Two referred to the specific conditions of depression and hypochondria, while the rest referred to the more nebulous ‘peace of mind’ and ‘nervous illness’. Apart from one, these were examples of primary control, requesting help and recovery. The secondary control example stated the problem without suggesting a desirable outcome.

[Please pray for] NAME Myself to come out of this depression and find peace of mind with her husband and son, and job in the future. And to get out of this very anxious period.

[Please pray for] Me as I am a dreadful hypochondriac.*

[Please pray for] Please give me peace of mind now.

[Please pray for] [NAME – prayer author], whose head is a mess and help

her through her hard times.

World or global. Of the 104 examples concerned with a world or global context, 2 (2%) had explicit mental health as a key focus. These focused on mental health problems in general, and included those suffering and their carers. The one primary control example articulates the desired outcome using Christian imagery and concepts, and the secondary control example states for whom the prayer is intended without suggesting an outcome.

[Please pray for] All the people who suffer from mental health disorders and all the people who treat and care for them.*

[Please pray for] The sick in mind and body. May your grace shine upon them and those who care of them. Giving divine strength and love as Jesus had.

[Please pray for] All the sick and suffering to get well again.

Physical health

Of the 971 examples, 381 (39%) had physical health as the key focus, and were mainly related to other people, followed by a world or global context, animals, and self. The prayer objectives were examples of either primary control or implicit secondary control.

Other people. Of the 787 examples concerned with other people, 334 (42%) had physical health as the key focus. These prayer requests were mainly related to

family members and friends, and employed primary control more often than secondary control. Requests referred to illnesses in general, non-specific terms or provided more detail about the nature of the problems, identifying diseases, accidents, operations, and pregnancy and birth, and if the conditions were terminal. Some of the requests included the families of the ill. In a number of requests additional details concerning the age, location, and personal qualities of the ill people were included. Primary control requests had desirable outcomes which included, for the ill person, improvements in health, freedom from pain, and strength, and for the ill person's family, help, strength, and ability to cope. Some requests focused on the prevention of illness and the promotion of health. Secondary control requests were characterised by their identification of context, with no desired outcomes.

[Please pray for] NAME who is going into hospital.*

[Please pray for] NAME who is bearing her illness so bravely.*

[Please pray for] All members of my family that they may find health and happiness.

[Please pray for] My wife NAME who has been unlucky with illness – give her strength to carry on and enjoy life.

[Please pray for] NAME and NAME that his suffering will soon end and for NAME his wife to have the strength she needs.

[Please pray for] NAME a sweet child fighting hard against a vile illness. Give her strength please to be completely well.

World or global context. Of the 104 examples concerned with a world or global context, 31 (30%) had physical health as the key focus. There were slightly more examples of secondary control than primary control, where the contexts for the requests were stated without identified desirable outcomes. These contexts included the ill, hospitalised, and cancer patients. In the examples of primary control, the desirable outcomes ranged from global health, healing, and help for the ill (including animals) to the discovery of a cure for AIDS. Occasionally, primary control was expressed in terms of receiving divine gifts such as grace and peace, and in a number of cases God was asked to bless the sick. In both primary control and secondary control there were occasional requests for the carers of the ill.

[Please pray for] All people with cancer.*

[Please pray for] All the sick and suffering to get well again.

Animals. Of the 31 examples concerned with animals, 9 (29%) had physical health as the key focus. The cases of primary control requested that sick pets were looked after, and, in one case, that a pet stayed healthy. The cases of secondary control stated the context without indicating a desirable outcome.

[Please pray for] Please look after my dog who is not well.

[Please pray for] For my dog NAME who is not well and the vet does not know what is wrong.*

Self. Of the 49 examples concerned with the prayer author, 7 (14%) had physical health as the key focus. These related to physical ailments suffered by the prayer

author and an operation, as well as a couple of requests related to preservation of health. All were primary control examples requesting healing, improvement, or protection.

[Please pray for] Me to get rid of bad pains in my lungs.

[Please prayer for] keep me free from cancer and heart trouble.

Direct communication

Of the 971 examples, 112 (12%) had direct communication as an element of prayer, and were mainly related to other people, followed by self, a world or global context, and animals. The prayer objectives were mainly examples of primary control with some implicit secondary control.

Other people. Of the 787 examples concerned with other people, 82 (10%) had direct communication as an element of prayer. Many were primary control examples, where prayer authors sought to re-establish or maintain relationships among family or friends, and also to send their ‘love’ or ‘thanks’ to family and friends through the medium of prayer.

[Please pray for] My mum and dad. Hope they get back together.

[Please pray for] Keep my family happy and together for always.

[Please pray for] NAMES. Please let them know I love them all very much.

[Please pray for] my parents who have helped me all my life – please thank them.

Secondary control examples provided the relationship context for the prayer request without indicating a desirable outcome.

[Please pray for] NAME and NAME – their marriage.*

Many examples focused on re-establishing or maintaining relationships among the dead or between the dead and the living, and these were usually primary control requests. In a number of cases the dead were addressed directly in the prayer, often as examples of secondary control.

[Please pray for] NAME, Grandad to us all. May he rest in peace and join Granny in a new life.

[Please pray for] NAME my mate who died a year ago and make this all a nightmare and bring her back so that we can all be happy again.

[Please pray for] NAME and NAME as they start their life together on DATE. May all our unseen friends be with us. Especially NAME, Dad and NAME.

[Please pray for] My Nan who died two months ago. She was a great person. I'll never forget you Nan. Thinking of you always.*

[Please pray for] my Mum, Dad and Sister. Remember that I will always love you and remember you always.*

Self. Of the 49 examples concerned with the prayer author, 17 (35%) had direct communication as an element of prayer. These were all examples of primary control which focused on establishing or maintaining relationships between the

prayer author alone and partners, close family, or friends.

[Please pray for] NAME and help to keep her as my friend.

[Please pray for] I also pray that one day I will have a chance to see my real mother as I am adopted although I love my mum lots.

World or global. Of the 104 examples concerned with a world or global context, 12 (12%) had direct communication as an element of prayer. These were all examples of primary control which often sought to improve relationships on a global level which were perceived as imperfect and, either implicitly or explicitly, pointed towards an ideal marked by the qualities of love, trust, harmony, peace, and unity. The intended recipients of these prayers were either generic groups such as ‘families’ or ‘children’, for example, or the all-encompassing ‘peoples of the earth’. In a more specific case, relationships in a named mission was the focus, and bringing others into that relationship.

[Please pray for] All those involved in the NAME mission. That they may grow close to God and each other and bring others into the fellowship of the church.

[Please pray for] families that they may be reunited in family love.

[Please pray for] All the peoples of the earth that they can learn to love and trust each other and live as one nation.

Animals. Of the 31 examples concerned with other people, 1 (3%) had direct communication as an element of prayer, and this was an example of primary

control.

[Please pray for] My cat NAME who I hope to see in heaven.

Affective communication

Of the 971 examples, 444 (46%) had affective communication as an element of prayer, and were mainly related to other people, followed by a world or global context, animals, and self. The prayer objectives were examples of either primary control or implicit secondary control.

Other people. Of the 787 examples concerned with other people, 344 (44%) had affective communication as an element of prayer. Affective communication was expressed in three main ways. First, in terms of prayer authors' emotions toward other people who were usually close family and friends, and these emotions were most commonly love or 'missing' someone, and descriptions of the closeness of the prayer authors' relationships with specified others such as 'a very close friend'. Many of these examples related to dead friends and relatives. These were part of either primary control requests or were secondary control.

[Please pray for] NAME who died on my brother's birthday. We miss her a lot and we love her.

[Please pray for] Our daughter who is in God's care. We love and miss her very much.

Secondly, in terms of prayer authors empathising with others' situations and needs, and asking that their needs are met for primary control requests (for

example, giving courage, ability to cope, happiness, peace, protection, and love), or stating their needs without a desirable outcome in the few secondary control examples. A number of these focused on the needs of dead relatives and friends, and those still alive.

[Please pray for] NAME who died earlier this year. Look after her please.

[Please pray for] NAME that God will uphold her in her loss.

[Please pray for] NAME. Security and love that he will grow up into a caring loving young man.

[Please pray for] NAME, that she can sort out her life and be happy.

Thirdly, in terms of prayer authors occasionally identifying other's personal qualities and gifts such as 'my wonderful great nanny' or 'My nanna and NAME. They touched my life with happiness and love.'

World or global. Of the 104 examples concerned with a world or global context, 59 (57%) had affective communication as an element of prayer. Affective communication was expressed by the prayer authors identifying with the situations and needs of specific groups of people (or occasionally animals) in the world or the world in general. In primary control examples, the desirable outcome is that the needs are met, and in secondary control examples, the situations and needs are identified with no explicit desirable outcome.

[Please pray for] those who are in need of some love and care throughout the world.*

[Please pray for] The poor, ill, and needed that they all will find love and peace some day from our goodwill and love.’

[Please pray for] All nurses that they may find courage to continue their work despite the heavy burdens which they are forced to carry. May God bless them and watch over them, helping to ease the dissolution of their work.

Animals. Of the 31 examples concerned with animals, 21 (68%) had affective communication as an element of prayer. Affective communication was expressed by prayer authors identifying their emotions in relation to pets which had usually died, and in instances of primary control requesting that God care for them. In cases of secondary control, no desirable outcome was suggested, and there were also examples of prayer authors empathising with the pet’s situation.

[Please pray for] My hamster NAME who was very ill, and died three weeks ago. I loved him very much, may you God, look after him for me, and keep him in your care. I spent many hours with him.

[Please pray for] My hamster NAME who died peacefully three months after having an operation.*

Self. Of the 49 examples concerned with the prayer author, 20 (41%) had affective communication as an element of prayer. In cases of primary control, prayer authors asked for personal support, help, and in one case, forgiveness, in specified personal situations. In the few secondary control examples the personal problem was articulated without suggesting a desirable outcome.

[Please pray for] Mum and Dad – both crippled. Give me strength to look after them – and patience!

[Please pray for] I love my friends and family. I don't know what to do though, I'm a gooseberry, that is I'm the odd one out. I'm divided between two groups of people, please help me to choose, I feel so split in two.

[Please pray for] NAME and NAME [prayer authors] That our new found happiness may last forever, and we be forgiven any hurt we may have caused.

[Please pray for] Me as I am so mixed up. I love him so but he loves another.*

Conclusion

The aim of this case study was to explore the content of ordinary prayers for material relevant to health and well-being. The modified framework used four health and well-being intention categories to identify explicitly topics and elements in prayer requests which could relate to health and well-being. Two categories concerned health and well-being in the straightforward concrete sense of physical health and mental health, and two categories concerned health and well-being in the less concrete and more affective sense of direct communication and affective communication. In this case, employing separate intention categories for the concrete and the affective ensured that the more affective prayer content was formally recognised as significant in the study, rather than

being submerged under more concrete category headings. It has already been shown in chapter 5, 'Exploring the subjective correlates of prayer', that private prayer may have demonstrable mental and physical health effects, although prayer content and prayer expectations may play a significant role in determining whether these effects are positive or negative. However, it has not yet been clearly demonstrated that there are any objective effects of prayer, as the review in chapter 4, 'Exploring the objective correlates of prayer', indicates. One of the contributions of the present study is that it identifies, quantifies, and illustrates prayer content and prayer expectations relevant to both the subjective and objective perspectives discussed earlier.

Five conclusions may be drawn from the results of this analysis. First, in relation to prayer *intention*, explicit physical and mental health concerns were a significant focus in nearly one third of the total number of requests made, although mental health featured considerably less prominently in the prayer requests than physical health. Health and well-being, however, may be promoted in less obvious and concrete ways as the intention categories of direct communication and affective communication demonstrate. In these categories, prayer authors used prayer requests as a means of communicating with others, expressing emotions, empathising with others, and identifying needs, in terms of the living and the dead in each case. In addition, on a functional level, the prayer authors are engaged in an essential form of communication with the church community responsible for praying their requests, and in many cases, either explicitly or implicitly, with God.

Secondly, in relation to prayer *reference*, only 5% of prayer examples were for the prayer author alone. According to this analysis, when people were

invited to pray, they preferred to pray mainly for family and friends (81%) and global issues (11%) than for themselves. The same questions are posed and the same responses are given as those offered in case study 1 in response to the same issue. For example, why do prayer authors usually choose not to pray for themselves? Do they consider prayer for themselves alone unnecessary, inappropriate, or too difficult in this Christian prayer setting? Or are the prayer authors' needs met primarily in relation to their family and friends? As it has already been seen in chapter 5, 'Exploring the subjective correlates of prayer', prayer for other people may bring with it positive psychological benefits.

Thirdly, in relation to prayer *objective*, the prayer examples concerned with health and well-being were found largely within primary control requests (69%). This is a higher proportion of primary control requests than that recorded in either case study 1 or case study 2 (employing the original intention categories), where 43% and 55% of prayer requests, respectively, were classified as primary control. This may indicate that prayer authors who included the identified aspects of health and well-being in their prayer requests had either a greater need or a greater ability to articulate the desired outcome for their prayers. This was particularly evident in prayers for the prayer author, and the intention categories of mental health and direct communication. Of prayers for the prayer author, 92% were set within primary control contexts, and of prayers for the intention categories of mental health and direct communication, 82% and 87% were set within primary control contexts, respectively.

Fourthly, despite the apparent overall decline in numbers for conventional churchgoers and church membership, there is increasing empirical evidence to suggest that church buildings and church communities have a meaningful role to

play in the lives of both churchgoers and non-churchgoers outside official service times. One of these roles is the provision of opportunities for intercessory prayer for the public through prayer-cards. The results of the current study indicate that many of those visiting churches (who take advantage of the opportunity to compose prayer requests) are concerned with the promotion of health and well-being conceived in terms of mental health, physical health, direct communication, and affective communication. In this context, churches may offer visitors quiet, atmospheric spaces with opportunities for directed reflection, supported by largely unseen praying communities.

Fifthly, the modified framework has been generally useful in providing a detailed analysis of the content of prayers, which is able to contribute to the study of ordinary prayer and ordinary theology in relation to the field of health and well-being.

Case study 4: Content of intercessory and supplicatory prayer by intention, reference, and objective

intention	people		global		self		animals		total		TOTAL
	pc	sc	pc	sc	pc	sc	pc	sc	pc	sc	
physical health	215	119	14	17	7	0	3	6	239	142	381
mental health	23	4	1	1	4	1	0	0	28	6	34
affective	222	122	52	7	17	3	12	9	303	141	444
direct	67	15	12	0	17	0	1	0	97	15	112
total	527	260	79	25	45	4	16	15	667	304	
TOTAL	787		104		49		31				971

Chapter 12 Case study 5: Ordinary prayer and God's activity in the world

Introduction

The aim of this case study is to explore the content of ordinary prayers for material which identifies the beliefs of ordinary pray-ers concerning the nature and activity of God and God's concern with and impact on the everyday world. The study analyses the second batch of 1,067 prayer-cards using a modification of the general analytical framework, which is designed to provide a focused study of ordinary pray-ers' views of God and God's activity in the world. In the modified framework, the general *intention* categories are replaced by nine categories, which are articulated as: gift-bestower, confidant/e, intervener, protector, intermediary, revealer, strength-giver, helper (general), and comforter. The benefits of this exercise are envisaged to be twofold: analyses should provide insight into the ordinary theology of ordinary pray-ers and illuminate ways in which ordinary pray-ers envisage God impacting on matters of significance to the public square.

Method

Of the 1,067 prayer-cards analysed in the study, 1,022 were concerned with intercessory and supplicatory prayer forms (96%). Of the remaining 45 prayer-cards, 33 included elements of thanksgiving, five included elements of confession and repentance, and seven included elements of adoration. Within the 1,022 prayer-cards concerned with intercession and supplication, a total of 1,370

requests were made. It is these 1,370 individual requests which form the basis of the following analyses.

The modified framework proposed for analysing the content of the intercessory and supplicatory prayers distinguished between three elements defined as *intention*, *reference*, and *objective*. The notion of *intention* distinguishes between nine views of God drawn from God's perceived activity in the world with which individual prayer authors were concerned. These are articulated as: gift-bestower, confidant/e, intervener, protector, intermediary, revealer, strength-giver, helper (general), and comforter. The notion of *reference* distinguishes between four key foci with which the individual authors were concerned: themselves, other people who were known personally to the authors, animals which were known personally to the authors, and the world or global context. The notion of *objective* distinguishes between two effects which the individual authors envisaged as a consequence of their prayers of intercession or supplication in terms of primary control and secondary control. In primary control prayer authors explicitly suggest the desired consequences of their prayers. In secondary control prayer authors place prayers and their consequences entirely in the hands of another. Secondary control is further subdivided into explicit secondary control and implicit secondary control, where control is given to either God or the person praying on behalf of the prayer author, respectively.

Results

Quantitative analyses

Within the 1,370 prayer requests there were 1,140 examples of prayer request content which fell in the nine intention categories identified in this study, portraying God as: gift-bestower; confidant/e; intervener; protector; intermediary; revealer; strength-giver; helper (general); and comforter. The results of the quantitative analyses are presented in a table at the end of this chapter.

Reference

Of the 1,140 examples, 875 (77%) had people known personally to the prayer author as the key focus, 152 (13%) had a world or global context as the key focus, 78 (7%) had the prayer authors as the key focus, and 35 (3%) had animals known personally to the prayer author as the key focus.

Intention

Of the 1,140 examples, 268 (24%) portrayed God as gift-bestower, followed by 227 (20%) as confidant/e, 179 (16%) as intervener, 164 (14%) as protector, 112 (10%) as intermediary, 91 (8%) as revealer, 43 (4%) as strength-giver, 41 (4%) as helper (general), and 15 (1%) as comforter.

God as gift-bestower was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for

191 (71%) of cases, followed by 58 (22%) for a world or global context, 11 (4%) for the prayer author, and 8 (3%) for animals known personally to the prayer author.

God as confidant/e was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for 193 (85%) of cases, followed by 16 (7%) for animals known personally to the prayer author, 14 (6%) for the prayer author, and 4 (2%) for a world or global context.

God as intervener was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for 141 (79%) of cases, followed by 29 (16%) for a world or global context, 9 (5%) for the prayer author, and none (0%) for animals known personally to the prayer author.

God as protector was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for 136 (83%) of cases, followed by 13 (8%) for the prayer author, 9 (5%) for animals known personally to the prayer author, and 6 (4%) for a world or global context.

God as intermediary was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for 82 (73%) of cases, followed by 17 (15%) for the prayer author, 12 (11%) for a world or global context, and one (1%) for animals known personally to the prayer author.

God as revealer was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as

a key focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for 54 (59%) of cases, followed by 29 (32%) for a world or global context, 8 (9%) for the prayer author, and none (0%) for animals known personally to the prayer author.

God as strength-giver was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for 36 (84%) of cases, followed by 5 (12%) for a world or global context, 2 (5%) for the prayer author, and none (0%) for animals known personally to the prayer author.

God as helper (general) was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for 27 (66%) of cases, followed by 9 (22%) for a world or global context, 4 (10%) for the prayer author, and one (2%) for animals known personally to the prayer author.

God as comforter was found predominantly in prayer requests which had as a key focus people known personally to the prayer author, accounting for 15 (100%) of cases. There were no examples present in the other reference categories of world or global context, the prayer author, or animals known personally to the prayer author.

Objective

Overall, of the 1,140 examples, primary control was preferred over secondary control, with 994 cases of primary control (87%) and 146 cases of secondary control (13%).

In relation to prayer reference, of the 1,140 examples, primary control was employed more frequently than secondary control in requests relating to: people who were known personally to the prayer author, with 744 cases of primary control (85%) and 131 cases of secondary control (15%); a world or global context, with 150 (99%) cases of primary control and 2 cases of secondary control (1%); the prayer author, with 75 (96%) cases of primary control and 3 cases of secondary control (4%); and animals known personally to the prayer author, with 25 (71%) cases of primary control and 10 (29%) cases of secondary control.

In relation to prayer intention, of the 1,140 individual examples, primary control was employed more frequently than secondary control in requests relating to God as gift-bestower, with 268 cases of primary control (100%) and no cases of secondary control (0%). This was followed by God as intervener, with 179 cases of primary control (100%) and no cases of secondary control (0%); God as protector, with 163 cases of primary control (99%) and 1 case of secondary control (1%); God as intermediary, with 97 cases of primary control (87%) and 15 cases of secondary control (13%); God as revealer, with 91 cases of primary control (100%) and no cases of secondary control (0%); God as strength-giver, with 43 cases of primary control (100%) and no cases of secondary control (0%); God as helper (general), with 41 cases of primary control (100%) and no cases of secondary control (0%); and God as comforter, with 15 cases of primary control (100%) and no cases of secondary control (0%). Secondary control was employed more frequently than primary control in requests relating to God as confidant/e, with 130 cases of secondary control (57%) and 97 cases of primary control (43%).

Qualitative analyses

The qualitative analyses of the content of prayers explore prayer *reference* and prayer *objective* in relation to prayer *intention*. Examples of secondary control are denoted by an asterisk (*). Only implicit secondary control examples were present.

God as gift-bestower

Of the 1,140 examples, 268 (24%) had God as gift-bestower as an element of prayer, and were mainly related to other people, followed by a world or global context, self, and animals. The prayer objectives were all examples of primary control.

Other People. Of the 875 examples concerned with other people, 191 (22%) had God as gift-bestower as an element of prayer. In these examples, the non-concrete, spiritual ‘gifts’ or states of peace, happiness, love, enjoyment, unity, and togetherness were requested for family and friends. Generally, the requests sought to create, maintain, or extend these experiences. Some of these ‘gifts’ or states had distinctive features. For example, in the case of happiness, there were many instances where this was linked explicitly to specified related physical partners such as ‘health’, ‘safety’, and ‘success’. In the case of peace, most of these examples were requests on behalf of those who had died or those who were still living and in need of ‘peace of mind’.

On rare occasions, the acquisition of these states was placed in a broader

framework, explicitly recognising the need for guidance in order to ‘follow the right road to happiness and health.’ In addition, there were a few examples where the request for the ‘gift’ or state was appended with an evaluative statement such as ‘like we all deserve’, for example.

[Please pray for] ALL MY FAMILY MAY THEY LIVE IN PEACE
AND HAPPINESS AND THOSE WHO HAVE DIED RIP.

[Please pray for] Joy, happiness and togetherness in our family, and the larger family of mankind.

[Please pray for] My dear mother who departed this life on DATE and also for my father in law, who passed away in DATE. That they may enjoy the wonders of heaven.

[Please pray for] My mother who passed away one and a half years ago never a day passes when she is not missed. Please also pray for my father that one day he will find happiness again.

[Please pray for] NAME that she may find peace of mind.

[Please pray for] my daughter NAME that she may find her way to you and find the happiness she is seeking.

Requests for God’s ‘blessing’ of family or friends featured on a number of the cards. The majority of the requests for blessing were placed in the explicit contexts of illness and death in relation to family or friends. In some cases, blessing was invoked for other people’s relationships and ‘studies’, although in other cases, requests for blessing were not placed in any context. Occasionally,

fairly extensive lists of people's qualities or worthy activities were cited before asking for blessing. In addition, there were some examples where the blessing was already realised, and this was accompanied by a request that the recipients should derive benefit from the blessing.

[Please pray for] Mum Good night and God bless.

[Please pray for] My mother, NAME who has recently had heart trouble and my brother, who is depressed, God bless all the family, and pray for the family's health.

[Please pray for] NAME, NAME and Baby that they will have great pleasure and love in their blessing.

World or global context. Of the 152 examples concerned with a world or global context, 58 (38%) had God as gift-bestower as an element of prayer. The spiritual 'gifts' or states of peace, happiness, and love were cited most often in relation to the world in general or generic groups such as the sick, hungry, dead, victims of disaster, and families. In one example, the request for the 'gifts' or states was qualified by the comment 'for everyone who needs and deserves it' and in another example, the qualification was present in the liturgical expression 'the souls of the faithfully departed.' In addition, one request asked for the world to be led to a series of positive abstract states which were presented with their corresponding negative states.

[Please prayer for] Peace Throughout The World.

[Please pray for] peace and happiness for everyone who needs and

deserves it.

[Please pray for] Families that they may be reunited in family love.

[Please pray for] all sick people and all who are Hungrey throughout the World. Leave them your Peace.

[Please pray for] Lead us from Death to Life, From Hate to Love, From Despair to Hope, From War to Peace, Let Peace fill our Hearts our World our Universe.

Requests for the blessing of the world in general or the world and nature featured on a number of cards as well as for generic groups such as the 'hungry', 'suffering', or 'ill'. On one occasion, blessing was invoked for those belonging to a particular profession.

[Please pray for] those who are constantly hungry. We know that we can never experience their sadness. May God bless them all.

[Please pray for] All who suffer. Amen. May God bless you.

[Please pray for] [All nurses]. May God Bless them and watch over them, helping to ease the dissolution of their work.

Self. Of the 78 examples concerned with self, 11 (14%) had God as gift-bestower as an element of prayer. These examples were concerned with the prayer author's happiness and 'peace of mind' most frequently in terms of relationships with others. In some examples, happiness was linked to specified related physical partners such as 'health' and a 'long life'.

[Please pray for] Myself, NAME to come out of this depression and find peace of mind with her husband and son and job in the future.

[Please pray for] [Prayer authors] that our later years together may be happy and healthy and in loving unison.

[Please pray for] keep me well so that I have a happy and long life.

Where blessing was requested for the prayer author, it was also placed in the context of relationships; either marriage (or equivalent) or family and friends.

[Please pray for] BLESS MY LOVE TO NAME AND NAME.

Animals. Of the 35 examples concerned with animals, 8 (23%) had God as gift-bestower as an element of prayer. In around half of these requests, the prayer authors asked for the happiness of their dead pets in the afterlife.

[Please pray for] my dog. I hope he is happy in heaven.

The remaining requests asked for the prayer authors' animals to be blessed; in each example, the animals were either dead or ill.

[Please pray for] My hamster Bonnie who was very ill and died and our guinea pig Katy who very sadly passed away. Please bless them both.
Gone from our lives but not from our memories.

God as confidant/e

Of the 1,140 examples, 227 (20%) had God as confidant/e as an element of prayer, and were mainly related to other people, followed by animals, self, and a

world or global context. The prayer objectives were examples of either implicit secondary control or primary control.

Other People. Of the 875 examples concerned with other people, 193 (22%) had God as confidant/e as an element of prayer. In these examples, God was viewed as confidant/e to prayer authors because of the presence of discursive elements in the prayer requests which were expressed in four specific ways. First, prayer authors' articulated their emotions in relation to family or friends being prayed for within the body of the prayer request or as part of the signature, for example, 'signed: A loving Mum.' These emotions were most commonly cited as love, concern or worry, pain (in separation), and commitment to keeping alive the memory of a person. Secondly, prayer authors offered some reflection on the people or situations in the prayer request: for example, one author wrote about two relatives who had 'touched my life with happiness and love' and another considered a person's responses to circumstances as 'brave'. Thirdly, prayer authors provided additional narrative details relating to the specific circumstances surrounding the prayer request. Fourthly, prayer authors made a personal statement (rather than a direct request) of their own wishes or opinions regarding a person or circumstance, such as 'I hope they are very happy' and 'I hope she gets well', for example.

Most of these examples related to family and friends who had either died or who were ill, and less frequently to relationships among family and friends. However, a number of these examples were placed in no concrete context. Many of the more extensive examples which fell into the God as confidant/e intention category also contained elements relevant to the other intention categories, and

these are exemplified, where relevant, in the appropriate sections.

In cases of primary control, an intended outcome to the prayer request was suggested by the prayer author and in cases of secondary control there was no explicit suggested outcome.

[Please pray for] NAME so that she can see her beloved NAME again before she leaves. And please let her see him in the near future. If she does not see him again it will break her heart.

[Please pray for] my dear husband whom I love and cherish, my two beloved children, NAME and NAME.*

[Please pray for] a lady in my church who is a mother of two children (young). She is dying of cancer. Her children don't know this.*

[Please pray for] NAME who died 3 weeks ago who deserves peace now.

[Please pray for] NAME who is bearing her illness so bravely.*

[Please pray for] My Aunty NAME and Uncle NAME who have sadly passed away but are now in a better place free from pain hate and hunger.

I miss them.*

Animals. Of the 35 examples concerned with animals, 16 (46%) had God as confidant/e as an element of prayer. The four expressions of God as confidant/e identified in the 'other people' reference category were also present in the 'animals known to the prayer author' reference category. Apart from one, all of these examples related to animals who were dead or whose death was anticipated. In addition, some of these examples contained elements which are

pertinent to other intention categories, such as God as protector, for example, which is illustrated in the first quotation.

Primary control examples indicated a desirable outcome such as protection or happiness for a dead pet and the request to be reunited with the animal 'in heaven'. Secondary control examples recorded no explicit desirable outcome.

[Please pray for] my hamster NAME, who was very ill and died three weeks ago. I loved him very much. May you God, look after him for me, and keep him in your care. I spent many hours with him.

[Please pray for] my dog. I hope he is happy in heaven.

[Please pray for] My uncle's dog NAME who died from a disease that a pig had, a very close friend.*

[Please pray for] my dog NAME who will be gone from our lives at sometime but not from our memories.*

[Please pray for] my dog NAME who is so loving to everyone.

Self. Of the 78 examples concerned with self, 14 (18%) had God as confidant/e as an element of prayer. The four expressions of God as confidant/e identified in the 'other people' reference category were also present in the examples relating to the prayer author reference category. The majority of these examples were concerned with relationships between prayer authors and partners, and less frequently with relationships between prayer authors and family or friends. In addition, some contained elements which are pertinent to other intention

categories, such as God as revealer, protector, and gift-bestower, for example, which are illustrated. Most were examples of primary control where a desirable outcome was suggested by the prayer author such as guidance, protection, and blessing. Secondary control examples did not explicitly direct the outcome of the prayer request.

[Please pray for] Dear Lord, I've never done something like this, I know some people would take as a joke but I love you. I love my friends and family. I don't know what to do though, I'm a gooseberry, that is I'm the odd one out. I'm divided between two groups of people, please let me choose, I feel so split in two. Thank you for listening.

[Please pray for] NAME who I love so dearly and protect our love from the bad things in life. Help her to get through her life without any more illness. She has such beautiful ways. Please Lord keep us together in heart and soul.

[Please pray for] my boyfriend NAME who I love very much and hope that he loves me very much to. God bless him and me.

[Please pray for] me as I am so mixed up I Love Him so but he Loves another.

World or global context. Of the 152 examples concerned with a world or a global context, 4 (3%) had God as confidant/e as an element of prayer. Two of the four expressions of God as confidant/e identified in the 'other people' reference category were present in the 'world or global' reference category: an expression of emotion in relation to the supplication and reflection on an aspect of the

supplication. Examples related to the generic groups of animals, children, and the hungry. Primary control examples suggested a desirable outcome such as help or a blessing, while secondary control examples recorded no explicit desirable outcome.

[Please pray for] All the animals that are experimented on, killed, shot, and run over. Help them seek a better life. Signed: NAME A devoted vegetarian.

[Please pray for] All the children in the world who are devoid of the love of caring parents and families – a thing which we find all too easy to take for granted.*

[Please pray for] those who are constantly hungry. We know we can never experience their sadness. May god bless them all.

God as intervener

Of the 1,140 examples, 179 (16%) had God as intervener as an element of prayer, and were mainly related to other people, a world or global context, and self. The prayer objectives were all examples of primary control.

Other People. Of the 875 examples concerned with other people, 141 (16%) had God as intervener as an element of prayer. The defining feature of this intention category was an explicit request for a concrete outcome to prayer, without the inclusion of language which suggested that the outcome was a ‘hope’ or a ‘wish’ on the part of the prayer author. In relation to other people known personally to the prayer author, almost four-fifths of the examples related to requests for the

healing of illness or, in a few cases of terminal illness, the gentle, quick taking of life. Although the majority of these stated simply the intended outcome (healing, improvement, or death), some cited God explicitly as the agent (for example, ‘may God heal him’) and included additional information, providing glimpses into theological frameworks underpinning the requests. Both physical and mental illnesses were represented. In a few examples, the request for the improvement or recovery of a family member or friend provided the context for a supplementary global request for a cure for the respective disease. Other concrete outcomes which were requested related to exam success, gaining employment or a particular type of living accommodation, becoming pregnant, and re-establishing relationships with spouses or partners. In addition, there was one request for a friend to be brought back from the dead.

[Please pray for] NAME ... is a very poorly little boy. At just over a year old, NAME has spent most of his life in hospital. Please do not let him suffer any more brain damage. Please take him gently and care for him when the time comes.

[Please pray for] NAME who is recovering from cancer for the second time. Please ask God to keep his Healing hands on her.

[Please pray for] NAME of PLACE, who has cancer of the stomach. May God heal if it is his will or relieve Brian from his suffering.

[Please pray for] NAME that he may recover from schizophrenia.

[Please pray for] my dad who smokes and drinks achohol and make him give it up.

[Please pray for] NAME, that she gets a job.

[Please pray for] NAME and NAME. That They will get back together as they love each other but can't because they're separated.

World or global context. Of the 152 examples concerned with a world or global context, 29 (19%) had God as intervener as an element of prayer. In these examples, the explicit requests for concrete outcomes to prayer related largely to famine, war, poverty, and national/international sporting events. Requested outcomes included either the provision of that which was lacking such as food, peace, healing, and victory, or the cessation of particular social behaviour or government policies. In addition, there were individual requests for the release of kidnapped hostages, good weather, and a positive response to all the prayer requests left in the church. A few of these requests employed Christian terminology in their expression.

[Please pray for] Peace Throughout The World And Make an end to apartheid and hooliganism at football matches.

[Please pray for] Everyone who is lonely, scared and needing security. May they be fed, kept warm and live happy lives.

[Please pray for] All those who are sick in body, mind and spirit that they may be healed in and through the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. That the evils of our day may be overcome through the power of Almighty God.

[Please pray for] Peace throughout the world and the destruction of all

nuclear weapons.

[Please pray for] FOOTBALL CLUB and an early return to Division 1.

[Please pray for] All these prayers to come true.

Self. Of the 78 examples concerned with self, 9 (12%) had God as intervener as an element of prayer. In these examples, the concrete outcomes of the explicit requests were improvement in health or healing, financial provision, exam success, pregnancy, and reinstatement of a relationship with a former partner. One prayer request included a reference to the practice of praying to saints.

[Please pray for] That my health gets better – I pray a lot to St. Jude.

[Please pray for] me to get rid of Bad Pains in lung.

[Please pray for] money to pay off debt.

[Please pray for] My family and husband's family and my prayer to have a child.

God as protector

Of the 1,140 examples, 164 (14%) had God as protector as an element of prayer, and were mainly related to other people, followed by self, animals, and a world or global context. Apart from one, the prayer objectives were all examples of primary control.

Other people. Of the 875 examples concerned with other people, 136 (16%) had God as protector as an element of prayer. In these examples, the concept of

‘protection’ embraces both direct and implied definitions of the term. Direct definitions included ‘protection’ as ‘keeping’, ‘looking after’, ‘providing security or safety’, ‘taking care of’, and ‘watching over’, with each possessing its own nuances. Most of these explicit examples related to requests for protection in general for family and friends. The other examples were more specific, and referred to the protection of loved ones in heaven and during illness, pregnancy, birth, holidays, and journeys.

Implied definitions understand ‘protection’ in terms of the prevention of that which is perceived as undesirable or the preservation of that which is perceived as good. Examples of the latter included requests for the preservation of the current state of happiness, health, love, enjoyment, self-sufficiency, peace, success, or beauty. Examples of the former included their counterparts. Apart from one, all the examples were primary control, explicitly indicating the desired outcome. The secondary control example contained a statement of faith and a familiar idiom relating to the protector and protected.

[Please pray for] NAME. who has Parkinson’s disease. Please help and protect her so she may have many more happy years. Please help her because I love her loads.

[Please pray for] My family and friends. May God keep them safe and protect them.

[Please pray for] Please pray that all the members of our camping holiday arrive home safely.

[Please pray for] NAME who died a year ago. Please may she be in

heaven and please look after her all the time and let her be by her friend and family all the time.

[Please pray for] Grant that NAME and NAME may enjoy their home as long as possible.

[Please pray for] NAME, for the safe delivery of her first baby.

[Please pray for] Nana and granddad who passed away. But is now in good hands.*

Self. Of the 78 examples concerned with self, 13 (17%) had God as protector as an element of prayer. Most of these examples related to implied definitions of ‘protection’ where prayer authors requested that current situations were maintained, for example, health, happiness, and personal relationships. One example related to a direct definition of ‘protection’ where a prayer author requested a ‘safe’ journey.

[Please pray for] NAME and I that we may enjoy the best possible health.

[Please pray for] NAME, that she will always want to be with me.

[Please pray for] NAME and AUTHOR, so that they may never be parted from one another.

[Please pray for] Keep me safe on my journey.

[Please pray for] ... also keep me free from cancer and heart-chest trouble.

[Please pray for] the one thing you have seen fit to give me lord I pray

that you do not take it away. 'the will to live'.

Animals. Of the 35 examples concerned with animals, 9 (26%) had God as protector as an element of prayer. Examples relating to direct definitions of 'protection' in relation to pets or animals known to the prayer author included protection in the afterlife, during illness, and during migration. Implied 'protection' examples included requests for long life or maintaining the health of pets. A distinctive feature of some requests was the inclusion of a pet in a list of family and friends.

[Please pray for] My Hamster NAME who departed from this world 2 years ago hope your feeding dailey and properly.

[Please pray for] My Mum, Dad, brother, boyfriend and cat and all my relations and keep them well.

[Please pray for] all the small swallows who have found sanctuary in this porch for generations. God give them safe journey.

World or global context. Of the 152 examples concerned with a world or global context, 6 (4%) had God as protector as an element of prayer. In these examples, both direct and implied 'protection' was represented. Protection was requested for the residents of a residential home and for the more nebulous 'less fortunate' and 'everybody ... in this world and in heaven.'

[Please pray for] ... all the other residents of Weston House and keep them safe.

[Please pray for] everybody that they may have health and all they will for in this world and in heaven.

[Please pray for] Look over those less fortunate.

God as intermediary

Of the 1,140 examples, 112 (10%) had God as intermediary as an element of prayer, and were mainly related to other people, followed by self, a world or global context, and animals. The prayer objectives were either examples of primary control or implicit secondary control.

Other people. Of the 875 examples concerned with other people, 82 (9%) had God as intermediary as an element of prayer. Many were primary control examples, where prayer authors sought to re-establish or maintain relationships among family or friends, and also to send their ‘love’ or ‘thanks’ to family and friends through the medium of prayer.

[Please pray for] My mum and dad. Hope they get back together.

[Please pray for] Keep my family happy and together for always.

[Please pray for] NAMES. Please let them know I love them all very much.

[Please pray for] my parents who have helped me all my life – please thank them.

Secondary control examples provided the relationship context for the prayer request without indicating a desirable outcome.

[Please pray for] NAME and NAME – their marriage.*

Many examples focused on re-establishing or maintaining relationships among the dead or between the dead and the living, and these were usually primary control requests. In a number of cases the dead were addressed directly in the prayer, often as examples of secondary control.

[Please pray for] NAME, Grandad to us all. May he rest in peace and join Granny in a new life.

[Please pray for] NAME my mate who died a year ago and make this all a nightmare and bring her back so that we can all be happy again.

[Please pray for] NAME and NAME as they start their life together on DATE. May all our unseen friends be with us. Especially NAME, Dad and NAME.

[Please pray for] My Nan who died two months ago. She was a great person. I'll never forget you Nan. Thinking of you always.*

[Please pray for] my Mum, Dad and Sister. Remember that I will always love you and remember you always.*

Self. Of the 78 examples concerned with self, 17 (22%) had God as intermediary as an element of prayer. These were all examples of primary control which focused on establishing or maintaining relationships between the prayer author alone and partners, close family, or friends.

[Please pray for] NAME and help to keep her as my friend.

[Please pray for] I also pray that one day I will have a chance to see my real mother as I am adopted although I love my mum lots.

[Please pray for] ... Also pray for my mum: who I love really and my dad and NAME and tell them I'm sorry for things I've done that have hurt them and I will try not to do it again.

World or global. Of the 152 examples concerned with a world or global context, 12 (8%) had God as intermediary as an element of prayer. These were all examples of primary control. These requests often sought to improve relationships on a global level which were perceived as imperfect, and (either implicitly or explicitly) pointed towards an ideal marked by the qualities of love, trust, harmony, peace, and unity. The intended recipients of these prayers were either generic groups such as 'families' or 'children', for example, or the all-encompassing 'peoples of the earth'. In a more specific case, relationships in a named mission are the focus, and bringing others into that relationship.

[Please pray for] All those involved in the NAME mission. That they may grow close to God and each other and bring others into the fellowship of the church.

[Please pray for] families that they may be reunited in family love.

[Please pray for] All the peoples of the earth that they can learn to love and trust each other and live as one nation.

Animals. Of the 35 examples concerned with animals, 1 (3%) had God as intermediary as an element of prayer and this was an example of primary control.

[Please pray for] My cat NAME who I hope to see in heaven.

God as revealer

Of the 1,140 examples, 91 (8%) had God as revealer as an element of prayer, and were mainly related to other people, followed by a world or global context, and self. The prayer objectives were all examples of primary control.

Other People. Of the 875 examples concerned with other people, 54 (6%) had God as revealer as an element of prayer. In these examples, the notion that God plays a role in revelation was depicted in three basic forms in relation to family (most frequently) and friends. First, revelation was related to explicit religious truths, usually requesting the conversion of family members or friends to Christianity. Conversion was described in a number of different ways; for example, there were requests to ‘come to faith’, to ‘believe in the Lord’, to ‘know the truth of Jesus’, to ‘come to know the love of God/Jesus’, to ‘open the heart to our Saviour Jesus Christ’, to ‘find their way to you’, and to ‘place faith and/or trust in God/Jesus’. The qualities of ‘love’ and ‘truth’ were used most frequently with regard to God and Jesus, while ‘knowledge’, ‘belief’, ‘trust’, and ‘faith’ were used most frequently for the desired attributes of those being prayed for. Two requests which were explicitly religious did not relate to conversion. In one example, guidance for a named person to ‘do God’s will’ was requested and in the other example, a ‘personal’ knowledge of Jesus’ love was the focus. Secondly, revelation was related to spiritual, moral, or emotional guidance or support; for example, being shown or finding ‘the right way/direction/road’, ‘happiness’, ‘that which a person’s looking for’, and ‘the true self’. In addition,

there was one example where a prayer author requested that a person would perceive the truth and recognise that 'he has friends'. Thirdly, revelation was expressed in concrete terms, addressing specific practical problems and requesting the understanding or the disclosure of information; for example, help in realising the need for medical advice and care, understanding the medical problems by others, and knowledge about a missing friend's whereabouts.

[Please pray for] NAME that some day will believe in the Lord.

[Please pray for] my husband NAME to open his heart to our Saviour Jesus Christ.

[Please pray for] my daughter NAME that she may find her way to you and find the happiness she is seeking.

[Please pray for] My brother Wayne who is a confessed occultist witch. Please pray that he has no rest until he come to Christ.

[Please pray for] My two daughters NAME and NAME that they may come to know the love of Jesus in a personal way and put their trust in him.

[Please pray for] NAME that he will learn in his last year of college to know himself.

[Please pray for] Please guide NAME in the right way.

[Please pray for] NAME. That she will seek the medical care she desperately needs.

[Please pray for] my family and friends, help us to follow the right road,

to happiness and health.

World or global context. Of the 152 examples concerned with a world or global context, 29 (19%) had God as revealer as an element of prayer. The majority of these examples were explicitly religious in their concerns and related mainly to conversion and faith development. Many requests asked for the conversion of those in the world who were not Christians, and others prayed for particular missions. In the former, where biblical quotations were cited, the exclusivity of Christianity was emphasised, and in a number of other examples, the Bible was seen as a central instrument in that conversion. In one example, personal religious experience and testimony was the primary motivator for a request that others find Jesus' 'love and compassion'. A couple of examples requested God's direct and visible action in the world (or country) with a request that Jesus returned to save humanity and a request for mass conversions resulting from an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Faith development examples were related to Christians and specific churches or missions, and included requests for the strengthening of a group or church's bonds among its members and with God; discerning, aligning, and implementing God's will; employing Jesus as a role model during difficult times, and learning how to pray.

The few examples which were not explicitly religious were concerned with global requests for ethical lifestyles and, in one case, for 'the world to come to its senses'.

[Please pray for] That all men might find that true light 'Jesus'. There is **no other** name given under heaven by which a man must be saved. Acts chapter 4 vs 12.

[Please pray for] A more widespread use of the bible and that more people may come to know god and live by his word.

[Please pray for] Those who don't know Jesus in their life – may they find His love and compassion. I pray those who read this will know the presence of God as I have. Thankyou Jesus.

[Please pray for] A mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit in this land that men women boy and girls will repent of their sins and know Jesus as Saviour and Lord. Amen.

[Please pray for] All involved in the NAME mission ... that they may grow closer to God and each other and bring others into the fellowship of the Church.

[Please pray for] All Christians that more of what they want will decrease and more of God's will increase.

[Please pray for] For all those who are facing problems and heartache. Consider him who faced such opposition from sinful man so that you may not grow weary and lose heart.

[Please pray for] Dear Lord Everything we have. And help us not to want more and help anybody who need's more and make the world a happier place.

Self. Of the 78 examples concerned with self, 8 (10%) had God as revealer as an element of prayer. Three examples were related to explicit religious issues pertaining to the prayer author, and included requests for the regaining of faith

and faith development. Five examples were related to spiritual, moral, or emotional guidance or support in terms of making the right choices in specific (or non-specific) situations and character development. All eight examples could be described as overtly religious in form because God (or ‘Christ’) was placed as the primary reference and agent in each request. This was the case even where God (or ‘Christ’) was not explicitly mentioned because the prayers bypassed their intercessory context and addressed God directly.

[Please pray for] ... Most of all help me to find the faith I once had.

[Please pray for] A special friend who I love dearly. And may God guide me in the right direction. So no one will be hurt or caused pain.

[Please pray for] May God show me the right path to choose when the time comes.

[Please pray for] Thanks for your help, without it we would have nothing, make me a channel of peace.

[Please pray for] ... P.S. Help to make me a better person.

[Please pray for] Please guide me if you will.

[Please pray for] me that I will try to put Christ first in my life constantly.

God as strength-giver

Of the 1,140 examples, 43 (4%) had God as strength-giver as an element of prayer, and were mainly related to other people, followed by a world or global context, and self. The prayer objectives were all examples of primary control.

Other people. Of the 875 examples concerned with other people, 36 (4%) had God as strength-giver as an element of prayer. In the majority of these examples the term ‘strength’ was employed, although other related terms included ‘courage’ and the ability to ‘cope’ with or ‘bear’ a situation. Most requests for strength were set in bereavement or illness contexts of friends and family: the bereaved in cases of bereavement, and the ill and their carers in cases of illness. Other contexts included the Duke of Edinburgh Award training programme and implied religious faith. The ‘strength’ in most of the examples was mental or emotional in nature, although spiritual and physical types of strength were also featured.

[Please pray for] NAME, NAME and NAME to give them strength after their bereavement of their husband and father at such a young age.

[Please pray for] my wife NAME who has been unlucky with illness – give her strength to carry on and enjoy life.

[Please pray for] NAME. May the Lord give her health and strength to walk again.

[Please pray for] NAME and NAME that his suffering may soon end and for NAME to have the strength she needs.

[Please pray for] NAME, my older sister and daughter of God. As she is a parish worker for CHURCH. Having been delivered that she will stand firm.

[Please pray for] My Dad so that he will have the strength to give up

drinking alchole.

World or global context. Of the 152 examples concerned with a world or global context, 5 (3%) had God as strength-giver as an element of prayer. In these examples, strength or courage was requested for generic groups related to vocation (nursing), the Developing World (Africa), wrongdoers (prisoners), the sick, and those who found life difficult. Two examples were distinctive insofar as moral and spiritual types of strength were explicitly asked for.

[Please pray for] All nurses that they may find courage to continue their work despite the heavy burdens which they are forced to carry.

[Please pray for] Everyone in the world and help the unfortunate people in Africa to have strength.

[Please pray for] People who have done wrong. And are in prison. And help them to be forgiven. And give them strength to do better.

[Please pray for] The sick in mind and body. May your grace shine upon them and those who care for them. Giving divine strength and love as Jesus Christ had.

[Please pray for] anybody who is finding life hard at this moment in time. Give them strength and courage to face the troubles and battle on.

Self. Of the 78 examples concerned with self, 2 (3%) had God as strength-giver as an element of prayer. One related to the responsibilities of a carer and the other to the completion of a Duke of Edinburgh training programme.

[Please pray for] Mum and Dad – both crippled. Give me strength to look after them – and patience!

[Please pray for] Please help me get through this D of E training camp.

God as helper (general)

Of the 1,140 examples, 41 (4%) had God as helper (general) as an element of prayer, and were mainly related to other people, followed by a world or global context, self, and animals. The prayer objectives were all examples of primary control.

Other people. Of the 875 examples concerned with other people, 27 (3%) had God as helper (general) as an element of prayer. The God as helper (general) category incorporated two different types of request, in this case, related to family and friends. First, usually the examples contained the general word ‘help’ without explicitly specifying what form of help was required, or the examples contained a vague appeal for things generally to go well. Secondly, occasionally examples included the request for a specific form of help which is not provided for explicitly in the other intention categories of protection, strength, comfort, ‘revelation’, or mediation; for example, a basic statement requesting ‘success’ or ‘completion’ of a project. It is understood that in most cases the type of help requested could have been conjectured but in the absence of more concrete verification, the examples were placed in the ‘helper (general)’ category.

[Please pray for] Mum, dad, NAME, NAME, NAME and NAME. And everything in family go well.

[Please pray for] Danny and Bob to live after being scared by noises that no one has ever heard.

[Please pray for] NAME who is very poorly because she is very ill and very old and please help her through the rest of her life.

[Please pray for] My gran who died last year. Please help my granddad at this time of year.

[Please pray for] My Dad so he can finish our house off.

World or global context. Of the 152 examples concerned with a world or global context, 9 (6%) had God as helper (general) as an element of prayer. In these examples, specific types of help were requested relating to wider local, national, and global projects or issues which are not provided for in the other intention categories.

[Please pray for] Everyone in Hospital, Everyone who is very sad, hungry, frightened and in pain. Jesus please help them.

[Please pray for] All the members of NAME Church and all the people who worship in this place as they both need support in building a new church or roof.

[Please pray for] that we will get more out of this country than we are getting at the moment. Also help the ones who are out of work or who can't.

[Please pray for] FOOTBALL TEAM and help them win promotion.

Self. Of the 78 examples concerned with self, 4 (5%) had God as helper (general) as an element of prayer. In these examples, specific types of help were requested relating to mental states and particular projects which are not provided for in the other intention categories.

[Please pray for] AUTHOR, whose head is a mess, and help her through her hard times and Mum NAME and NAME. Thankyou.

[Please pray for] My friend and I as we are approaching our A Level exams. Pray that we will reach our goals in life and make some contribution to the happiness and love of the world.

Animals. Of the 35 examples concerned with animals, one (3%) had God as helper (general) as an element of prayer. In this case, general help was requested for a pet that had died.

[Please pray for] NAME. She was a lovely dog. She was eleven when she died. Please help her. She was a beagle.

God as comforter

Of the 1,140 examples, 15 (1%) had God as comforter as an element of prayer, and were related only to other people. The prayer objectives were all examples of primary control.

Other people. Of the 875 examples concerned with other people, 15 (2%) had God as comforter as an element of prayer. The majority of these examples related

to requests for comfort during bereavement experienced by friends. Comfort was envisaged as coming either directly from God or in relationship with those around the person/s. In some instances, comfort was linked with strength and support. In one example, comfort was viewed as an experiential manifestation of God and the Mother of God's love in people's lives.

[Please pray for] NAME and NAME. May God comfort them in their grief.

[Please pray for] NAME whose mother NAME died recently. May she find comfort and courage now that she is on her own.

[Please pray for] NAME, and her family, may they find the strength and solace they need.

[Please pray for] NAME, murdered DATE. May she rest in peace. The NAME family, may they find comfort and support in each other and through God. Her murderer, may he find forgiveness in God. (Give us a way to forgive).

[Please pray for] Bless all the children of my family. Bless my son NAME let them live long and happy in the comfort of God's and the Holy Mothers love.

Conclusion

The aim of this case study was to explore the content of ordinary prayers for material which identifies the beliefs of ordinary pray-ers concerning the nature and activity of God and God's concern with and impact on the everyday world.

The quantitative and qualitative analyses provide insight into the ordinary theology of ordinary pray-ers and illuminate ways in which ordinary pray-ers envisage God impacting on matters of significance to the public square.

The modified framework for analysing supplicatory prayer requests according to *intention*, *reference*, and *objective* provides a structurally coherent and informative insight into the relevant content of these ordinary prayers. In relation to the nine prayer *intention* categories, 80% of the prayer examples invoked a God who was perceived to be active in the world. This active God has been variously defined and exemplified as a God who provides gifts, intervenes in concrete terms, protects, mediates between the living and between the living and the dead, and provides revelations, strength, help, and comfort. In the remaining 20% of examples, God was cast in the more passive role of confidant/e, but even here, in 43% of cases, action pertaining to one of the other categories was also invoked. Within these intention categories, prayer authors' concerns relating to illness and bereavement, and their counterparts (such as health, long life, and happiness), dominated most of the intention categories.

In relation to prayer *reference*, a considerable proportion of God's action in the world was perceived to be for the benefit of those closest to the prayer authors, their family and friends, accounting for 77% of examples, followed by more global concerns, accounting for 13% of examples. In terms of frequency, requests for the self alone were perceived to be of secondary importance for many of the prayer authors, accounting for only 7% of prayer examples.

In relation to prayer *objective*, 87% of prayer examples were primary control requests. This would suggest that a significant proportion of prayer

authors viewed God's action in the world as one which exists as part of a deeply personal relationship with human beings. Within this relationship, human beings were not passive beneficiaries of the consequences of God's action; they actively had to take responsibility for identifying and presenting their needs to God, through the act of prayer. Many of the prayer requests articulated the nature of the relationship in specific terms. For example, the presentation of the qualities and worthy attributes of the recipients of prayer was fairly common, which implies that a person is deserving of God's favour (conversely, occasional prayer requests explicitly limited the requests to only those who deserve it). The prayer requests which present God in this way seemed to stress a special relationship between a just God and the 'good' and the 'faithful', who appropriately request God's action. As one prayer request which prays 'for the souls of the faithfully departed' indicates, this may reflect (in part) the influence of the language used in liturgy and hymns. However, this stands in stark contrast to one prayer, which includes a request for a murderer, that 'he find forgiveness in God (Give us a way to forgive)'.

The nature of the relationship between God and ordinary pray-ers is also expressed in another way in some prayer requests, which indicates a collaborative approach, with each party having specific roles. For example, blessings were given by God, but a human response was needed to appreciate them. In addition, God's (and Jesus') qualities were often described as 'love' and 'truth', while requests for human responses to God (or Jesus) focused on 'knowledge', 'belief', 'trust', and 'faith'. Exploring in greater detail how ordinary pray-ers understand the nature of the relationship between human beings and God would be useful.

It has been argued in the first part of this thesis that ordinary prayer, like ordinary theology, is deeply personal and firmly grounded in experience. As such, it is to be expected that some of the main concerns highlighted in the analyses of the ordinary prayer requests also identify matters of direct significance to social and political issues within the public square. Three examples of this occurring are provided, pertaining to health, companion animals, and sustainable development and global citizenship. The dominance of health-related requests acknowledges an appreciation of the fragility of human existence and a deep concern with protecting and responding to the needs of the vulnerable and their carers (cf. other prayer request studies, Schmied, 2002; Brown and Burton, 2007). This appreciation and concern is probably rooted in the universal personal experience of the effects of illness on those closest to the prayer authors, their family and their friends (for example, within some requests set in world or global contexts, the prayer may begin as a request for a friend or family member). It is probably not coincidental that Government policy for the health-care system in the UK (alongside education) is traditionally viewed by politicians as a key vote winner. Information of this nature could make a contribution in the public response to National Health Service reform (for example, Appleby and Alvarez-Rosete, 2003, 2005).

Although requests for the welfare of companion animals, living and dead, were numerically fewer than those for the other three reference categories, the content of the requests reflects the significance of companion animals in the lives of ordinary people. Judging by writing style and content, many of the authors requesting prayer for their animals probably fell into the very young or old age brackets, indicating vested interests among these social groups in particular. This

concern in relation to companion animals can be considered alongside research studies focusing on the benefits of living with companion animals, of which a useful summary is provided by Francis, Turton, and Loudon (2007: 50-52) who categorise the studies according to social, medical, and psychological benefits.

A feature of a significant minority of prayer requests was a global concern for the 'hungry', the 'poor', 'peace', and the environment, and in many cases, some form of action was felt necessary. The requests in the current study relate to the latter part of the 1980s, when aspects of current education for sustainable development and global citizenship had been a part of education in the UK since the 1970s. However, it is only fairly recently that education for sustainable development and global citizenship has become more prominent, clearly conceptualised, and firmly embedded in the school-based curriculum and initial teacher training programmes in the UK (Robbins, Francis, and Elliot, 2003). It is argued that prayer requests relating to areas relevant for sustainable development and global citizenship, in terms of content and frequency, can provide useful indicators of individuals' attitudes towards such global issues and their expectations in relation to them. In addition to these three examples, it would be interesting to explore other relevant issues in contemporary politics and society in the UK as they are reflected in prayer requests such as national security, war, crime, and work, for example.

It may be argued that the present study of prayer requests provides a constructive basis for further detailed empirical and social-scientific studies of ordinary theology relating to prayer and God's perceived impact on the public square. As a piece of qualitative research based on data not controlled by the researcher, the present study identifies real, prevailing themes and concerns of

ordinary prayer authors within this particular context which merit further exploration. Through the exemplification of these themes and concerns, it is also apparent that prayer authors understood the matter of *how* God acts in the world in different ways; for example, some prayer authors appeared to be working in more concrete theological frameworks than others who were more complex and abstract. For these reasons, the present study is able to inform both qualitative and quantitative research investigating this field.

Case study 5: Content of intercessory and supplicatory prayer by intention, reference, and objective

intention	people		global		self		animals		total		TOTAL
	pc	sc	pc	sc	pc	sc	pc	sc	pc	sc	
Gift-bestower	191	0	58	0	11	0	8	0	268	0	268
Confidant/e	78	115	2	2	11	3	6	10	97	130	227
Intervener	141	0	29	0	9	0	0	0	179	0	179
Protector	135	1	6	0	13	0	9	0	163	1	164
Intermediary	67	15	12	0	17	0	1	0	97	15	112
Revealer	54	0	29	0	8	0	0	0	91	0	91
Strength-giver	36	0	5	0	2	0	0	0	43	0	43
Helper (general)	27	0	9	0	4	0	1	0	41	0	41
Comforter	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	0	15
Total	744	131	150	2	75	3	25	10	994	146	1140
TOTAL	875		152		78		35		1140		1140

Conclusion

The aim of the thesis is to demonstrate the significance of ordinary prayer for the study of ordinary theology, as conceived by Astley (2002), and to make an original contribution to research in this field. This is realised by structuring the thesis around four key activities which are presented sequentially, and comprise: establishing the nature of the relationship between ordinary prayer and ordinary theology; providing reviews and evaluations of existing empirical research of relevance to ordinary prayer; developing an original methodological contribution to empirical research in ordinary prayer; and testing the new methodology in practice. The conclusion to the thesis sets out to draw together the main findings emerging from these activities, to evaluate critically the new methodology which has been presented and tested in the thesis, and to discuss further the practical relevance of this research for the Church today.

Main findings

Chapter 1, 'Ordinary prayer', contextualised and defined the construct of ordinary prayer. Ordinary prayer was placed firmly in the context of ordinary theology according to the Astley tradition, and was defined as the prayer of ordinary people or 'those believers who have received no scholarly theological education'. It was argued that the study of ordinary prayer could make a valid and distinctive contribution to the study of ordinary theology, both directly and indirectly. Prayer was presented as an activity which is integral to religious experience through which ordinary theology could be accessed at a fundamental and formative level, with the starting point being the ordinary theologian rather than a doctrine or theological

concept. It was suggested that a thorough study of ordinary prayer should focus on self-reported private experiences of prayer, and should gather empirical data concerning who prays, when people pray, the content of people's prayers and the perceived effects of prayer (both subjective and objective). These strands of ordinary prayer were then examined in turn in the following five chapters of the thesis.

Chapter 2, 'Who prays?', drew a number of conclusions about who prays from a representative review of pertinent broadly-based social surveys, studies focused on the behaviour, attitudes, and values of religious people, and surveys focused on quantifying and contextualising prayer in people's lives. The review indicated that overall significant numbers of people practise private prayer in the Western world. However, survey data have shown that some groups practise private prayer more than others and these differences are related to gender, age, social status, church attendance, religious beliefs, geographical location, race, and Christian denomination. The review highlighted the need to explore some of these relationships with prayer in more detail, for example, the relationship between the practice of prayer and Catholic, Evangelical, and Charismatic religious orientations, and the effect of social and cultural background on race differences in the practice of prayer.

Chapter 3, 'When do people pray?', drew a number of conclusions about when people pray from a representative review of pertinent surveys. The review indicated that people pray in circumstances which are challenging or extreme, including situations regarding health and personal illness, parental coping with ill children, volatile marital relationships, coping in non-medical contexts, finance and work-related problems, and working in often difficult caring contexts. There was also some evidence to suggest that there is a relationship between the use of prayer

for health and illness and being female, increased age, and poorer self-rated health. The review highlighted the need to explore the relationship between type of prayer and illness, to build on and broaden the relationship between prayer and conflict as well as finance and work-related problems, and to study prayer and the views and practices of UK healthcare professionals in relation to patients.

Chapter 4, 'The objective correlates of prayer', drew a number of conclusions about whether intercessory prayer has any empirically discernable, objective effects on the external world based on a representative review of a wide range of prayer experiments. The review indicated that there is no consistent evidence to suggest that distant, double-blind, intercessory prayer has measurable objective effects although some interesting findings have emerged with regard to intercessory prayer for women in IVF contexts and the effect of patient knowledge of prayer made on their behalf. In addition, although the majority of experiments did not reach statistical significance, trends in favour of the prayer group suggested that this field would benefit from further empirical investigation. The review highlighted the need for further empirical investigations to take account of specific methodological issues, to support the need for replication and comparability of studies, and to consider the possible benefits of broadening the range of data collected with regard to those who perform the intercessory prayer and those who are the recipients of the intercessory prayer.

Chapter 5, 'The subjective correlates of prayer', drew a number of conclusions about whether private prayer has any empirically discernable, subjective effects on those who practise it based on a representative review of a wide range of empirical studies. The review indicated that private prayer appears to have measurable subjective psychological and physical benefits for those who practise it

(some negative effects were also observed). These perceived benefits were particularly apparent in certain areas such as behaviour and attitudes, positive self-perception in relation to self-esteem, life satisfaction and purpose in life, decreased anxiety, stress, tension, and distress, resilience and coping in certain circumstances, and spiritual health. The review highlighted the need for further empirical investigations to explore some of these relationships with prayer in more detail in order to establish which characteristics of prayer are most significant in producing these effects in addition to frequency of prayer. It was suggested that such empirical investigations would include attention paid to prayer type, prayer content, and underpinning beliefs.

Chapter 6, 'Exploring the content of prayer', drew a number of conclusions about the content of people's prayers from a representative review of pertinent studies, which either surveyed peoples' reported experiences of prayer content or analysed the content of prayers directly. The review indicated that private prayers shared a number of common features. For example: prayers were usually about problems; prayers were often for other people; prayers were usually concerned with health and death; prayers were usually addressed to God; and prayers often had either concrete or abstract anticipated outcomes. In addition, a number of studies suggested that prayer content may produce related, discernable effects and that prayer content may be linked to key sociodemographic variables. However, it was acknowledged that prayer content in a developed sense was present in only a small minority of studies concerned with prayer, although its significance has now begun to be appreciated by researchers. The review highlighted the need for substantial additional work to be done mapping prayer content and the effects of prayer content on those who pray in different contexts to ensure that practical applications based on

the results of prayer studies are properly informed and effective.

Chapter 7, 'Proposing a new methodology', evaluated the significance of empirical studies of ordinary prayer in relation to Astley's (2002) construct of ordinary theology. It was demonstrated that empirical studies of ordinary prayer are useful to the study of ordinary theology because they provide a detailed portrait of the ordinary theologian and the influencing factors on their ordinary theologies at a fundamental and formative level through a primary focus on the ordinary theologian rather than on the doctrine or theological concept. The relevance of ordinary theology combined with the study of ordinary prayer was argued to be particularly acute for the Church and the people who attend regularly, as well as those outside the Church who continue to express themselves through the central religious practice of prayer. Set within these contexts, a new methodology for analysing ordinary prayer was proposed, with the aim of making a significant contribution to the dialogue that Astley envisages taking place between the ordinary theologian and the 'professional' theologian. The new methodology, which is concerned with accessing the content of ordinary prayer through the analysis of prayer-cards left in churches, was set out in detail alongside its proposed application through five case studies.

Chapter 8, 'Case study 1: A general content analysis of ordinary prayer', provided a detailed content analysis of 917 prayer-cards left in a rural church, using the general analytical framework to explore prayer *intention*, prayer *reference*, and prayer *objective*. The exercise identified material which enriches the understanding of contemporary beliefs and expressions of ordinary prayer, and supported the notion that prayer requests are largely motivated by the pray-ers' everyday personal experiences and wider 'global' concerns of relevance at the time of composing the prayer requests. Results of particular interest, which were discussed, included: in

relation to prayer *reference*, the focus on prayers for other people and scarcity of prayers for self alone; in relation to prayer *intention*, the concern of the majority with personal, local, or global ‘life-and death’ issues involving illness, death, and conflict or disaster; and in relation to prayer *objective*, the balance of primary control and secondary control in certain *reference* and *intention* categories. Overall, the general analytical framework seemed to work well in providing a detailed analysis of the content of the prayers.

Chapter 9, ‘Case study 2: A general content analysis replication of ordinary prayer’, replicated the general analytical framework using a second set of 1,067 prayer-card from the same rural church used in case study 1. The results which emerged from this replication study generally supported the results of case study 1, and worked well in identifying the main elements of this type of ordinary prayer in a consistent and structured manner. In addition, the replication led to some refinements in the interpretation of results presented in case study 1 in light of a few key differences emerging between the two studies. It was argued that this illustrated the importance of replicating studies in the same location in order to test both the robustness of a framework and its results. It was suggested that the general framework now needed testing in different rural locations and in urban locations.

Chapter 10, ‘Case study 3: Ordinary prayer and implicit religion’, built on the results of the second set of 1,067 prayer-cards analysed in case study 2 by employing Lord’s (2006) nine-type definition of implicit religion to identify examples of implicit religion within an explicit religion context of prayer requests. The conceptual frameworks employed in the analysis of prayer requests were viewed as helpful for the broad identification and illustration of concerns and beliefs of ordinary people and the role that implicit religion may play within them. Material

relevant to ordinary prayer and implicit religion was gathered around three themes which related to beliefs about death and the afterlife, manipulation of the environment, and common expressions of implied efficacy. It was argued that examples illustrated the presence of residual religion (in the ‘effect of explicit religion’ type) and that, from a Church perspective, any learning and subsequent dialogue stimulated by the content of the prayer requests would be an example of the requests acting as a ‘source of explicit religion’ type of implicit religion.

Chapter 11, ‘Case study 4: Ordinary prayer and health and well-being’, analysed the second set of 1,067 prayer-cards using a modification of the general analytical framework in order to provide a focused study of aspects of health and well-being. In the modified framework, the general *intention* categories were replaced by health and well-being categories, which included physical health, mental health, affective communication, and direct communication. One of the main strengths of the new intention categories was their ability to differentiate between material which was relevant to health and well-being in an explicit concrete sense and material which was relevant to health and well-being in a less concrete and more affective sense. It was argued that the study quantified and illustrated prayer content and prayer expectations relevant to both subjective studies of the correlates of ordinary prayer and objective studies of the correlates of ordinary prayer. Results of particular interest, which were discussed, included: in relation to prayer *reference*, the focus on prayers for other people and scarcity of prayers for the self alone; in relation to prayer *intention*, the breadth of material available of relevance to health and well-being; and in relation to prayer *objective*, the particularly high number of primary control requests for this area. Overall, the modified analytical framework seemed to work well in providing a detailed analysis of the content of prayers, which

is able to contribute to the study of ordinary prayer and ordinary theology in relation to the field of health and well-being.

Chapter 12, 'Case study 5: Ordinary prayer and God's activity in the world,' analysed the second set of 1,067 prayer-cards using a modification of the general analytical framework in order to provide a focused study of the beliefs of ordinary pray-ers concerning the nature and activity of God and God's concern with and impact on the everyday world. In the modified framework, the general *intention* categories were replaced by nine new categories, which portrayed God as: gift-bestower, confidant/e, intervener, protector, intermediary, revealer, strength-giver, helper (general), and comforter. The vast majority of prayer requests invoked a God who was perceived to be active in the world (particularly with regard to matters of health and bereavement) by providing gifts, intervening in concrete terms, protecting, mediating between the living and between the living and the dead, and providing revelations, strength, help, and comfort. The predominance of primary control requests (and aspects of their content) indicated that a significant proportion of prayer authors viewed God's action in the world as one which exists as part of a deeply personal relationship with human beings. Significant elements of this relationship were explored. As ordinary prayer is deeply personal and firmly grounded in experience, the analyses of the ordinary prayer requests also identified matters of direct significance to social and political issues within the public square pertaining to health, companion animals, and sustainable development and global citizenship. Overall, the modified analytical framework seemed to work well in providing an insight into the ordinary theology of ordinary pray-ers and illuminating ways in which ordinary pray-ers envisage God impacting on matters of significance to the public square.

Evaluation of new methodology

It has been demonstrated that the new methodology, which is presented and tested in the thesis, is able to make a distinctive and useful contribution to the empirical study of ordinary prayer and ordinary theology by contributing to knowledge of the content of prayer, which has been identified as an area in particular need of further research. As the reviews of empirical studies of prayer have shown, it is anticipated that the content and expectations of ordinary prayers may well play a role in the effects of prayer, both positive and negative. Expressed in a different way, and bearing in mind the relationship between ordinary prayer and ordinary theology, this means that people's ordinary theologies may well also play a role in the effects of prayer, both positive and negative. Therefore, ordinary theology could benefit in practical terms from empirical studies of ordinary prayer which may be able to identify 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' components of ordinary theology. This approach to ordinary theology, which focuses on the ordinary pray-er or ordinary theologian, complements the approach to ordinary theology which begins with the doctrine, by providing a fuller understanding of the processes at work both in 'ordinary theologies' and 'professional theologies'.

The analytical frameworks generated to analyse the content of intercessory and supplicatory prayer requests have responded well to the five tests conducted in the case studies. The frameworks are both replicable and flexible. In relation to replication, the detailed format of the full analyses is an important factor in facilitating accurate replication. In relation to flexibility, the modification of the *intention* component of the framework allows prayer request studies to focus on

specific areas of interest. Using a clearly defined framework, five different analyses have been conducted on two sets of prayer-cards, and interpretations in each case have added specific insights into ordinary prayer and ordinary theology depending on the specific foci of the studies. The content and the results of the analyses are relevant to both future qualitative and quantitative studies exploring ordinary prayer and its correlates because they map out and quantify a wide range of characteristics of ordinary prayer.

A limitation of the present series of case studies is that the data were collected from only one church over a limited period of time (two blocks of sixteen months). Further research now needs to be carried out in this particular church in order to monitor the content of prayer over a longer period of time, and further research needs to be carried out in other locations in England and Wales (in urban as well as rural contexts), and in other national and cultural contexts. A second limitation of the present series of case studies is that it is confined to an examination of supplicatory or petitionary prayer, and robust frameworks which include qualitative and quantitative measures also need to be developed to analyse other forms of prayer such as thanksgiving, confession, and adoration. A third limitation concerns prayer-card studies as a source of data in general. Unlike most data used in empirical studies, prayer-cards carry no basic information relating to the prayer authors such as gender or age, which would refine further the information gleaned from the prayer content.

Finally, it is recommended that future replications of the framework employed in the five case studies should make a modification to the prayer *objective* component of the framework. The primary control element of the *objective* component embraces two different types of primary control: primary control related

to requesting concrete changes in the physical world and primary control related to requesting affective change in self or others. Although both types of primary control have been recognised in the qualitative analyses, it would be useful to quantify their relative strengths.

Relevance of research to the Church

It has been maintained throughout this thesis that empirical studies of ordinary prayer offer valuable insights into ordinary theologies and ordinary theologians. In chapter 7, 'Proposing a new methodology', it was argued that central to the notion of ordinary theology is the perceived need to make theology an activity which is relevant to the lives of all believers, including the vast majority who are technically unqualified in this area. This relevance can be achieved only with appropriate interaction between ordinary theologians and 'professional' theologians, and a sense of 'buying into' the resultant activity. Declining church attendance and closure of churches (alongside evidence provided by other markers of religiosity, which indicate that people are not necessarily becoming less 'religious' or 'spiritual') would suggest that the Church may benefit from listening to ordinary theologies and that which concerns ordinary theologians, if it is properly to exercise its ministry among those whom it seeks to serve. This listening will involve attention to individual life experiences, to group differences such as those relating to gender, age, religious orientation, race, culture, and social status, and to expectations in relation to how God is perceived to work in the world.

Churches still provide good locations in which to interact with both the churched and the unchurched, in both the listening and learning capacity as well as

the reflecting and responding capacity. It has already been argued in chapter 1, ‘Ordinary prayer’, that the management of the dialogue between ordinary theology and ‘professional’ theology remains with qualified theologians, who are best equipped to interpret and apply the contribution of ordinary theology because they are best able to place ordinary theologies within the relevant broader perspectives. Although church attendance is clearly declining, there is evidence regarding the way in which church buildings remain of interest to visitors and to tourists. For example, a series of studies has now begun to chart the impact of visitors and tourists on cathedrals in England and Wales (English Tourist Board, 1979; Francis, Williams, Annis, and Robbins, 2007; Gasson and Winter, 1994; Jackson and Hudman, 1995; Voase, 2007; Williams, Francis, Robbins, and Annis, 2007). This research tradition was applied by Francis and Martineau (2001) to an examination of the expectations and experiences of visitors to rural churches in England and Wales. Over 12,000 such visitors completed an informative questionnaire. Three key findings from the study are of particular salience. First, the visitors covered all age groups. Secondly, the visitors included both churchgoers and non-churchgoers. Thirdly, a high proportion of the visitors (non-churchgoers as well as churchgoers) found spiritual significance in their visit. The spiritual significance of their visit was captured in a variety of ways. One of these ways was the level of appreciation shown for somewhere to write prayer requests. Over 42% of the visitors said that they would welcome such a facility. This proportion included 50% of those who attended church most weeks and 32% of those who hardly ever attended church.

This means that opportunities exist for ‘professional’ theologians to use prayer requests as one way of gathering information of relevance to ordinary theology which is inclusive of both the churched and the unchurched. There is also

the potential to develop inviting and accepting aids to help, to inform, and to shape the aspirations for prayer within ordinary pray-ers. The provision of such resources presents an opportunity for churches to have an impact beyond the boundaries of their immediate congregations and to have a role extending beyond that of offering prayers on behalf of others, which involves the more proactive and challenging task of nurturing and guiding those individuals who are simply ‘passing through’.

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