

Prayer in the Abrahamic Faith Traditions: Steering Wheel or Spare Tire?

“How does prayer shape people and contribute towards the vitality of their communities?”



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By
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Approved: Dr. Jody Clarke

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Certificate of Ethical Acceptability for Research Involving Humans

This is to certify that the Research Ethics Board has examined the research proposal:

AST REB File number:	0092016
Title of Research Project:	Prayer in the Abrahamic Traditions: Steering Wheel or Spare Tire?
Faculty Supervisor:	Dr. Jody Clarke
Student Investigator	David Atwood

and concludes that in all respects the proposed project meets appropriate standards of ethical acceptability and is in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2) and Atlantic School of Theology's relevant policies.

Approval Period: 30 November 2016 to 16 April 2017

Dated this 30th day of November, 2016 at Halifax, Nova Scotia.

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Prayer In The Abrahamic Faith Traditions:

“Steering Wheel or Spare Tire?”

by David W. Atwood

Abstract:

Churches mosques and synagogues are under pressure in an increasing secularized world. Where do such communities find a sense of identity and hope, and does it have anything to do with prayer? This grounded theory study asks in the context of the three Abrahamic faiths, Christianity, Islam and Judaism, how prayer shapes people and their communities and contributes towards their vitality?

Introduction

The subject of prayer for a graduate project interested me for two reasons. Last year during my time as a student minister in Bermuda, I was talking to a member of my congregation. She told me of the sense of hope that prayer once gave to her and to the black members of her church during the sixties and seventies. This was a time when there was much racial injustice and segregation in Bermuda’s society and the church. It was a time when congregants sat in specific places in church because of their race, and children attended segregated Sunday schools. But this lady used to attend a prayer group in her church during those difficult days. Through prayer, she and the other members of her church experienced hope and confidence in the future. In time, racial injustice in Bermuda’s society and its churches came to an end, but in her view, the emphasis on prayer also declined, and the congregation lost some of its cohesiveness as a result. This conversation inspired my initial question, “how does

prayer shape communities and give them a sense of hope?”

The interfaith aspect of prayer came from an experience I had several years ago, when I organized a series of study discussions on the book of Genesis. I gathered together participants from the Jewish, Christian and Islamic faith traditions. Over several weeks we read the stories of Genesis and experienced many rich insights from each other. Like Genesis, prayer is an area in the Abrahamic faith traditions where there are differences and commonalities, and it is good to explore these, particular considering the role which prayer plays in those communities.

Purpose & Relevance

Someone once commented on the difference between prayer in the three Abrahamic faiths. They suggested that Christians mumble to the ceiling, Jews mumble to the wall and Muslims mumble to the floor! It seems like an oversimplification, but it raises the question. What is the experience of prayer in these three Abrahamic Faith Traditions, and how does prayer shape those communities? This question is the primary concern of this study. Churches, mosques and synagogues are under pressure in a growing secularized society. Churches are facing closures, amalgamations and reductions in membership. Mosques and synagogues have their own set of challenges to deal with. Increasing levels of Islamophobia and anti-Jewish sentiment present a growing threat to Jews and Muslims. The questions explored in this study ask, in such an environment, how do these faith groups find a sense of identity and hope? And does that sense of hope have anything to do with

prayer? It's relevant to explore this question from the context of the three Abrahamic faiths. As a participant in my focus group noted, "all faith communities in one way or another are under pressure, and its important, despite theological differences for us to come together in dialogue."

This study could provide a resource for use in workshops and facilitate a re-engagement with the practice of prayer and be a source of outreach to the wider faith community. There is also an important ecumenical dimension to this study, as prayer is a core practice in Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities. Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury, convening an Islamic, Christian seminar in 2011 called "Building Bridges." noted in his introductory remarks "as communities we come back to the experience and challenge, when we meet, of seeing one another praying." that, "to pray is to be in touch with our deepest nature and our truest destiny as human beings." ¹

Rationale Concerning the Research Methodology

The project was a grounded theory study. Grounded theory develops a hypotheses by collecting, coding and analyzing data. The method results in a model which emerges from the data itself, but avoids preconceived assumptions. The theory is "grounded in the actions, interactions and social processes of people." ² For this study the connection between prayer and its effects in a community is an

¹ Williams 2011, 123,135

² Creswell 2007, 63

unknown. A grounded theory approach would document the experiences and insights about prayer within a church, mosque or synagogue. What is advantageous in this method is its focus on *substantive* theory vs formal or *grand* theory. Substantive theory derives its data from everyday situations. ³ In the context of this study, it provides a focus on what works ⁴ about prayer. It may also show how prayer shapes that community and contributes towards its vitality.

The data for the study was transcribed, analyzed and sorted it into primary and secondary categories. These were further studied to identify trends and causality. The intent was to develop a hypothesis based on the the relationships and themes revealed through the participant's insights. As the study proceeded through a ongoing process of theological reflection and engaging with the data, a model did begin to emerge, one which pointed to an ancient Christian formula concerning the relationship between *worship* and *belief*.

Five short and simple research questions were developed for the study to generate conversation and a dialogue on prayer.

1. How did your commitment to the practice of prayer begin?
2. What sustains your practice of prayer?
3. What do you experience during prayer?
4. How has prayer shaped your life?
5. How has prayer shaped your community?

³ Merriam_2009, 30

⁴ Merriam_2009, 30

The data for the study was gathered through interviews and focus groups. Two interviews were conducted with persons from the Jewish community. Despite the smaller number of participants from this faith tradition, the interviews contributed greatly to the study and revealed many valuable insights on prayer. One focus group was held with five participants associated with the Islamic Education Center in Halifax. The second focus group was with eight participants from a Wesleyan Methodist faith community. A Wesleyan church was selected for two reasons. Wesleyans in the Atlantic Canada region place a strong emphasis on the practice of prayer. Secondly, it was important to engage with faith groups removed from the researcher's own immediate United Church context, and thus allow for a greater opportunity to be surprised by the data.

Data Analysis and Coding

The following coding process was used to establish themes from the data in the transcripts. Content was extracted based on individual responses from participants. Keywords were assigned to statements based on the content and context. The keywords were sorted based on to what degree they resonated with the goals of the study. Statements were retrieved and examined to provide further insight to the identified themes. Themes were prioritized using a decision matrix which compared each theme with every other theme. The decision matrix is a rigorous method of analyzing data which helps to challenge early conclusions. It is a useful tool for a grounded theory project where the intent is to set aside assumptions.

Defining Prayer

What is prayer exactly? Spilka and Ladd propose that “it is a core part of all religious experience,”⁵ that it exists in the “lived moments of religious awareness.” Lewis also states that through prayer, “an enlivened awareness of God is induced and maintained,⁶ and that prayer is a central phenomena of all religious life. It is a commitment and a practice that forms a basis for religious experience, across all faith traditions.” Prayer is also a social process grounded in relationships. It is thus never engaged in alone, but connects with the self, with others and with God.⁷ Ladd and Spilka highlight a concept about prayer called *directionality*.⁸ Directionality sees prayer as inward, outward, and upward. The directionality of prayer conveys a sense of connectivity, the notion comes from theological and psychological principles.⁹ Thus, inward-oriented prayers involve a search to better know one’s self, outward prayers unite the self with the experiences of others, and upward prayers focus on the relationship between the individual and the divine.¹⁰

There are obvious key differences in language and practice across all religious traditions, but arguably all prayer can be viewed and understood through this lens.

5 Spilka 2013, 13

6 *ibid.*

7 Ladd & McIntosh, 2008

8 Spilka 2013, 42, Ladd 2008, 31

9 Ladd 2008, 34

10 Spilka 2013, 42

Directionality thus helps us examine and understand prayer in the three Abrahamic faith traditions. Observing prayer at the Islamic Education Center in Halifax on several occasions, the existence of directionality was evident. Those gathered with the Imam all faced outwards towards the *Mihrab*, a niche placed in the direction of Mecca. The prayers using the text of the Quaran emphasized the upward movement of communication with God. But each person participating stood shoulder to shoulder and prostrated in unison. Thus the upward movement of prayer to Allah, was at the same time an outward act of community. After the main prayers were over, each person spent time alone in prayer. Worshippers now faced different directions as they prayed for their personal needs. It is suggested that this same directionality would be evident in both Christian and Jewish faith traditions, though expressed in different ways.

Themes

In exploring the data the following themes began to emerge. Some of these were common to all faith groups and some more unique to a particular community.

- The Call to prayer
- Metanoia and transformation
- Shoulder to Shoulder in community
- The rythmn of prayer
- Zahor or prayer and community memory
- Prayer and the body
- Prayer and the world

- God Moments

The Call to Prayer

The Call to Prayer emerged from the first focus group question, "what instilled in you the habit of prayer?" Childhood memory played an important role here. Most of the participants had been part of a faith tradition as children. Some of them had at one time or another drifted away from practicing their religion. These early recollections were a persistent voice re-affirming a life of faith. Sometimes it was the memory of a parent or a grandparent, sometimes recalling the sights and sounds from their community. A participant from the Islamic group said "for me it was growing up as a small child and hearing the call to prayer, the *Adanah* from the mosque. I remember that it had a soothing effect on me. I remember washing my hands my face and bowing before God." He said "the mosque was central to our neighborhood. It stood right behind my friends house and we would often go and visit there as children." A member of the Jewish faith group said "my prayer life began with my parents singing me the Shema from Deut 6 at nighttime, *hear Oh Israel, the Lord our God is One Lord.*" He added "this likely began when I was born, I just got used to hearing them singing those words to me." A member of the Wesleyan community remembered being nurtured by the prayer life of his grandmother and mother. They were both strong prayer warriors who taught him prayer and took him to church and Sunday school. Another said, "my mother used to

get us to say our prayers before we went to sleep. I remember we would pray for all our relatives."

What emerges here is the question, to what extent do faith groups as well as families self-identify as centers of prayer? In the case of Islam the minaret on a Mosque is a visible active call to prayer, much like a church steeple. But sometimes symbols and steeples can lose their meaning in the life of a congregation. Not all faith groups strongly associate themselves as communities of prayer. But if they do not identify as such, then to what extent are those communities shaped by prayer? Churches are facing amalgamations, down sizing and reduced ministry hours. What shapes the decisions of these congregations about their future if it isn't prayer?

Metanoia & Transformation

Metanoia and transformation also played an important part in engendering a commitment towards prayer. This theme emerged a number of times in the focus groups, particularly in the Wesleyan community, but also in the Islamic group. Noted one of the Muslim participants. "If you have not been brought up in a religious environment, then your life itself creates the lens through which you see the world." He said "I was rebellious against religion and blaming God for my circumstances but I came to the point where I was brought to my knees." A member of the Wesleyan community said "we all come to God through different experiences. I came to Christ through some pretty nasty stuff." Another spoke about the "tug towards a completely different direction in life." And one person noted "I only went to church at Christmas

and Easter, and prayer didn't mean anything. Before I decided to walk the walk and make a decision I was having a tough time in my life with my job with family struggles. Then I remembered the verse from Phillipians 4:13, *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*. I used to repeat it over and over again. That verse became my mantra and my prayer life developed from there."

The experience of transformation lends itself to a commitment towards the practice of prayer. And the question that arises from this, is to what extent do we see peoples lives being transformed in our faith communities? Metanoia is an important area to consider. After all, don't individual experiences of transformation shape and transform the faith community itself?

Shoulder to Shoulder

One of the aspects of Islamic prayer that captured my attention was that in the mosque members of the community stood shoulder to shoulder. Their shoulders are touching the person standing next to them. It conveys a strong sense of community and solidarity. As one of the participants said "shoulder to shoulder we get to know others. It's a physical act. Sisters are touching sisters, brothers are touching brothers. The act of touching each other forms resilience, and the idea is that we can come together. It's a physical coming together and it's a spiritual coming together." The christian community at Cole Harbour-Woodside United Church engage in a similar practice when in morning chapel service. They have a tradition of closing worship by crossing arms in a circle and singing the final hymn *God be*

with you. It is a profoundly moving part of the liturgy for many who attend. It is as the Muslim participant in the focus group described a “physical and spiritual coming together.”

In the Wesleyan community they practice a similar *shoulder to shoulder* concept of maintaining a common concern for each other. It was particularly evident in the way that they used social media. As one of them said "every morning on a rotation basis we add the name of someone in our church community we are praying for on our internal Facebook page. If your name is posted you see within minutes that there are fifty people praying for you. There is an assurance that there are people you havn't seen this morning, but you know that they are holding you in prayer."

The same idea is evident in Jewish tradition. Following the Synagogue service there is *Kiddish*. It is a coming together for celebratory meal or as a blessing to sanctify Shabbat.

A member of the Islamic community noted what happens when you place several grandfather clocks in a room together. Over a period of time the ticking and the clock movements all become synchronized together, its called *harmonic induction*. This theme, so evident in the Islamic tradition speaks to how this concept of common concern can shape a faith community. But also how different this is from our prevailing culture which primarily focusses on the individual. Standing together in physical, emotional and spiritual unity is a powerful concept. A member of the Islamic focus group drew attention to a verse in the book

of Zephaniah. *I will purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him shoulder to shoulder* (Zeph 3:9).

The Rhythm of Prayer

The rhythm of prayer came from insights particularly emphasized in the Islamic and the Jewish context. One of the pillars of Islam is praying five times daily. And in the Jewish tradition praying three times a day. A person in the Islamic group said, “the beautiful thing about Islamic prayer is there are five opportunities each day to reconnect with God.” This is a developed discipline of course. One who had converted to Islam said in the early days he thought his new faith shouldn't be called *Islam*, it should be called *Is-Hard*. But that he had got so used to the practice of praying five times a day, that if he missed one of the prayers then he didn't feel right. Another said that "the practice of praying five times a day is a checkpoint. It can act to prevent us from considering immoral actions. It influences us in our day-to-day life." He said “I believe that the five daily prayers makes Muslims more resilient than some other faith communities." It's as if the shoulder to shoulder in community creates a horizontal *spatial* unity. But the act of rhythmic repetitive prayer creates a *temporal* unity. Of course these traditions exist in the Christian faith as well. They originate in Judaism and were later developed into the *liturgy of the hours*, and then into the *Daily Office*. What we learn from the rhythm of prayer in Islam and Judaism is the value of this weaving together of our life in the world and our life of prayer. There is a Hasidic saying. "When Tevian walks down the road, and sees trees

he thinks of the glory of God. When he walks and the wheels of the cart turn he is saying prayer.”¹¹ Is there an opportunity in Christian communities to take a page from our Jewish and Islamic brothers and sisters? Can we rediscover the rhythm of prayer, and in what way might that shape our faith communities?

***Zahor* - Prayer and Memory**

In the Jewish tradition there is a strong emphasis on memory. Why do we pray? Ultimately we are responding to God's historical actions in the world. This was very evident in the Jewish synagogue service where there is a big context of *memory*. Where parts of the of the synagogue service are there in place of the temple service. The temple no longer exists but there is a re-enactment of the temple ritual. The word for *remember* in Hebrew is *Zahor*. *Zahor* emphasizes how important it is for faith communities to remember their history. A Jewish interviewee said "being a Jew is about not being bogged down in today's context. It's not just about being a *post holocaust* Jew. *Zahor* means that we stand in the whole of Jewish history."

Memory in both the Jewish and Christian contexts is metaphysical, the events of the past are real in the present. In Jews this is true in the Passover meal, and in Christians it is alive in eucharistic theology. The operational term is *Anamnesis*.” This theme resonates strongly in an inter-faith context. As Jews, Muslims and Christians, we do in reality stand together in a shared history which begins with Abraham. It's important particularly as Christians that we affirm that history,

¹¹ quoted by a Jewish interviewee

especially in a Northern American context where there is increasing Islamophobia, and where Jewish grave stones are being toppled over. Zahor means that we are not merely three separate communities. In history through Abraham we are one community!

Prayer and the Body

In the Islamic tradition there is an emphasis on the physical posture of prayer. It is evident in standing, bowing, sitting, and prostrating. Many Christians adopt similar postures for similar reasons. One participant said “we submit ourselves to Allah not only spiritually but physically as well.” In Islamic prayer this submission happens through bowing and placing one's head on the ground. As one person told me, “it is a unique position where your head is made to be lower than your heart and your forehead is pressed against the ground.” Someone else said, “when in the position of Islamic prayer there are seven joints which are touching the floor, and when you are in this position your breathing changes.” The focus on the body in Islamic prayer challenges the mind/body dualism so common in western culture and Christianity. Valerie Hoffman notes that the “Quran does not speak of a body spirit dichotomy as the problem behind the evils of human existence.”¹² But a body spirit division lies at the root of why Christian faith communities find it difficult to talk about issues of sexuality and the body. There is something to be learned for Christians about the way in which Islam sees the body and spirit as a unity.

¹² Hoffman 1995

Prayer in the World

There is always a risk that prayer becomes contained or bounded within a faith community, where prayer can become disconnected from the world. There is a sense in which all participants believed there to be a deep connection between prayer and ethical action. They saw a close relationship between prayer and serving others. As one of the Wesleyan members said, "you don't have a prayer life you have a life of prayer." He went on to note that, "my prayer life started to flow out more naturally when it was more in response to the world around me." A member of the Islamic group said, "prayer in the mosque is connected to what is happening in the world. There has to be a worldly component to prayer. I may not pray as a trinitarian, but I can help my Christian brother with the problem of homelessness and with poverty and crime." A Jewish interviewee noted, "what we are trying to do is build community through a community of *prayers*. And with that there comes certain calls to action. There is always some local, global or national issue, issues that need attention to the fact that there is a divine will or a divine sense of righteousness. Something that shows and points out that the world is not as divine as it could be." He said "Kiddish, the sanctification meal at the end of services is critical for expanding what happens beyond when we are praying. This is when the calls to action really start taking place, beyond whatever that urge is that happens in prayer where I am imagining that I am repairing the world."

God Moments

Another theme which emerged from the study was the value of sharing experiences of prayer. A member of the Wesleyan community described these as *God Moments*. The importance of God moments became clear when I listening to a participant in that particular focus group. She said “I don’t know if you guys can sense this but right here and right now, I can feel his presence here, I can! When I get quiet in personal prayer he shows up. I can sense him drawing me close, and I sense that right here tonight. Its just simply because we are talking about him and we are talking about prayer and he leans in and says ‘listen I hear you guys.’ And it is so pleasing to his heart that it becomes pleasing to our hearts.” Her comments triggered several other conversations that evening about experiences of God moments. The group spent some time sharing memories of God in their lives, whether through prayer or dreams. This particular participant brought into view the realization that when we share such stories with others it builds up the community of faith.

Accessing God Moments can be powerfully animating. Last Sunday at Cole Harbour/Woodside United Church I led the nine-thirty morning chapel service, the theme of which was *God Moments*. Several shared their experiences. Afterwards my spouse Margaret pointed out that for two of those who shared that morning, it was the first time she had ever seen them speak in chapel. It goes to demonstrate that when a personal faith story becomes an intra-personal story, then God does indeed *lean into* that community.

Evaluation & Implications for Pastoral Theology and Ministry

During the study there were some theological considerations that required attention, as well as incorporating the findings of the study into a conceptual framework. One of those issues was the Christian Trinitarian understanding of prayer. Does a belief in the Trinity create a theological barrier between Christianity and Islam and Judaism? From the perspective of the Muslim or the Jew, how can we all pray to the same God when the Christian God includes the human Jesus? There is a theological principle that has been in the church from its earliest times, first coined by Prosper of Aquitaine. It is called *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi*,¹³ which means that the law of prayer and worship grounds and establishes the law of belief. Prayer comes before belief because it emphasizes a theology of revelation where we respond to God's Word. This is in contrast to reading our *word* with our cultural connotations into our understanding of God. From a Trinitarian perspective through the law of worship we have the earliest form of prayer addressed *to the Father through the Son in the Spirit*. While Trinitarian, it particularly emphasizes Jesus humanity and his oneness with and presence in the Christian community. The later formula *to the Father and the Son and the Spirit* essentially underlines that the persons of the Trinity are hierarchically equal. But it was crafted in response to Arianism which challenged Christ's divinity. In other words here we have the law of belief establishing the Law of worship. *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi* to a large extent

13 Irwin 2006, 58

resolves that theological barrier, as it emphasizes Jesus humanity as high priest and his inseparability from the Christian community. As noted by Wainwright in “The Study of Liturgy,” “it is the “redeeming work of Christ which makes present the mystery of the Trinity, which is seen as dynamic and not just an object of faith.”¹⁴

Rowan Williams in a sermon on prayer says when we pray we should pray as if it is not us praying but Jesus himself. He suggests “talk to God as if you were Jesus, which the Holy Spirit enables.”¹⁵ Williams is correct in this regard and supported by Bonhoeffer who notes, “when our will wholeheartedly enters into the prayer of Christ, then we pray correctly.”¹⁶ Rather than placing Christ *above* it locates him *beside* us. It means that our prayer becomes his prayer. Without undermining Trinitarian theology, through the law of worship Christians pray with Christ to the same God as our Jewish and Muslim brothers and sisters. Naturally, the theological differences are still there. As Christians we are still Trinitarian in belief, but we have removed the defensive doctrinal language and like the Islamic prayer of submission *we place our head below our heart.*

But there is a another part to the Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi formula and that is the *Lex Agendi*, the Law of Ethical Action. This is where we have a living theology

¹⁴ Wainwright, The Study of Liturgy, 5

¹⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PWEnK5qnGYo>

¹⁶ Bonhoeffer 1974, xxx

which supports a response to liturgy and prayer in living. As Irwin notes, “the issue here is to allow the prayer to shape and challenge how we look at the world and our corporate and personal lives within it.”¹⁷ As a Jewish participant noted, “We imagine ourselves repairing the world, but it is in Kiddish after prayer where the calls to action take place.” We saw an example of Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi, Lex Agendi in February 2017. The Unitarian church through worship and belief went out from their community and formed a protective barrier. They stood *shoulder to shoulder* around the mosque in Halifax, a circle that was soon joined by others in the community.

Prayer... Belief....Action.

¹⁷ Irwin 2008, 66

Conclusion

The original study question was, does prayer work and does it shape communities? The insights from this study answer definitively yes! One participant from the Islamic community said "we never had a budget for this mosque it was built through prayer." But what about faith communities dealing with the many challenges facing our world? There is evidence that communities that are communities of prayer are also communities of hope. A Jewish participant noted that "though the Jewish population is decreasing in Canada and in the US, there are certain acts of kindness and acts of social change for positive steps, and these come because people have been inspired directly or indirectly by our prayers." A Wesleyan member said "we have not been broken up, torn apart and the doors shut because we believe that God wants us to be a worshipping community. Our community still exists because we believe that prayer is key to our relationship with God. "

One way or another faith communities are being shaped. Christian communities, are experiencing amalgamations. There will be church closures and reductions in ministry hours. The question is, what guides the decisions which those communities make about their future? The final destination of faith communities may not change. The forces and influences of our society mean that these faith communities may one day no longer exist. But faith is not about the destination, its about the journey there and what shapes that journey. The questions

we need to consider are such as these. Is it a journey where as a community we are in relationship with God? Is it a journey where others can see in our faith communities a common concern for each other. Is it a journey where we experience transformation? And is it a journey where we see and serve Christ in others in the world? As Christians we are an Easter people. This means that though our destination is death, our journey there in Christ is meant to be and can one of resurrection.

— *Salaam, Peace, Shalom* —

APPENDIX A - Decision Matrix

GS3000A - DAVID ATWOOD

ANALYSIS OF CATEGORIES

Key word	SC1	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	SC2	
A Call to prayer	9	X	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	17
B Shoulder to Shoulder	8	X	X	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	15
C relationship	8	X	X	X	C	C	C	G	C	C	C	C	L	M	N	C	P	C	C	C	11	
D memory	8	X	X	X	X	D	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	D	P	Q	R	S	2	
E presence	7	X	X	X	X	X	F	G	E	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	E	X	2	
F Physical	7	X	X	X	X	X	X	F	F	I	J	K	F	M	N	O	P	F	F	F	8	
G metanoia	7	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	G	G	G	K	L	M	G	O	P	Q	G	G	9	
H Jesus as example	7	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	H	2	
I hope	7	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	I	K	K	I	N	P	P	I	I	I	9	
J God Moments	7	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	J	L	M	N	O	P	J	J	J	8	
K Five times	7	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	K	M	K	O	P	K	K	K	11	
L Experience	7	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	M	L	O	P	L	L	L	10	
M culture of prayer	7	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	M	O	M	M	M	M	13	
N conversion	7	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	O	P	N	N	N	10	
O connection	7	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	O	O	O	O	O	13	
P community	7	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	P	P	P	14	
Q World Connection	6	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	R	Q	5	
R Safety	6	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	R	4	
S pray without ceasing	6	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1	

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APPENDIX B

Research Ethics Board Proposal

Name of Student Investigator: David Atwood

Title of Research Project:

Vitality in Communities of Faith: What's Prayer Got To Do With It?

Summary of Proposed Research

Faith communities are under pressure in an increasing secularized world. Where do such communities find a sense of identity and hope? And does it have anything to do with prayer? This study asks the following question. How does prayer shape people and contribute towards the vitality of their communities? The three Abrahamic faiths, Christianity, Islam and Judaism are included in the study's context. I will examine how prayer shapes a community and contributes towards its vitality. I will be using a grounded theory method (Creswell) to collect and analyze and report on the data. Note, when I use the term "vitality" I am not referring to "growth." Rather I am examining how engaged the community is with its life and worship.

Proposed Research Field

I will collect data from participants in the Abrahamic faiths, Christianity, Islam and Judaism. I intend to use three focus groups and some follow up interviews for the study to collect the data.

Principle Research Consultants

Rev Dr. Jody Clarke

Rev. Dr. David MacLachlan

Method

Grounded Theory develops a hypotheses by collecting, coding and analyzing data based on focus groups and/or interviews. In this instance a theory is being developed to explain how people in a faith community experience the phenomena of prayer. This particular method of ethnography results in a theory which is derived from the data and avoids any preconceived assumptions. The theory is thus grounded in the actions interactions and social processes of people¹⁸. Data collec-

¹⁸ Crewel 2007, 63

tion is also guided by “theoretical sampling.” The researcher collects, codes and analyses data and then decides on additional data to collect in order to develop theory “as it emerges¹⁹”. For this study the connection between prayer and its effects in a community is an unknown. Grounded theory for this study would document experiential insights gained about prayer from members of several faith communities. What particularly attracted me to this methodology was its focus on “substantive²⁰” theory vs formal or “grand” theory. Substantive theory derives its data from everyday situations. In the context of prayer, I believe it would provide a focus on “what works²¹” about prayer in faith communities. I feel it may also demonstrate how prayer shapes that community and contributes towards its vitality. I will transcribe and analyze the interview data and sort it into primary and secondary categories. These will be further analyzed to identify trends and causality. I may hold some further interviews by phone, to achieve greater data saturation. Once the data is analyzed and insights have gained, a hypothesis will be developed to define the relationships in the data and appropriate conclusions

Potential Benefits from Study

Faith communities experience increasing pressures today. Reduced membership, finances and resources erode a communities sense of identity. Prayer has been in decline in faith communities according to circumstantial evidence. But prayer also has helped these same communities face difficult times in the past. The findings of this study might prove useful to faith groups under stress. The study could provide a resource for use in workshops on prayer. It may result in a re-engagement with the practice of prayer and thus engender a greater sense of hope. I would also suggest that prayer is the source of outreach to the wider community. Because prayer changes the way which we view others, it also changes how we respond to the needs of others.

There is an ecumenical dimension to this study as well. Prayer is an important activity in Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities. Prayer is also an aspect of religious faith in which there can be helpful ecumenical dialogue. As Rowan Williams wrote, "to pray is to be in touch with our deepest nature and our truest destiny as human beings." People experience prayer as God's breath in humankind returning to its birth. (Williams 2011, x1)." So prayer is an experience which

¹⁹ Merriam 2009, 30

²⁰ Crewell 2007, 67

²¹ *ibid*

is true for each of the three Abrahamic faith communities. The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams convened a Islamic, Christian seminar in 2011 called “building bridges.” As Williams noted, “as communities we come back to the experience and challenge, when we meet, of seeing one another praying.” This study could be used to create a dialogue between the Abrahamic communities, because arguably it reflects a common human and religious experience.

Potential Risks from Study

Participants will be reflecting on personal experiences. This may carry some emotional import, but this is a minimal risk.

Process for Obtaining Informed Consent

I will request potential participants through a single contact in each faith community. For the Christian faith community I have been participating in an ongoing prayer group. This group is part of the Wesleyan Methodist Church and I have a good rapport with the Pastor. Note, I have not yet requested his or their help in any formal way. For the Jewish community I felt that Rabbi Ellis would be a good contact. I have spoken to him about the study in brief. For the Islamic community a fellow student provided me with the name of local Imam. His name is Mr Zia Khan from the Centre for Islamic Studies in Halifax. I have initiated contact, but am awaiting a reply. On securing participants, I will request that they sign an informed consent form. I will communicate that they are free to decide at that point or at any point to withdraw. At the first meeting before the focus group begins, I will share the background of my project. I will answer questions they might have and ask them to sign the consent form (see appendix C).

Process for Protecting Identity of Participants and Confidentiality of Data

On receiving a signed Informed Consent from research participants **by date**, I will:

- a) provide one copy for the participants
- b) keep one copy for myself which I will place in a envelope separate from all other materials. This will be kept in a locked file cabinet in (location).
- c) provide one copy for my supervisor Rev. Dr. Jody Clarke. The copy will be placed in a separate envelope and stored in a locked file cabinet in his office at AST.

d) I will:

- assign code names to each participant.
- record interviews and focus groups on my i-phone.
- Remove audio files following the final graduate project paper due date.
- Transcribe by text editor interviews and focus groups within two weeks of each event
- Keep files on my computer until after the Grad project presentations.
- Bring audio files to my supervisor to confirm deletion on March 20th 2017.
- Convert the text files of interviews to word and submit as paper copies to my supervisor.
- Remove all text and word files from my computer and "trash bin".
- Rev Dr J Clarke will store transcripts of interviews in a locked file cabinet in her office at AST for one year.
- AST will destroy paper materials of interviews will on March 25, 2017.

Appendix A: Proposed Interview Questions

1. How has prayer shaped your life?
2. What do you experience during prayer?
3. How did your commitment to the practice of prayer begin (individual question)
4. What sustains your practice of prayer?
5. How has prayer shaped your community?

Appendix B: Invitation to Participate

Study Project: Coming to Faith: The Student Experience

Description:

This project is being undertaken as part of a course required for the M.Div. program at Atlantic School of Theology by David Atwood. The purpose of the study is to ask the question, how does prayer shape people and contribute towards the vitality of their communities? The three Abra-

hamic faiths, Christianity, Islam and Judaism are included in the study's context. The researcher requests your assistance because you are a person who has a commitment and practice of prayer.

Participation:

Your participation in this project is at all times voluntary. If you do agree to participate, you can withdraw from participation at any time during the project without comment. Your participation will involve attendance in a small focus group probably with people you already know and the possibility of individual interviews to cover any follow up questions. The Focus group and interview (if needed) will be for forty-five minutes. Both will be conducted at a time and place convenient for you during December 2016 or January 2017.

Expected benefits:

In this study you will be able to reflect on your own experiences and insights on prayer. You will also hear the faith stories of others in your faith community. Sharing such knowledge with people is in itself a faith building opportunity. You may hear of prayer techniques from others that you might find useful in your own devotional life. We may also come to better understand how prayer shapes your faith community and how it influences its relationship and service to the wider world.

Risks:

There are no physical risks associated with your participation in this project. Since the subject of the interview may have emotional significance for you, it is important for you to know that questions will be open-ended and that you only need to speak as you are willing.

Confidentiality:

All comments and responses are anonymous and will be treated confidentially. Your consent is sought for the interviews to be audio-taped for later transcription. Your name will not be used in the interviews or any audio recording, transcription or published document. The audiotapes will be kept secure and destroyed one year after the project concludes.

Agreement:

We ask you to sign a written consent form (enclosed) to confirm your agreement to participate.

Questions / further information about the project

Please contact the researcher named above to have any questions answered or if you require further information about the project. If you have any concerns about the project you may contact the Faculty Advisor, Dr. Jody Clarke, as outlined on the agreement form.

Thank you for your time.

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APPENDIX C
GS3000A GRADUATE PROJECT
LITERATURE REVIEW
DAVID ATWOOD
27TH OCTOBER 2016

In this review I will outline some research gathered on prayer as it relates to faith communities. The purpose is to examine some published conclusions and insights on the subject. The information is intended to provide a basis for moving forward with the second part of the study. The focus groups and the interviews will thus supplement the information gathered from the researched materials. Together, it is anticipated the two sources will provide a deep multi-dimensional understanding of prayer. The focus groups in particular will explore the effectiveness of prayer within faith communities at a phenomenological level.

The literature I researched on prayer in communities is by no means comprehensive. Much of it addresses the impact of prayer on individuals and examines more tangentially how prayer impacts whole faith communities. But, I anticipate that a combination of this research material and the data gathered through focus groups will support the development of an appropriate grounded theory study for the objectives in this project. This review explores particular topics of study on prayer. It highlights writings and research that I feel will contribute and inform the remaining work of this project. With this in view, the following areas of interest were identified in the researched material..

- Definitions of prayer
- A concept of the “directionality” of prayer common to all faith traditions.
- The social context of prayer
- The issue of “resilience” vs efficacy of faith communities
- Factors that create a commitment to an ongoing prayer life.

Spilka and Ladd propose that prayer is a core part of all religious experience,” and that it exists in the “lived” moments of religious awareness”²². Lewis further states that through prayer “an enlivened awareness of God is induced and maintained”²³. So prayer is a central phenomena of all religious life²⁴, and a commitment and a practice that grounds religious experience, for all faith traditions.

Most of the literature I researched, describes prayer from the perspective of the individual. But Spilka & Ladd note that prayer is a social process grounded in relationship. Prayer is thus never engaged in “alone” in the strictest sense. It assumes the presence of a Being toward whom the prayer is directed. Prayer maintains a sense of connectivity with the self, others, and the

²² Spilka 2013, 13

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ Manongi 2014, 760

supra-physical.²⁵ So prayer is not genuine unless through it we are also connecting with others. HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism notes that prayer should also deepen one's sense of others and their needs²⁶. Hence an awareness of others developed through prayer can help to facilitate a more cohesive faith community. This would certainly be the case in a Christian context. When we pray we are already praying within a triune community of relationship. Our prayers of petition for others widens that community further. Prayer at its heart even when practiced as an individual is always social in context.

Ladd & Spilka highlight an interesting concept about prayer called "directionality"^{27 28}. "Directionality" sees prayer as "inward," "outward," and "upward." The "Directionality" of prayer conveys a sense of connectivity. The concept is derived from theological and psychological principles²⁹. Thus, inward-oriented prayers involve a search to better know one's self. Outward prayers unite the self with the experiences of others. Upward prayers focus on the relationship between the practitioner and the divine³⁰³¹.

There are obvious key differences in language and practice across all religious traditions. But arguably all prayer can be viewed and understood through this lens. So "directionality" can provide a helpful way of examining and understanding prayer across the three Abrahamic faith traditions. Recently I was fortunate to be able to observe prayer at the Islamic Development Center in Halifax. The existence of directionality in Islamic prayer was very clearly demonstrated to me through the prayer rituals I observed. Those gathered with the Imam all faced outwards towards the "mihrab", a niche placed in the direction of Mecca, The prayers were directed by the Imam through the words of the Koran to Allah. It emphasized this "upward" movement of communication with God. But also, every person participating stood shoulder to shoulder and prostrated in unison. Thus the (upward) movement of prayer to Allah, was at the same time an (outward) act of community. Then after the main prayers were finished, each person spent time individually in prayer. I noticed that now they faced different directions, as if to emphasize the inward personal

²⁵ Ladd & McIntosh, 2008

²⁶ Spilka 2013, 19

²⁷ Spilka 2013, 42

²⁸ Ladd 2008, 31

²⁹ Ladd 2008, 34

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ Spilka 2013, 42

and individual domain of prayer. I have not been able to observe prayer in a Synagogue. But I suspect the same elements in one form or another can be identified. And I'm sure they would be for Christian congregations as well.

We move now to the role of prayer specifically within a social context. Krause examines "religious coping" and church based³² social support. He notes the recent, growing interest in the relationship between religion and health. This has created new opportunities to study social relationships in the church. Studies show people of faith enjoy better health than those less involved in religion. People of faith also have a lower risk of depression than those who claim no such allegiance³³. This then is looking at the efficacy of faith from the perspective of the individual. But I would argue that this type of faith support also strengthens the community as an entity as well. Krause notes that secular as well as spiritual support is a factor in strengthening communities³⁴. Krause additionally notes the role of the pastor in providing spiritual support to those who are in need. There are thus three key factors to higher degrees of social cohesion in a faith community. Emotional and Spiritual support from the congregation and spiritual support from the pastor³⁵.

Krause quotes the work of Simmel (1905). Simmel was examining the role that faith plays in inter-personal relationships. He finds that all inter-personal relationships are in fact faith based relationships³⁶. Here, "faith" refers to trust or belief in the goodwill and intentions of others³⁷. But, Simmel also points out that this faith between people particularly comes to full bloom in religious settings³⁸. He examines these relationships among people in faith communities. He notes that relationships among people "offer deep analogies to the individual's relationship with God³⁹.

³² Krause 2001, 636

³³ Ladd 2008, 24

³⁴ Krause 2001, 638

³⁵ Krause 2001, 640

³⁶ Krause 2001, 639

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ Krause 2001, 638

³⁹ Krause 2001,639

Ladd and McIntosh also emphasize how faith communities provide cohesion and support. They note that faith based relationships give one a sense of being metaphysically bound with others⁴⁰.

Krause also quotes a study conducted by Wuthnow (1994). He reports on the social ties that arise in small bible study and prayer groups. These relationships encourage those facing a personal crisis to depend on their religious practices. Such groups are cohesive, efficacious and resilient in themselves. Wuthnow notes that a good deal of religion has to do with coping. He suggests that spiritual support and religious coping may be highly correlated⁴¹.

Krause concludes that religion is an inherently social phenomenon. People who worship together in groups and social relationships tend to thrive in church settings. Basic tenants of the Christian faith also support interpersonal relationships. These in turn encourage people to help each other. He points out though that we know little about the actual dynamics of interpersonal relations in faith communities⁴². This is an area which could be further explored through the focus group questions in the next part of this study. The experiential insights of those participating in focus groups should enable a better understanding of the dynamics of relationships in faith communities.

Ladd & McIntosh refer to prayer as a way of giving and receiving social support. But they also argue that prayer fits within a religious context, goals and theology. It raises an interesting question about the relationship between prayer, theology and resilient faith communities. Do people naturally pray together more when they share similar beliefs and theologies?

Ladd & McIntosh consider whether similar resilience and social support occurs in non-religious communities⁴³. And they point to the uniqueness of faith communities in this regard. Their argument is that unlike secular groups, faith communities provide a coherent framework for understanding life⁴⁴. They also point out the unique place of prayer in a faith community. Prayer metaphysically details the nature of relationship between the divine, the self and others⁴⁵. And people

⁴⁰ Ladd 2008, 24

⁴¹ Krause 2001, 639

⁴² Krause 2001, 652

⁴³ Ladd 2008, 27

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Ladd 2008, 28

who engage in prayer believe that it expands their social networks. These networks transition from tangible person-to-person connections to also include intangible relationships⁴⁶. Prayer enables a going beyond the “pleasant interpersonal exchanges”⁴⁷ and its practice increases the breadth of perceived social contact. It also increases the extent to which that contact conforms to expectations⁴⁸.

The title of this study is the "efficacy of prayer in faith communities." But what do we mean by efficacy?" There is a tendency to focus on the individual as noted in most of the available literature about prayer. Whereas this study is looking at the topic at a social level. Efficacy in the studied literature asks the following question. Does prayer change circumstances? Or does prayer allow a person to more successfully adapt to circumstances⁴⁹. Religion in general, and praying in particular, is often described as a “coping mechanism”⁵⁰. Pargament notes in difficult circumstances and in times of stress religious activity heightens⁵¹. The person praying brings themselves into line with environmental forces. Thus prayer gains secondary control⁵². It does not always aim to change the situation. Rather it brings about a psychological change in the person who prays. While this speaks to prayer in the individual, surely it must also apply to a community?

I was talking to some black church members from my former pastoral charge earlier this year. They told me what life was like in the 1960’s when the church practiced racial segregation.

Gathering together in prayer was what supported the black members of the congregation then. The church has long since established racial equality. But somehow along the way the congregation has lost that sense of resilience. It was evident by the decline in the practice of community prayer. These comments were part of the reason why I wanted to do my graduate project on the efficacy of prayer in faith communities. Faith communities which have experienced discrimination have demonstrated the power of prayer. Communities thus can use prayer as a cop-

⁴⁶ Ladd 2008, 31

⁴⁷ Ladd 2008, 32

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Chatters 1994, 1

⁵⁰ Janssen 2013, 32

⁵¹ Krause 2001, 638

⁵² Ladd 2008, 28

ing mechanism. This is particularly the case when they lack control over their immediate circumstances. Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) and other scholars have explored this area⁵³. They point out that Black religious expression developed within a hostile larger society⁵⁴. Thus prayer for African Americans aimed to abolish the discriminatory practices they were subject to⁵⁵. And prayer created resiliency and effectiveness within their faith community. It raises the question, though whether an effective faith community is also one which is under threat? Where it's members feel actively discriminated against.

We turn now to the inter-faith aspect of prayer, also a part of this study. There was little research material on interfaith conversations on prayer. But in 2011, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams convened a Christian/Islamic dialogue on prayer. The seminars included perspectives from each tradition about the other faith's prayer practices. The document included two helpful chapters on "learning to pray"⁵⁶ They were written from Christian and Islamic perspectives. It addresses the processes for teaching prayer to children. The information provided some insight for one of the focus group questions, "how does a commitment to prayer begin?" Often upbringing and childhood influences play a part. This is particularly the case for Islamic communities. In such cases children attend "madrassa's" where they have detailed instruction in prayer. This subsequently influences their commitment to prayer in adulthood. This is a new area of consideration. i.e. to what extent are vibrant faith communities influenced by those who have longstanding prayer practices. And to what extent does that practice begin in childhood? If we seek effective faith communities, how do we engage our children in prayer, and to what degree is prayer part of a child's home life?

In conclusion, the research gathered only partly addresses the efficacy of faith communities. But the documents have added some valuable insight to the questions raised by the study. Questions which until now were not under consideration. The concept of "directionality" of prayer is a helpful lens to use as the study progresses. It can help to identify commonalities regardless of the differences between prayer traditions. It can also provide a common frame of reference when speaking about prayer to each faith group.

⁵³ Chatters 1994, 1

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ Chatters 1994, 1

⁵⁶ Williams 2011, 123,135

A another key insight gained is the issue of “resilience” vs “efficacy.” It would be valuable to explore this question with the Jewish and Islamic faith groups. Both of these faith groups live as minorities. Both have experienced discrimination in the past. In fact, the Islamic community is experiencing this more recently. Anti-islamic political rhetoric in some quarters has increased the sense of discrimination and threat. It would be good to examine how this plays out in the prayer life of the community. How does it contribute to this faith communities resilience?

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APPENDIX D

Prayer: The Law of Belief or Worship?



GS3000A - Theological Essay

David Atwood

2nd Dec 2016

This essay examines the theology of prayer. It is part of a graduate project to address the efficacy of prayer for faith communities in the Abrahamic religions. A theology of prayer that covers Judaism, Islam and Christianity is a daunting task. Naturally there are areas of prayer across the three traditions which evidence some commonality. I described one of them in my literature review called the “directionality of prayer” where prayer in each tradition incorporates the experience of community, of the self and of God. But the directionality of prayer has more to do with structure and form than it does with theology.

As Christians when we look at the underlying “theology” of prayer we naturally encounter the issue of trinitarianism. Arguably prayer in a Christian context is inseparable from trinitarian belief, we place our faith in one God as three persons, one of which is fully human. But the divinity of Christ places a theological barrier between Christianity and other faiths. From the perspective of the Muslim or the Jew how can we all pray to the same God when the Christian God includes the human Jesus? As this project will be working across the three faith traditions it is important that this particular theological issue be carefully examined. Yet in an interfaith dialogue about prayer there needs to be a reduced emphasis on “theology” and “belief” in favor of an increased emphasis on “worship” and the “experience” of prayer. According to Rahner “theological truth is not primarily linked to a rational epistemology but rather to anthropology in which true knowledge is grounded in a faith response to God as mystery.”¹ This essay examines how through the development of prayer in the church the primacy of theology and doctrine

¹ OudtShoorn 2013, 296

over worship became problematic, particularly when the church was responding to Arianism. This is relevant today because it bears on the nature of prayer itself and potentially impacts inter-faith dialogue. It asks us to consider when we approach the issue of prayer whether emphasis should be placed on the “law of worship” or the “law of belief”².

Prayer is the one practice which is unique to humanity. James Henry notes, “if the odd creature of the sixth day can be classified: then we would be described as the praying animals³. “We are also that living thing whose being is essentially determined by the potentiality for discourse.”⁴ Thus as humans we are called into relationship with each other and into a relationship with God. Moltmann writes, “there is no such thing as solitary life, all living things live in one another and with one another, from one another and for one another”⁵.

We tend to think of prayer as an action or a practice that begins with us and is directed towards God. We assume it is a means of getting God’s attention so that God will respond to our particular needs or those of others. Prayer is often understood in this “transactional” sense, rather than taking place in the context of relationship. We see prayer as our reaching out to God rather than our response to God’s reaching out to

² LaCugna 1973, 135

³ Henry 2013, 342

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ Moltmann 1985, 17

us. But what is common to Jews, Christians and Muslims is the knowledge “that the human word is not the first or primal word. Rather, “an anterior word comes to us, from beyond us to which the religious phenomenon positing a communicative power is but a response” ⁶. I was recently discussing the topic of prayer with Imam, Zia Khan in Halifax. He emphasized “that we do not know God or understand God, but God knows us and speaks to us.” The inclination we have to pray is thus a human response back to God’s first and primal word to us. Prayer is Creation itself responding through humanity in gratitude to God ⁷. So when we make the effort to pray it is more helpful to remember that God is the initiator.

Lawrence Kushner in his book “Filling Words with Light” writes about the opening words of the “Amidah,” the central prayer of the Jewish liturgy. It begins with Psalm 51:17. “Adonai, open my lips that my mouth may declare your praise.” Kushner notes that including this verse in the Amidah, is unusual, because it challenges the tendency in the bible to identify God and humanity as two separate parties. In most Old testament texts God and people are described as separate, discrete, autonomous, and apart from one another⁸. So Kushner asks, If it is God who is opening our lips, who then is praising God, is it ourselves or is it God? ⁹ This speaks to the issue of dualism which has

⁶ Henry 2013, 240

⁷ Henry 2013, 342

⁸ Kushner 2011, 67

⁹ *ibid.*

become a part of Christian epistemology. T.F. Torrance notes as Christianity spread from the Middle East into the Greco Roman world there was an increased emphasis on the dualism of mind and body, between the visible and invisible, between God and Creation.¹⁰ Moltmann suggests that the Old Testament teaching of the separation between God and Creation was only intended to counteract against the pantheism of the Canaanite religions and Baal worship.¹¹ But as is often the case this emphasis later resulted in a reactive epistemology which emphasized a separation between God and Creation. While effective prayer cannot take place in the context of a pantheistic God neither can it exist where God is separate from the world. In rabbinic and kabbalistic theology there is the concept of the “Shekinah.” The Shekinah is the descent of God to human beings and his dwelling amongst them.¹² In the Shekinah God separates God from God’s self so that God can be with humanity. It implies an “interpenetration” between God and the world. As Kushner describes, “God is the ocean and we are the waves.”¹³ Or as Rabbi Shapiro Piassozo declares “Alts is Gott” “It is all God” “My mouth is Gods mouth, my praises are Gods praise.”¹⁴ The kabbalistic view is fascinating, it reveals a subtle connection between the Shekinah and Christian trinitarian thought. The idea of God and humanity as the ocean and waves suggests incarnation. Thus there is

¹⁰ Molnar 2009, 38

¹¹ Moltmann 1985, 13

¹² Moltmann 1985, 15

¹³ Kushner 2011, 68

¹⁴ *ibid.*

something fundamental between God and humanity that is shared. For Christians it is expressed through the consubstantiality between Jesus Christ and God the Father, and the ontological oneness between Jesus and humanity. For the Christian our mouth is Christ's mouth, and our praises are Christ's praises and therefore God's. The underlying theology of the Trinity is naturally problematic for Jewish and Islamic believers. But some of the prayers and doxologies of the early church liturgy may have been less so. As the theology of the Trinity developed after the Arian controversy prayer became more influenced by intellectual theological concerns focussed on the reaction against Arianism. In liturgy, "the one who unites us with God becomes infinitely distant from us taking his place at the right hand of the Father, not as exalted Lord but as pre-existent Christ"¹⁵. The early church used a formula where prayer was directed *to* the Father *through* the Son and *in* the Spirit. Christians believed and confessed in the divinity of Jesus, but this particular prayer highlighted Jesus' humanity. It emphasized his role as high priest offering up the prayers of the body of Christ to the God the Father. It is interesting that the formula "*through* the Son" implies a subordinate position for Jesus within the Trinity. But for the early Christians this never suggested an undermining of his divinity. But the Arians used it to support their own epistemological context of causality to argue against pro-Nicene thought. They used the proposition "*through*" to suggest that the Son comes after the Father.¹⁶ By causality, Jesus is thus subordinate and not of the same substance with God.

¹⁵ LaCugna 1973, 126

¹⁶ Moltmann 1985, 118

They proposed that the liturgical practice which avoided declaring Jesus equal to God should define the theology of the church. In reaction to this the pro-Nicene changed the liturgical forms and prayers so that they affirmed trinitarian doctrine. The doxology was gradually changed as the church reacted against continuing Arian theological pressure. There was an increased emphasis on Jesus equality with the Father and the concept of hierarchy was incorporated into the liturgy itself. Over time liturgical statements of praise changed from.

- to God through Christ.
- to The Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit.
- to the father through the Son in the Holy Spirit
- to the father and the Son together with the Holy Spirit
- to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.¹⁷

We see a gradual shift where the later doxologies elevate Christ, but also change the relationship between theological thought and prayer so that “the law of belief” came to dominate “the law of worship”¹⁸ There is also a change in emphasis around the person of Christ. In the primitive model Christ reaches up into heaven and mediates our worship to God. In the Post Nicene Anti-Arian period Christ reaches down from heaven and mediates Gods blessings to us.¹⁹ As LaCugna notes, “Human mediation has become a divine mediation.”²⁰ Clearly there is a theological reaction in the church’s liturgy. It is

¹⁷ LaCugna 1973, 127

¹⁸ LaCugna 1973, 127.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *ibid.*

similar to the Old Testament emphasis on the separation of God and Creation which was intended to counter pantheistic belief, but by doing so undermined an understanding of the interpenetration between God and the world. In response to Arianism, the church mounts a theological defense which causes it to modify its schema of prayer. Lacugna is arguing that in the process our relationship with God through the humanity of Christ is diminished.

Rabbi Kalonymus Qualmish Shapiro says that “Not only does God hear our prayers, God prays them through us as well”.²¹ This echoes a Christian primitive trinitarian model. Here the second person of the Trinity in his humanity offers up our prayers to God. Jesus is then both God’s word of Grace to humanity, but also humanity’s faithful response back to God. This means that our prayers should be grounded in an expression that reflects the relationship between Jesus in his *humanity* and God the Father. It calls for a return to the formula which follows the law of *worship* where we address the Father through Christ and in the Spirit. Rowan Williams in a sermon on prayer says when we pray we should pray as if it is not us praying but Jesus himself. He suggests “Talk to God as if you were Jesus, which the Holy Spirit enables.”²² Thus prayer to the Father through Christ emphasizes Christ's humanity and his priestly role. Rather than placing Christ “above” us it locates him “beside” us. It means that our prayer becomes his prayer. It means that without undermining our trinitarian theology, through the law of worship we are praying

²¹ Kushner 2011, 68

²² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PWEnK5qnGYo>

with Christ to the same God as our Jewish and Muslim brothers and sisters. Obviously the theological barriers are still there, as Christians we are still trinitarian in belief. But we have removed the defensive doctrinal language from prayer and returned to the doxologies used by the early church. We have returned to the “Law of Worship.”

A few years ago I organized an interfaith study of the stories of Genesis. I invited Christian, Islamic and Jewish participants and we used Bill Moyer’s Genesis study as the resource. It was a revealing and rich experience for me, and for the participants. One of the ground rules of the process was we agreed not to determine which interpretation of the Genesis story was the *correct* one. We avoided theological discussion and instead listened to the perspectives from each of the faith traditions and how those stories resonated with their context and their experience. This is the same principle that should be adopted in interfaith dialogue around prayer. It is through sharing our experiences of prayer, how prayer inspires and moves us to be God’s word in the world that we can grow into a deeper relationship with the Divine and with each other.

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APPENDIX E

DATA ANALYSIS

Coding Process

The following coding process was used to establish themes from the data in the transcripts.

1. Transcripts were divided into statements based on individual responses from participants.
2. Multiple Keywords were assigned to statements based on content.
3. Keywords prioritized based on perceived priority and how they resonated with the direction of the project. (See attached decision matrix.)
4. statements were retrieved by keyword and examined to provide further context to the identified themes.

The Call to Prayer

The idea that prayer is seen at the center of the community, not only within the community but the public face of that community. For example, one participant remembered as a child the sound of the Muezzin calling for the “adhan” (daily prayer). it was an early childhood memory which encouraged him later on to engage in a life of prayer. In the Wesleyan tradition the call to prayer is also a strong emphasis in the community. Sometimes the call to prayer comes from a strong family member. Or a father in the case of one of the Islamic participants or a grandmother and/or parents in the Wesleyan tradition. The call to prayer also takes place when people speak of their experiences of prayer and

their own “God moments.” The call to prayer is also a command to the community, its not something that you do when you feel like it. This is why prayer cannot be seen as an individual activity, it is a community call.

Shoulder to Shoulder - Community.

In the Islamic community people touch each other's shoulders when they pray. This physical action provides a strong sense of community and solidarity. In the Wesleyan tradition there was a similar idea though expressed in a different way. Each day someone posts the names of people who are being held in prayer. Others in the community "like" and comment on the post to show that they are praying “shoulder to shoulder” with that person. As Zephaniah writes “Then I will purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him shoulder to shoulder, Zeph 3:9. The passing of the peace in Christian worship may be seen as a similar exercise.

Connection and Relationship

The theme of connection and relationship with God was naturally one which emerged. This was particularly the case in the Islamic and the Wesleyan Methodist focus groups. In the Islamic group, both relationship and the discipline of prayer were important. but because one of the pillars of the Islamic faith is praying five times a day, the concept of discipline was particularly evident. In the Wesleyan tradition relationship was more particularly emphasized.

Culture of Prayer- "Pray Five Times Daily"

An emphasis on the culture of prayer was important in both the Islamic and Wesleyan tradition. I could see that the culture of prayer is central in the Wesleyan tradition. My observation is that there is a greater emphasis in the Wesleyan tradition than I have experienced in most UCC congregations. In the Islamic tradition, the requirement to pray five times daily is key to establishing a strong culture of prayer across the community. A strong "prayer culture" seemed less present in the Jewish tradition. But, I only interviewed one person, so this may be an invalid assumption. Prayer in the Jewish tradition is also viewed differently in some ways. (See categories "World Connection" and "Memory" below.)

Experience

One of the focus group questions was "what is your experience of prayer?" This generated a lot of discussion for both the Islamic and Wesleyan groups. People spoke of the experience of God's presence, feelings of peace and hope. But they also described feelings of frustration, anger or even abandonment. Participants emphasized the value they derived from sharing their experiences of prayer. They felt the focus groups had been positive because of the opportunity to share their experiences.

Hope

Hope was a category that came up particularly in the Wesleyan Group. What was interesting here is that the church has been undergoing some challenges. Yet in spite of this, they

felt that their commitment to prayer instilled a sense of hope for the future. One of the participants who seemed to speak for all who were there said that God allowed them to exist only as a praying and worshipping community.

Metanoia/Conversion

One of the questions I asked was "what instilled in you the desire for prayer?" In both Islamic and Wesleyan communities, there were several persons who had come to faith through a an experience of "metanoia and conversion." This was often arrived at through a personal crisis. Although many people had grown up in the faith, the role of conversion and metanoia played an important role for several in each focus group.

Physicality

In the Islamic tradition there was a special emphasis on the role and position of the body in prayer. How bowing, placing the forehead on the ground so that the head is physically lower than the heart can facilitate prayer etc. There was a particular emphasis in the Islamic tradition of the essential unity of body and mind in prayer.

God Moments

In the Wesleyan group we also talked of how people experience "God Moments." What Jung might describe as meaningful coincidences or "synchronicity." There was an emphasis on the importance of sharing these moments with others. One person noted in the Wesleyan group that evening, a strong sense of God's presence.

Memory

In the Jewish tradition, there is a particular emphasis on “memory” in the synagogue service. Prayer is an act of remembering what God had done for the people of Israel. Not to say that memory is not present in the Christian and Islamic traditions but it is very evident in the Jewish tradition.

World Connection

Prayer does not exist as a practice separate from the outside world. In the Jewish tradition there is a particular unity between the world and the life of the home and Synagogue. The Synagogue is not separate from the world. It is not “set apart” in the same way as we might sometimes think a church is. I was reminded of when attending Synagogue how people there held conversations with each other throughout the service. My interviewee quipped “Moshe goes to synagogue to talk to God, I go to Synagogue to talk to Moshe!” The idea of the connectedness of prayer in response to the affairs of the world was highlighted by those in the Islamic community. In the Wesleyan Group someone emphasized the book by Brother Lawrence “practicing the presence of God, an awareness of the presence of God all around us. In the Jewish tradition this consciousness of Gods presence was also important. "When Tevian walks down the road, and sees trees he thinks of the glory of God when the wheels of the cart turns he is in prayer."

APPENDIX F

CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Form

The Efficacy of Prayer in Faith Communities

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902-789-2524

I am a student enrolled at the Atlantic School of Theology. As a part of my course work under the supervision of Dr. Jody Clarke, I am conducting a research project about the efficacy of prayer in Faith Communities. For my study, I am conducting focus groups with faith communities in the Christian, Jewish and Islamic community. The purpose of the study is to ask the question, how does prayer shape people and contribute towards the vitality of their communities? Your participation in this project is very much appreciated.

I will take notes and audiotape the conversations in the focus group. The tapes and transcripts will be held in a secure environment until the completion of this course of study, at which time they will be destroyed. This project will be completed by the end of April, 2017. If you are willing to participate in this project, please read the following and indicate your willingness to be involved by signing your name at the bottom of this page:

I acknowledge that the research objectives, methods and procedures have been outlined to me. Any questions I may have had regarding the procedures have been answered to my satisfaction.

I know that I can contact the researcher at any time, should I have further questions.

I am aware that my participation in this study is purely voluntary and I am assured that personal records relating to this study will be kept confidential. I also understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time.

All information obtained in this study will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous. Audiotapes and field notes will be kept under lock and key until the conclusion of this project at the end of April, at which time they will be destroyed. Names and revealing facts will be changed, thus providing anonymity. To further protect individual identities, this consent form will be sealed in an envelope and stored separately. Furthermore, the results of the study will be presented as a group and no individual participants will be identified. If you have any questions, please contact the student researcher, David Atwood, at atwood.david@gmail.com . (902-789-2524)

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of Atlantic School of Theology.

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature: Date:

Please keep one copy of this form for your own records.