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Say One for Me: the implicit religion of prayers from the street

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ABSTRACT

Within the field of the psychology of prayer, there has been a growing interest in empirical studies concerned with the analysis of the content of ordinary people's private prayers, with a view to providing a more nuanced understanding of the psychological correlates of prayer among those who engage in the activity. One research tradition has focused on the content analysis of intercessory prayer requests left in church-related settings, and it is within this context that the present study is located, examining 417 intercessory prayer requests, collected on the streets by bishops in the Church of England as part of the 2011 'Say One for Me' Lent Prayer initiative. The study was informed by the constructs of implicit religion and ordinary theology, and employed ap Sion's general analytical framework for intercessory prayer requests (ap Sion, 2007, 2009). Three types of implicit religion were found to be present in the prayer content: societal consensus, the source of explicit religion, and the effect of explicit religion, and the significance of these results is discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The significance of the practice of private prayer within the psychology of religion has been recognized since the early works of William James (1902), Coe (1916), Hodge (1931), and Heiler (1932). More recent empirical surveys and studies conducted over the past 40 years or so have begun the task of mapping the practice of private prayer and its correlates by identifying groups of people most likely to pray and the subjective effects of prayer (ap Sion & Francis, 2009). Among these studies relatively few have been concerned with the analysis of prayer content, although it is increasingly recognised that what people pray and the beliefs and attitudes shaping their prayers may have significance in psychological as well as theological terms (Bade and Cook, 1997; Krause, Chatters, Meltzer, and Morgan, 2000; Krause 2004 Schoneman; and Carrera, 2005). The present study is concerned with an analysis of private intercessory prayer content, viewed through the lenses of implicit religion and ordinary theology. Central to both constructs, implicit religion and ordinary theology, is an emphasis on listening to those who are not usually viewed as significant or authoritative in the shaping of belief and practice within explicit formal religion; both constructs take seriously the insights and benefits that such listening may bring. The study is set within the specific cultural context of the Church of England, and the relationship that Church has with the general public who approach it with the request to ‘Say One for Me’.

Implicit religion

The construct of implicit religion, pioneered by Edward Bailey (1997, 1998, 2002), is based on the premise that ‘religiosity is innate to human society, although not always present in an overt form’ (Lord 2008, p. 34). Bailey (2002) defined implicit religion in

The Secular Quest for Meaning in Life: Denton papers in implicit religion as types of behavior reflecting the three attributes of ‘commitment’, ‘integrating foci’, and ‘intensive concerns with extensive effects’. Implicit religion, therefore, is concerned with various expressions of implicit religiosity located in both the secular domain and the explicitly religious domain, and it is also concerned with the interaction between explicit religion and its implicit counterpart. Of the nine types of implicit religion identified and exemplified by Lord (2006, 2008), five are of particular significance for studying the interaction between formal religion and implicit religion, and these are styled as: societal consensus, effect of explicit religion, source of explicit religion, group experience, and the pre-conscious. The presence and influence of a number of these types have been identified in empirical studies set in Anglican church contexts, with particular reference to the following three types: the ‘effect of explicit religion’ type demonstrated by the presence of residual religion in unconventional and non-Christian religious beliefs held by those located in church contexts (ap Sion, 2010; Francis, Williams and Robbins, 2006); the ‘source of explicit religion’ type demonstrated by the potential influence of those only loosely affiliated with the Church accessing open baptismal policies (Francis, Littler and Thomas, 2000); and the ‘societal consensus’ type demonstrated by attitudes towards the relationship between an Established church and the state on the part of clergy in the Church of England (Smith, Francis and Robbins, 2002).

The interaction between implicit religion and formal religion in the case of the Established Church of England and its relationship with the state and with the people within the state is of particular relevance to the present study. In *Say One for Me: the Church of England in the next decade*, Wesley Carr (1992) reflects on the complexity

of this relationship in terms of the imbedded perceptions of the Church of England, of its religious functionaries and of the people, broadly conceived. Carr argues that the pastoral concern of the Church of England, and by extension that of its religious functionaries, has in notion and practice extended beyond that of care for the individual member or the immediate parish.

Included in it [pastoral care] has been the idea of service to the nation as a whole, or to all the people, without regard to their personal belief, or to the parish, the local community One prominent dimension to this pastoring has been the pastor's willingness to engage with and respond to what is, now significantly with increasing disparagement, called 'folk religion' (page 12).

On the part of the people, Carr (1992, p13) describes an 'institutional reality to the Church of England', an example of which is reflected through the interaction between the religious functionary (priest) and the people whom he or she meets. This interaction has a dimension beyond that of a personal meeting; the religious functionary will, in some sense, be seen as representing the 'Church' in the minds of those who meet him or her. In addition, regardless of personal Christian belief or practice, there is a widespread sense of ownership of the Church of England on the part of many expressed through an assumed right of access to services at pivotal points in people's lives, such as birth, marriage, and death. For Carr (1992, p.14), it is these types of interaction (among others) between the Church of England and people, which contribute to the dynamic creation of the Church, although this is not without its tensions for those who seek a 'purer Church' without the 'mess of half belief, residual Christianity and sheer superstition that characterizes religion' (Carr, 1999, p.6). It is, therefore, within these interactions between Church and people that a

setting for implicit religion may be found. The popular expression and request made by those on the peripheries of the Church to ‘Say One for Me’ or to intercede in prayer on their behalf, offers a specific activity through which this relationship may be explored.

Ordinary theology

Jeff Astley (2002) introduced and defined the construct of ordinary theology in *Ordinary Theology: looking, listening and learning in theology*. He argued that theology is usually regarded as an activity that lies in the domain of ‘qualified’ theologians within the Church or Academy, and although there is dialogue between qualified theologians and ordinary people, it is often controlled by the former. Within this context, Astley asked whether benefits could be gained from listening carefully to the voices belonging to those who are technically unqualified (ordinary) people. Ordinary theology, therefore, is concerned with accessing ‘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). At the heart of ordinary theology 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, often tentative, hesitant, inarticulate, and it is ‘ordinary’ because it pertains to the everyday and the architect is the ordinary Christian. It is only through listening to and taking this ordinary theology seriously that the Church is able to interact meaningfully with those whom it serves. Although Astley’s work tends to focus on the ‘Christian’ within an explicit church context, it is understood that the construct of ordinary

theology has much wider applications, and includes the ‘God-talk’ of both the churching and the unchurching, broadly conceived.

One approach to accessing ordinary theology has been through the content analysis of ordinary prayers, that is the private prayers of ordinary theologians as defined by Astley. Prayer is often described as the activity which lies at the heart of Christian practice; knowing the content of ordinary people’s prayers can provide insights into trends relating to personal perceptions of the nature of the relationships existing between themselves, the world, and God. This makes ordinary prayers natural and fundamental access points to the scaffolding which helps to define, shape, and support people’s religious or spiritual lives, whether they are churching or unchurching. As such, studying ordinary prayers has the potential to offer important insights into a broad range of ordinary theologies, which include aspects relating to the presence of implicit religion. To date, there have been a number of analyses of ordinary prayer content which have drawn on prayer requests left in explicitly religious contexts, such as churches or shrines (ap Sion, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011; Brown & Burton, 2007; Burton, 2009, 2010; Lee, 2009; Schmied, 2002), hospital chapels or prayer rooms (Grossoehme, 1996; Hancocks and Lardner, 2007; Cadge and Daglian, 2008; Grossoehme, VanDyke *et al*, 2010; Grossoehme, Jeffrey Jacobson *et al*, 2011; ap Sion, 2012), and the Church of England’s ‘Say One for Me’ website (ap Sion & Edwards, 2012). Of these prayer studies two focused on identifying cases of implicit religion (ap Sion 2010; ap Sion & Edwards, 2012), in which cases relating to the ‘effect of explicit religion’ and the ‘source of explicit religion’ were cited.

The relationship between ordinary prayer and context

The prayer request studies that have been conducted so far have proved useful in accessing some trends and characteristics in the ordinary theologies and implicit religions of a range of people entering explicitly religious, church-related spaces. Within these church-related spaces, results demonstrated that, when using the same analytical instruments, there were significant differences in prayer content which were related to whether prayers were left in a church, a hospital or an online church website (ap Sion 2012; ap Sion & Edwards, 2012). When the results of the church prayer request study exploring aspects of health and wellbeing (ap Sion, 2008) were compared with the children's hospital chapel study (ap Sion, 2012), two striking differences were noted. First, in terms of prayer objective, the hospital study showed much greater use of primary control (seeking to direct the outcome of the prayer) than secondary control (leaving the outcome of the prayer in the hands of another). Secondly, in terms of 'direct communication' (in particular, the aspect which seeks to use prayer as a means of communication with both family and friends, living and dead), the hospital study showed much greater use of this approach to prayer when compared to the church study. When the two church prayer request studies exploring the general characteristics of prayer (ap Sion, 2007, 2009) were compared with the online prayer requests from the 'Say One for Me' website operated by the Church of England (during Lent 2010), three main differences were noted. First, although the prayer intention category most frequently employed in the three studies was 'illness', this preference was less strong in the online prayer requests. The 'online' requests also showed a marked preference for intentions relating to 'relationships', 'work', and 'growth' (affective) when compared with the other studies. Secondly, although the prayer reference category most frequently employed in the three studies was prayer for 'other people' (known to the prayer author), this preference was slightly less

strong in the online requests. The online prayer requests also showed a marked preference for prayer for the prayer authors themselves when compared with the other studies. Thirdly, in terms of prayer objective, the prayer requests in the two church studies showed that primary control (seeking to direct the outcome of the prayer) and secondary control (leaving the prayer outcome in the hands of another) were employed fairly equally, while the prayer requests from the online study showed a much greater preference towards the use of primary control.

One explanation for the differences in these results may be attributed to the types of people who accessed the intercessory prayer provision in the various explicitly religious, church-related spaces; prayer content indicated that these comprised, to varying degrees, both churched and unchurched petitioners. What has not yet been studied, however, is the content of intercessory prayers gathered from outside the explicitly religious, church-related space, and how this might provide access to and have an effect on the ordinary theologies and implicit religions contained therein.

Research agenda

The present study aims to analyse intercessory prayer content, which has been collected on the street, outside the location of the religious building, dedicated room, or website. Set within an Established Church of England context, the study aims to explore what happens when the religious functionary is taken out of the church context and placed on the street, how this affects the intercessory prayer request content collected by the religious functionary, and what this activity may contribute to the understanding of interactions between implicit religion and an explicit formal religious tradition set within a broader theoretical context shaped by ordinary

theology and the psychology of prayer. It is hypothesized that the types of implicit religion displayed in this context will be the ‘effect of explicit religion’, the ‘source of explicit religion’ and societal consensus’.

METHOD

Sample

The 2011 ‘Say one for Me’ (SOFM) Church of England intercessory prayer initiative involved gathering two distinct forms of prayer requests over the Lent period: hard copy prayer requests gathered on the streets by the 11 participating bishops and their teams and online prayer requests placed on the SOFM website. The sample used in this study was drawn from the hardcopy prayers collected on the streets by two bishops. The prayer cards themselves are small cardboard squares with the SOFM logo on the reverse. The obverse side is largely blank, with the invitation ‘Please pray for...’ located in the left hand corner. In total, 336 prayer cards were used in the analysis. Some of the prayer card content contained multiple petitions for several persons and intentions; therefore, where a clear division could be made the content of these prayer cards was further divided into their constituent prayer requests. From the sample of 336 prayer cards were derived a total of 417 individual prayer requests.

Analysis

Of the 417 prayer requests, 411 were examples of wholly supplicatory prayer (98%). The remaining six prayer requests were concerned with thanksgiving. There were no instances of adoration. Confession was observed as a secondary focus in one prayer request. For the purpose of this study, supplicatory prayer requests were examined.

A content analysis of the 411 supplicatory prayer requests employed ap Siôn's (2007, 2009) 'general' framework for intercessory and supplicatory types of prayer.

According to this framework, three elements intrinsic to all examples of prayer of this type are identified: intention, reference and objective. *Intention* seeks to establish the concerns of the individual prayer authors, which are categorized within ten areas: illness, death, growth, work, relationships, disaster, sport, travel, open intention, and general. *Reference* seeks to establish for whom the prayer is being offered, and identifies four foci: the prayer authors themselves; other people personally known to the prayer author; animals known to the prayer author; and the world or global context. *Objective* seeks to distinguish between the effects of prayer anticipated by the prayer authors, described as primary control and secondary control. Prayer authors employing primary control are explicit about the desired outcome of the prayer request, while prayer authors employing secondary control do not suggest a desired outcome. The primary control component of prayer *objective* was further delineated between prayer authors who requested material changes to the physical world and those who requested affective changes. The former is labelled primary control one (PC1) and the latter is labelled primary control two (PC2). Secondary control is referred to as SC.

RESULTS

With regard to prayer intention, of the 411 supplicatory prayer requests in the sample, 128 (31%) were concerned with illness, 96 (23%) open intention, 58 (14%) death, 31 (8%) growth, 28 (7%) relationships, 28 (7%), disaster, 22 (5%) work, 18 (4%) general, one (0.2%) travel, and one (0.2%) sport. With regard to prayer reference, 345

(84%) were requests for other people known to the prayer author, 46 (11%) were requests about global issues, and 20 (5%) were requests for the prayer authors themselves. With regard to prayer objective, there were 305 (74%) examples of secondary control requests and 106 (26%) examples of primary control requests. Of the primary control requests, 103 (97%) were PC2 and three (3%) were PC1.

The following is an exemplification of the content of these prayer requests. Each section explores the relationship between prayer intention, reference and objective. The categories of prayer intention included in the exemplification have been selected to illustrate the range of intentions. Examples of prayer objective are identified as PC1, PC2 or SC.

[Insert table about here]

Other People

Of the 411 supplicatory prayer requests, 345 (84%) were focused on people who were personally known to the prayer author. Of these 345, illness featured as the most frequent intention, with 121 (35%) examples, followed by 92 (27%) open intention, 57 (17%) death, 25 (7%) relationships, 20 (6%) growth, 18 (5%) work, six (2%) disaster, four (1%) general, one (0.3%) travel and one (0.3%) sport. In terms of prayer objective, 284 (82%) of these prayer requests were examples of secondary control and 61 (18%) were examples of primary control. Of these 61 prayer requests, 60 were examples of PC2, and one was an example of PC1. Illness, open intention, death, relationships, growth and work are exemplified.

Illness. Of the 121 individual prayer requests dealing with illness, 98 (81%) were secondary control requests. There were 22 (18%) examples of PC2, with one (1%) example of PC1. These prayers were primarily concerned with physical and mental health of family members and friends. Certain petitions were vague, with no clear indication of the nature of the ailment or the identity of the recipient of the prayer request. Others went into considerable detail, providing names, specific illnesses and malaises, and in some cases locations, as well as details about the prayer recipients themselves. SC prayer requests were generally characterised by their brevity. In these prayers, sick people were prayed for, but the outcome of the supplication was left unspecified. PC2 prayer requests were focused on the comfort of the sick person, their full return to health, thoughts for the sick person's family and friends as well as those who would mourn their loss, freedom from pain, and strength to face disease and injury with courage. PC1 prayer requests made explicit a desire for the health and healing of those who were ill.

Daughter's broken leg. (SC)

For [Name] with bowel cancer who has had her operations but still needs more treatment. (SC)

For [Name] with depression. Had it before but with no reasons this time. (SC)

[Name] bipolar. (SC)

[Name] (former cathedral guide). Housebound, for her recovery + mobility. (PC2)

Father-in-law [Name] now diagnosed with brain and stomach cancer – that he'll be free from pain. (PC2)

[Name] to get his sight back. (PC1)

[Name] Healing. Burst cyst. (PC1)

For [Name], son is not well. Has been ill for some time. I don't have a faith but thank you for praying for me. (SC)

Open Intention. Of the 92 individual prayer requests in the open intention category, all were examples of secondary control. These prayers did not include a specific intention but explicitly named individuals (or groups known to the author) who were subjects of prayer. These individuals were mostly family and friends, as well as romantic partners. Sometimes specific groups were named; all-inclusive appellations such as 'family' and 'friends' were not uncommon, and some may have referred to people who have died. A feature of some of these prayers was the additional information provided about named individuals and the prayer author's emotions in relation to them.

Anonymous person who used to go to Spring Harvest but won't give that stuff the time of day now. (SC)

[Name] living on his own. (SC)

For lady with too many things to pray for. (SC)

Man who attends the Rudolph Steiner Community in [Place]. (SC)

Group of SA people at Citadel, Birmingham. (SC)

[Place] Christian Fellowship. (SC)

RC Church. (SC)

My family in India. (SC)

Babies in neo-natal. (SC)

Death. Of the 57 individual prayer requests focusing on death, 51 (89%) were examples of secondary control. The remaining six (11%) prayer requests were examples of PC2. These prayer requests concerned dead family and friends, and often provided dates and the time lapse since the deaths, which ranged from the very recent to a few years previous or more. Some requests stated the belief that the dead person is with God or was reunited with loved ones. Several requests were directed towards those who were left behind. The circumstances of the deaths were recorded in very general terms, although in some instances specific details were provided. A number of prayer requests drew on the explicit religious term, 'R.I.P.' or 'rest in peace'.

For a friend who died of a brain tumour. (SC)

[Name] – remembering his mother + father who died 20 + 10 years ago. (SC)

All people – feel presence of dead after a lot of bereavement. (SC)

Memory of brother [Name]. (SC)

[Name] with God in heaven. (SC)

Sacred memory of [Name] – parents still grieving after his death 2 years ago.

(SC)

[Name] – lady's son who died. Husband + Daughter who died. Miss them – know love, peace. (PC2)

[Name] Rest in Peace. (PC2)

Relationships. Of the 25 individual prayer requests focusing on relationships, 17 (68%) were examples of secondary control. The eight (32%) remaining prayer requests were examples of PC2. Prayer requests of this nature were concerned with

issues within the relationships of family and friends, including spouses, children, and partners. Certain prayer requests referred specifically to offspring. Other requests were concerned with marital or pre-marital relationships, and described the wish that these relationships be blessed with love, happiness, courage, protection, longevity, and health. Often specific individuals were named, and their relationship with the prayer author was made clear. In other cases details about the recipients of prayer were undisclosed. In some cases, prayers were asked for persons known to the prayer author who were suffering from loneliness, and that a suitable partner might be found for them or for those going through the end of a relationship.

For [Name], struggling with the end of a relationship. (SC)

[Name] – divorce nearly finalized and experiencing finance troubles. (SC)

Elderly wed group at [Place]. (SC)

Family to stay together. (PC2)

Mother – [Name] – to be more content and not become a burden. (PC2)

For [Name] and [Name] our children, thanks for them. Keep them safe and well throughout their sleep. (PC2)

Comfort in loneliness. (PC2)

Growth. Of the 20 prayer requests concerned with growth, 14 (70%) were examples of PC2. The remaining six (30%) prayer requests were examples of SC. All of the primary control prayer requests were PC2. Examples of growth illustrated here include prayers for affective growth such as spiritual, emotional, and social.

That [Place] doesn't change too much and the community holds together.

(PC2)

For my friend [Name]. I hope he can see a way out of the dark. (PC2)

[Name] - open his heart and tell us his problems.

For [Name] 15th birthday as she grows up into a woman. (SC)

[Name] – doesn't believe in God anymore. (SC)

Work. Of the 18 prayer requests concerned with work, 12 (67%) were examples of SC. The remaining six (33%) were examples of PC2. The primary control prayer requests focused on the attainment of certain work-related goals or ambitions, the success of new business ventures or charitable endeavours, job satisfaction, educational aspiration, and the successful outcome of a court case. Some prayer requests were made by family members, hoping that the children and young people of the family would do well in their future, with some making explicit reference to specific situations, such as pending examinations. Other prayer requests dealt with older people recently retired, that they might find contentment in their lives. Some prayer requests dealt with the prospect of new beginnings, such as starting a new school, college, university or job, with the prayer authors desirous that friends, colleagues and family members find happiness in their new life situation.

[Name] who wants us to pray for people lost jobs. Govt cutbacks. (SC)

Our daughter who is a social worker with children and is under tremendous pressure. (SC)

For former colleagues in local government worried about their life and the spending cuts that are happening. (SC)

[Name] looking for work. (SC)

[Name] – City Treasurer – leaving work today! (SC)

For opportunities in retirement. (PC2)

Everything to go well in exams. (PC2)

Daughter – [Name] – started new school after move house that she'll make new friends + get on well. (PC2)

[Name] in court in May – pray for the right decisions 'not sent down'. (PC2)

Self

Of the 411 supplicatory prayer requests in the study, 20 (5%) featured the prayer authors themselves as the point of reference. Of these 20 prayer requests, growth was the most prominent category, featuring in seven (35%) prayer requests, followed by six (30%) illness, three (15%) relationships, three (15%) work and one (5%) general. There were no petitions relating to open intention, disaster, travel, sport, or death. In terms of prayer objective, 15 were examples of primary control, of which 13 were PC2 and two were PC1. The remaining five were examples of secondary control. Growth and relationships are exemplified.

Growth. The seven prayer requests concerned with personal growth were all examples of PC2. The types of personal growth identified by the prayer authors included protection and deliverance from spiritual forces, the desire for greater strength to face daily living, and blessings upon religious endeavours.

To keep me safe and free from the devil's hands. (PC2)

To get the devil out of my life. (PC2)

Strength and courage. (PC2)

For blessings on a Bible Study. (PC2)

Illness. Of the six prayer requests concerned with illness, four (66%) were examples of primary control: two of these (50%) were examples of PC1, and two (50%) PC2. The two (33%) remaining prayer requests were examples of SC. In most cases, the prayer author expressed a desired outcome, often in reference to the desire to have children or a healthy baby. The two instances of a secondary control prayer requests referred to illnesses the prayer author suffered from, expressed in specific terms or more generally.

Another miracle baby. (PC1)

For the gift of a child. (PC1)

A nice healthy baby. (PC2)

For my prostate and blood pressure (SC)

I am not feeling very good at the moment. Thank you. (SC)

World/Global

Of the 411 supplicatory prayer requests, 46 (11%) were concerned with global issues. The most frequent requests concerned with global issues were related to disaster and conflict with 22 (48%) examples, followed by 13 (28%) general, four (9%) growth, four (9%) open intention, one (2%) illness, one (2%) work, and one (2%) death. There were no prayer requests relating to travel and sport. In terms of prayer objective 30

were examples of primary control and 16 were secondary control. All primary control requests were PC2. Disaster/conflict and general are exemplified.

Disaster/Conflict. Of the 22 prayer requests concerned with disaster or conflict, 16 (73%) were examples of primary control and six (27%) were examples of secondary control. All of the primary control requests were PC2. Prayer requests concerned with disaster and conflict often recorded specific instances for which the prayer author wished to pray, occasionally going into detail about the context and circumstances surrounding the event. In other cases, a more general request was made in which victims of war, natural disasters, political and social exclusion and avarice were remembered by the prayer author. Sometimes geographical localities were mentioned, as well as particular disasters or conflicts.

The leaders in authority of countries where tyranny, corruption and hostility reign. Turn their hearts away from evil to ones abiding in your love. (PC2)

The people of Libya, for peace. (PC2)

Ease the economic times in the country. (PC2)

For a more settled world. (PC2)

Earthquake victims in NZ. (SC)

Middle East. (SC)

The country. The country needs it. (SC)

General. Of the 13 prayer requests placed within the general category, 10 (77%) were examples of primary control. The remaining three (23%) prayer requests were examples of SC. All the primary control requests were examples of PC2. The requests

were not specific or concrete enough to be accommodated within the existing intention categories. The prayer requests are characterised by their brevity, and broad, all-inclusive expressions of desire for ‘happiness’, ‘peace’, ‘love’ and ‘hope’.

Hope! (PC2)

For the world to become a better place. (PC2)

For peace in the whole world. (PC2)

The world in general. (SC)

General situation in the world today. (SC)

CONCLUSION

This study set out to conduct an analysis of intercessory prayer request content collected on the street by Church of England bishops for the Lent 2011 ‘Say One for Me’ prayer initiative. The analysis was informed by the constructs of implicit religion and ordinary theology, set within the context of the psychology of prayer, and two hypotheses were proposed. First, it was hypothesised that the hitherto unstudied content of prayer requests collected by religious functionaries who went out into the street would produce results which were different from those of other similar prayer request studies located in church-related domains. Second, it was hypothesized that three types of implicit religion would be displayed in this context: the ‘effect of explicit religion’, the ‘source of explicit religion’ and ‘societal consensus’. Based on the results from the quantitative and qualitative analyses of the prayer content, four main conclusions are drawn.

First, Wesley Carr's contention that the Established Church of England (as encountered through its religious functionaries) has a distinctive relationship with the wider public outside the immediate boundaries of its churches is supported by the results of the analysis. This distinctive relationship can also be described as a distinguishing feature of the 'societal consensus' type of implicit religion. The results demonstrated that when the Church of England's religious functionaries went out into the streets offering the provision of intercessory prayer to the general public, the people whom they encountered responded positively and asked them to 'say one for me'. The prayer content indicated that the people who responded to the invitation came from a variety of backgrounds. A minority of prayers showed that their authors were affiliated to a religious tradition or were at least familiar with concepts or language employed by a religious tradition; for example, prayers relating to specific churches and their activities, the use of terms such as 'heaven', 'sacred', 'Devil', and 'rest in peace', and the few prayers which were related to those from Muslim and Sikh religious traditions. However, the majority of prayers used no explicit religious language or concepts, and a few asserted that their authors came from no faith background or did not believe in God, but were nevertheless appreciative of the invitation to offer a prayer to be said by the Church on their behalf. The prayer content shows, therefore, that the majority of prayers were expressed in the ordinary, everyday language of ordinary people. This supports Carr's claim that a distinctive relationship still exists between the Established Church of England and the general public, a relationship that reflects a 'societal consensus' that the Church has a role to play in the lives of the churched and the unchurched, which extends beyond that of the immediate boundaries of church congregations. In addition, the proactive step of religious functionaries from the Church of England going out into the streets gives

credence to the contention that the Church of England perceives its ministry in similar broad terms, which supports and reinforces the societal consensus reflected in the general public's responses.

Second, a closer study of prayer content provides important information about the areas shared within this societal consensus and perceptions of roles and responsibilities, which is relevant to the fields of both ordinary theology and the psychology of prayer. For Astley (2002) ordinary theology is concerned with the everyday (ordinary) experiences of life and it is deeply personal. This feature of ordinary theology is clearly reflected in the personal everyday concerns which members of the general public asked the Church to bring before God on their behalf. For example, prayer request content focused largely on *prayer intentions* related to illness (both mental and physical), relationship issues, work and financial concerns, bereavement, and immediate global catastrophes and unrest. From a numerical perspective, the concerns reflected in the *prayer intention* category followed a very similar pattern to two comparable earlier studies of prayer requests left in a physical church context (ap Sion, 2007, 2009) and show similar marked differences to the earlier 'Say One for Me' study of prayer requests left on a Church of England website (ap Sion and Edwards, 2012). The ordinary everyday focus of the prayer requests may also be seen in the predominant concern for those closest to the prayer authors, their families and friends (84%). From a numerical perspective, those for whom the prayer authors pray, reflected in the *prayer reference* category, followed a very similar pattern to the two aforementioned studies of prayer requests left in a physical church context, and also displayed similar marked differences to the 'Say One for Me' website prayer requests. However, in terms of *prayer objective*, the results from this

prayer request study were different from the other prayer studies. The majority of prayers collected on the street did not attempt to direct the prayer outcome; their concern was simply presented, using varying amounts of detail. In total, 74% of the prayer requests were placed in the secondary control category, compared with 57% and 45% of the earlier church-based prayer requests and 17% of the 'Say One for Me' website prayer requests. Astley (2002) describes the 'God talk' of ordinary theologians as often 'hesitant' or 'inarticulate', because they have not had the training of theologians in the Church or Academy, which enables confident and articulate self-expression. It is possible that this characteristic of ordinary theology is being reflected in the non-directive prayer content collected on the street, and if this is so, it may be illuminated by an appreciation of the distinctive nature of the relationship between the general public and the Established Church of England. Is there a prevailing attitude of trust and expectation on the part of general public that their implicit religious needs will be both met by the Church and dealt with appropriately? If this were the case, to what extent would the principles also apply to public perceptions of the need for and right of access to key rituals such as baptism, marriage, and funerals?

Aspects of the discussion concerning the societal consensus aspect of implicit religion are also relevant to the psychology of prayer. The role of prayer as a coping strategy has been explored by a number of studies (ap Sion, 2012). The present study introduces a new aspect to this discussion. When members of the general public were invited to write a prayer request, many responded, and most of the prayer content produced was concerned with the everyday concerns and stresses of ordinary life. This activity, which is based on a tacitly agreed relationship between Church and

people, may be viewed as a significant psychological and spiritual resource for many people.

Third, very few clear examples of the ‘effect of explicit religion’ type of implicit religion were present in the prayer content of this study, when compared with other relevant prayer request studies. There were two kinds of prayer material which may reflect the presence of residual religion. First, the popular expression R.I.P was used in a number of the prayer requests in the ‘death’ prayer intention category, and it is likely that this expression has been taken out of its original liturgical context and employed in alternative ways. Second, there was one prayer request which used the prayer facility to communicate directly with another person, which may be an example of unconventional or alternative belief and practice being introduced into a formal religious context. However, it was anticipated that a much greater number of this type of ‘direct communication’ prayer requests would be present in the current study because of their comparative frequency in other prayer request studies (ap Sion, 2008, 2012). Although there were few specific examples of the ‘effect of explicit religion’ type of implicit religion in the prayer requests, at a general basic level the very act of completing an intercessory prayer request card by those from an unchurched background is illustrative of the presence of residual religious belief, which frequently takes the form of ordinary, everyday language and concerns and as such is very different from prayers often heard in church contexts.

Fourth, the ‘source of explicit religion’ type of implicit religion is indirectly present in the type of activity being studied. The act of sending out religious functionaries onto the street to gather intercessory prayers from the general public indicates an openness

to serve and to be influenced by a wide variety of people who are positioned outside the Church of England's usual congregations. It is through this type of activity that their implicit religions have an effect on the Church and so become a 'source of explicit religion'.

In summary, the hypothesis that the analysis of prayer requests collected on the street would produce results which were different from comparable prayer request studies collected from church buildings has been supported by the results of this study. The hypothesis that the analysis of prayer requests collected on the street would uncover examples of three types of implicit religion was also supported by the results of this study, although the 'effect of explicit religion' type was not that prevalent. This study has drawn on the constructs of implicit religion and ordinary theology, within the context of the psychology of prayer, and offered new insights into how intercessory prayer is being used by ordinary people of relevance to both the fields theology and psychology.

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

intention	people			self			global			animals			total			TOTAL
	PC1	PC2	SC	PC1	PC2	SC	PC1	PC2	SC	PC1	PC2	SC	PC1	PC2	SC	
illness	1	22	98	2	2	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	24	101	128
death	0	6	51	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	6	52	58
growth	0	14	6	0	7	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	24	7	31
work	0	6	12	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	9	13	22
relationships	0	8	17	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	18	28
conflict/disaster	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	16	6	0	0	0	0	17	11	28
sport/recreation	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
travel	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
open intention	0	0	92	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	96	96
general	0	1	3	0	0	1	0	10	3	0	0	0	0	11	7	18
total	1	60	284	2	13	5	0	30	16	0	0	0	3	103	305	411
TOTAL	345			20			46			0			411			

