



Protestant Theological University

Praying / Pastoral Care / Spirituality

Pleizier, T.T.J. (Theo)

Published in:

International handbook of practical theology

DOI:

[10.1515/9783110618150-033](https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110618150-033)

Published: 01/09/2022

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Pleizier, T. T. J. (2022). Praying / Pastoral Care / Spirituality. In B. Weyel, W. Gräb, E. Lartey, & C. Wepener (Eds.), *International handbook of practical theology* (pp. 431-444). de Gruyter.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110618150-033>

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons). You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

This publication might have been made available through the PThU Research Portal under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the PThU website: <https://www.pthu.nl/over-ptthu/bibliotheek-ptthu/diensten/article-25fa-taverne-amendement-end-user-agreement.pdf>

Takedown policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright, please contact us providing details, and we will investigate your claim and remove access to the work if necessary: bibliotheek@pthu.nl.

Downloaded from the PThU Research Portal (Pure): <https://pure.pthu.nl>.

Theo Pleizier

Praying / Pastoral Care / Spirituality

1 Introduction

A Dutch newspaper reported that the sales of books on praying during the COVID-19 pandemic has increased compared to the previous year. Based upon a list of these bestsellers, the newspaper concludes that books on praying are hard to find and that our houses have started to become more like monasteries. The crisis of the pandemic has indeed sparked urgent questions for many: ‘what is the meaning of life?’ ‘what if I become ill?’ or ‘what happens when I die?’. Praying is a central feature of religion in general and of Christianity in particular (Meyer-Blanck 2019). This article is interested in exploring the following: When do people pray, what do people pray about, to whom do people pray and what do people do when they pray?

This practical-theological essay on praying departs from two paradoxical observations. First, there is something distinctly religious about praying yet praying is not an exclusively religious practice. Empirical studies in secular spirituality show a decrease in interest in prayer (Zuckerman, Shook, and Fuller 2017), but praying is not confined to those who affiliate with religion. Post-secular approaches view prayer as

The place into which I pour my despair and out of which I drag my often elusive, often reluctant hope; it is the space into which I spiral, as well as the connection that rescues me there; it is the transformative work in which I am compelled to engage [...]. The connection I find in this place is essential to my being, but what it is to/with/by which I connect, I am not able to say. (Vosper 2014, introduction)

Second, praying is not phenomenologically unique to Christianity. Yet it determines the Christian religion in all its aspects. Praying is a source for doing theology (Muis 2021), its history and practice are as rich as Christianity itself (Meyer-Blanck 2019) and as a practice of ‘addressing God’ Christian prayers articulate an understanding of a Triune God (Coakley 2013). Christian praying is thus a source for understanding the Christian religion though praying is not a unique practice to Christianity.

In this chapter I present a Protestant (Reformed) and Western-European (Dutch) perspective to Christian praying. The Reformed tradition is known for its ‘free prayers’; a spirituality that runs deep in post-Reformation European approaches to prayer. According to nineteenth-century thinkers like Friedrich Schleiermacher, William James, and Friedrich Heiler, praying expresses religious awareness and constitutes religious experience.

In contemporary Protestant religious cultures, however, praying is an ambiguous practice. On the one hand, it is connected to institutionalised and ecclesial Christianity, following the classic principle *lex orandi, lex credendi*. It expresses the nature of a specific religion and thus has an institutional aspect, ecclesial and denominational.

On the other hand, the praying subject is free to access God without mediation of the church. Praying is foremost a spiritual practice to be found everywhere rather than being bound to ecclesial practices.

Christians pray on many occasions. To explain this, John Calvin distinguishes between ‘personal prayer’ and ‘public prayer’ (Calvin Institutes III.20). These two types of praying continue to shape practical-theological research, both with respect to prayer in the personal context (Lunk 2014) and in the context of worship (Baschera, Berlis, and Kunz 2014). Within the Reformed tradition and following Calvin, a specific ‘third’ type of prayer emerged. This type of prayer is neither strictly personal nor mainly public but concerns a type of ‘pastoral praying’; pastoral, not in the setting of worship, but in the setting of care and counselling, for instance praying for the sick and the dying, even if one does not believe in God.

This ‘third’ type of prayer challenges the limited perspectives of this essay: Reformed theology and the secularised European culture. First, pastoral praying in times of illness and death gave rise to specific ‘scripted’ textbooks on prayer in the Reformed tradition. Next, praying in times of illness and death is an important topic for research and reflection in studies on palliative care, including interreligious care practices and secular or non-religious spiritual care. Further, pastoral prayer is a helpful case to reflect upon significant theological topics such as divine presence and religious performativity. These theological topics resonate with Reformed theology and the practical-theological study of praying, as we will see.

The structure for the essay is as follows. First the case of pastoral praying in times of illness and death is introduced. This will be done through sketching an empirical situation.

Next, the case is studied from three different perspectives. The contextual perspective presents pastoral praying in its historical origins (the Reformed context) and its contemporary realities (the secular West). A comparative analysis adds examples from other contemporary Christian traditions. Interdisciplinarity broadens the conversation by including sociology and psychology of religion, two natural conversation partners of practical theology.

Finally, we consider the practical-theological implications by applying three different concepts: performativity, religious language, and divine presence. The essay closes with a reflection on the contribution of practical theology to understand the major concept of ‘religion’ in view of the specific practice of praying.

2 A Case of Pastoral Praying

Pastoral praying is a central practice in pastoral ministry:

A parish minister visits a parishioner who has recently been diagnosed with a terminal illness. The pastor has a longstanding relationship with the parishioner; the parishioner’s family partly belongs to the church; some members of the family left the church while others joined another

denominational church. The parishioner's family has lived in the village for a few generations and at the moment the family is in doubt whether the ill father should be moved to a hospital in a nearby city or should spend his final weeks at home, supported by palliative aid. The minister is not used to praying at every pastoral occasion as some of her colleagues would do. She does not shy away from praying either and considers pastoral prayer as one of the ways in which pastoral care can transcend interhuman conversation. At this particular moment of visiting the ill person, however, it feels appropriate for the minister to ask the parishioner whether he wants to pray. After he expresses his desire to do so, she formulates an *extempore* prayer, picking up themes from the conversation such as the fear for the unknown territory of death, the sadness of the moment, contemplating the coming departure, and the dilemma of staying at home or moving to a health-care facility. The prayer contains hints of gratitude towards God, because of the medical aid and the loving family; yet the tone is mostly intercessory, a call for help from God, to be present during this final stage in the parishioner's earthly life and to provide spiritual support in preparing for death. The pastor does not pray for returning health let alone for physical healing. Yet her prayer reflects nonetheless faith in God's active involvement in this person's life that soon will end in death and move into a state beyond death. There is still much to be asked for, when it no longer feels theologically appropriate to pray for physical health.

In a first practical-theological analysis, this empirical incident of an all-too-familiar scene for many pastors contains *multiple* religious practices. Praying is only one practice among others, such as the practice of hospitality, of preparing for death, of being church, or as practicing lived religion.

First, pastoral care is a practice of hospitality. Based upon a trinitarian structure in the hospitality of God, Neil Pembroke describes pastoral care as a practice that creates a space in which another person feels at welcome in a dialectic of unbounded and bounded openness (Pembroke 2006).

Further, in times of death, pastoral care is part of a broader practice of preparing for death and practicing the art of dying well (*ars moriendi*); a religious practice that is shared among religions but obviously reflects different values, convictions and eschatologies (Choudry, Latif, and Warburton 2018).

Next, pastoral care interacts with devotional practices, both individual and communal. The pastor engages with the individual spirituality of the parishioner without losing sight of communal spirituality; the religious community that the pastor represents and to which the parishioner belongs. This makes pastoral care, particularly in the moment of praying, an *ecclesial practice*. It is a practice in which 'church', or the body of Christ is expressed, experienced, and practiced.

Finally, in pastoral praying, religious convictions, such as beliefs concerning God's active involvement in the world, are actualised. How God's presence in the praying moment is experienced depends upon various theological conceptualisations. These conceptualisations also shape the expectations of those who pray during praying. Does the praying subject(s) believe in God's ability to bring about change in the situation of the praying subject? In other words, praying is a practice of 'lived theology' or perhaps even better: 'lived religion'.

Hence, pastoral praying in times of illness and death is part of an integrated whole of religious practices. Practices such as hospitality, dying well, devotion,

being-church, and lived religion require a separate analysis and are expressed in many other ways than in prayer. The fact of the interrelatedness of religious practices demonstrates that the concept of practice in practical theology is a complex concept.

3 Contextual Aspects of Pastoral Praying

Personal prayer, according to John Calvin, is about making petitions and expressing gratitude towards God:

In asking and beseeching, we pour out our desires before God, seeking both those things which make for the extension of his glory and setting forth of his name, and those benefits which conduce to our own advantage. In giving thanks, we celebrate with due praise his benefits towards us, and credit to his generosity every good that comes to us. (Calvin, Institutes III, 20.28)

Calvin values private prayer higher than public prayer. He addresses the ‘dangers’ of public prayers as they run the risk of turning prayer into public religious display. Public and private prayer, however, remain intimately connected. The person who does not show an interest in worship and public prayer, demonstrates a lack of valuing private prayer and vice versa. Calvin’s exposition of private and public prayer follows the sections that contain his criticism of intercession by the saints and his insistence on the necessity of Christ praying for us. Calvin’s critique of human intercession runs deeply into Reformed devotional practice. Later Reformed theologians such as the seventeenth century Dutch Reformed theologian Gisbertus Voetius in his treatise on religious devotion (*Voetius Excerptia pietatis*, 1664, chapter 4) also stress the importance of personal prayer instead of relying on prayer by other human beings.

On the other hand, pastoral visitation is a typical Reformed invention in pastoral ministry. Especially in times of sickness and death. Pastoral prayer in times of death was an important topic in the guidance of pastors in the times of the Reformers. Beyond the almost exclusive practice of free personal praying, Calvin’s colleagues, like Heinrich Bullinger and Theodore Beza, instructed local pastors by providing them with prayerbooks and other liturgical forms to be used in pastoral practice. Beza’s prayer ‘On the visitation of the sick’ (*Household Prayers* 1603) contains a brief theology of suffering and a pastoral approach towards the sick. Not only do these prayers connect Protestantism with the Medieval church, but they also influenced later Presbyterianism greatly. R. Milton Winter closes his overview on praying in the Presbyterian tradition with the observation that “prayers for the sick have evolved from highly introspective and penitential exercises which attribute sickness and affliction to the chastisement of God to sensitive intercessions and sacramental orders which blend prayers for physical healing with concerns for sexual health, spiritual well-being and emotional wholeness.” (Winter 1986, 153) These historical and contextual examples influenced contemporary practices of pastoral praying in three ways.

First, the emphasis on private prayer in Western Christianity reoccurs strongly in Friedrich Schleiermacher's modern insistence on the free subject which seems to make pastoral care superfluous. Even for the sick and dying, Schleiermacher starts his reflections with a warning of superstition in view of the sacrament. The Reformed insistence of personal prayer is felt in the background. Beza's prayer for the sick was written to be used at home as pastoral guidance, but the praying subject is not necessarily the pastor (Manetsch 2013, 291–93). Modern pastoral care, starting with Schleiermacher, appears to be a true heir of Protestantism: pastors help parishioners to pray for themselves.

Second, contemporary pastoral care practices such as 'mutual pastoral care' move beyond the central role of the ordained minister and the professional pastor. It highlights the role of fellow parishioners in pastoral practice that includes praying for the sick (de Vries 2018). Between private and public prayer, praying is done in the personal sphere, but not just privately. Next to professional pastors, lay pastors and fellow believers engage in pastoral praying.

Thirdly, the secular Western context seems to challenge the practice of praying in times of illness. Yet in healthcare contexts, praying appears to be one of the practices that chaplains mention when they are asked how they shape *interreligious* spiritual care (Liefbroer and Berghuijs 2019). Interdisciplinary studies also show that prayer has positive effects on health in times of illness; that social workers engage in pastoral praying; and that there is a significant health effect of praying in relation to various mental and physical diseases (Hodge 2007). Hence, pastoral praying remains a lively practice, both in ecclesial and in secular contexts.

4 Comparative Perspectives

The COVID19-pandemic exemplifies how in Western-European societal discourse illness and death are dealt with both medically and politically. Religious practices, such as pastoral work, seemed irrelevant at best or problematic at worst. Generally, opportunities to pray for the ill and the dying depended on most situations on local decisions and hospital policies. This defines the first comparative perspective to pastoral praying in an ecclesial context: spiritual care in interreligious and multi-religious public contexts

Chaplains pray with patients, with detainees and with soldiers. Public praying, however, is a contested practice in an overly secular environment such as the army. Grace Kao demonstrates a skeptical attitude towards prayer in military command settings and points to the problem of "ceremonial deism" versus the need to "manage *which* religious or civil religious interpretation or even form [of prayer] ought to prevail" (Kao 2010, 601). In pluralist and multireligious contexts in health care, however, this is very different. In situations of palliative care, for instance, to pray with the terminally ill is one of the primary religious interventions for chaplains (Nolan 2011). In his study on spiritual care at the end of life, Steve Nolan reports how

chaplains comfort the dying by praying with them. Praying is embedded in a conversation about the ‘what’ and ‘who’ to pray for. For instance, in the case of ‘Phoebe’: the 86 years old woman who is dying asks the chaplain to pray for her ‘leaving the world.’ The prayer that the chaplain prays is simple, it contains scripted language, yet it is very personal and relates to Phoebe’s lived experience:

Loving God, Thank you for your love, and thank you for your love to Phoebe down through the years. I ask that you will be with her now as she is ready to come back to you. Give her peace and courage and hold her in your arms. Amen. (Nolan 2011, 75)

Spiritual care takes place in a context in which pastors and chaplains meet people from all walks of life, with or without religious affiliations. Research in healthcare situations, however, shows that praying for the (mentally) ill seems to be most beneficial when nurses and others who pray with patients do so from a similar religious background (Yoon et al. 2018).

The fact that illness and death has become ‘disenchanted’ and thus secularised in the Western world, also invites another comparative perspective to the scene. Without neglecting medical science, treatments and therapies, non-Western Pentecostal movements demonstrate another attitude to illness, health, and healing.

Pentecostal and charismatic spiritualities criticise a typical Western European divide of the personal and the public. Praying for personal healing is part of corporate worship, and pastoral praying is often done in a public environment, such as in a church building, among fellow believers and through mass media channels such as radio (Blanton 2015). Traditional Pentecostal praying practices entail a distinctive material aspect, such as prayer cloths or anointed handkerchiefs. Blanton describes the interactions between the anointing of pieces of cloth, prayers of the congregation and the materiality of the Holy Spirit as pieces of fabric become a tangible presence of God’s healing power. Being prayed for, is more than an individual, spiritual experience. It involves the community of faith through the ‘exchange of hands’, when the anointed pieces of cloth are shared among the believers: “through the palpation of the cloth’s texture, its physical properties signal both a tactile immediacy for the handler and a simultaneous awareness that other hands have also experienced this textured surface of prayer.” (Blanton 2015, 59) In his theological analysis of practices of healing within Pentecostalism, Mark Cartledge stresses a soteriological motif, namely that “healing is in the atonement.” Physical healing is an aspect of “freedom from any burden in life that brings ‘dis-ease’ with oneself, one’s neighbor, and God.” (Cartledge 2015) In the comparative perspective of Pentecostal and Charismatic spiritualities, the material aspect evokes the nature of ‘reality’ in pastoral prayer. There is something going on between God and our lives, and the material aspect makes this tangible and therefore empirically real.

5 Interdisciplinary Views

Both comparative perspectives illustrate how practical-theological analysis interacts with psychological and sociological views. It clarifies the empirical orientation of practical-theology: the study of human phenomena in relation to the divine.

Religious practices display an intricate interaction between interhuman communicative processes and a divine-human dynamics (Pleizier 2010). The social and the religious are not separated. This means that theology does not simply provide another interpretative perspective of a certain phenomenon. Theology particularly looks for a dynamic between humans and God *within* social and psychological communication processes between humans. Hence, pastoral praying is as much an anthropological as a religious practice. The anthropological analysis aims to reconstruct the social and psychological aspects, while practical theology provides a reconstruction of these aspects by asking how it exemplifies and transforms the many possible dynamics, relationships, energies and interactions between God and humans. Hence, theological concepts are needed to study religious practices and dynamics (Immink 2014). Despite the fact that ontologically the order might be different, epistemologically and thus methodologically the analysis of divine-human dynamics follows the social and psychological descriptions. Though psychology and sociology of praying represent different domains of study, practical-theologians need to reflect on the anthropological in which religious practices are empirically situated.

The comparative perspective raises both psychological and sociological issues. For psychologists, praying is a coping-strategy. Praying in times of illness and death triggers many studies of the beneficial effects of praying for human health and coping mechanisms. A recent study in mental healthcare affirms the positive effects of praying (van Nieuw Amerongen-Meeuse et al. 2020). Further, psychologists developed a model that explains praying as a psychological mechanism for inward, outward, and upward connections (Ladd and Spilka 2006). Inward praying is about examination of the self; outward praying concerns interhuman connections; upward praying centers on the divine-human relationship. The model relates attitudes towards death and mechanisms of coping to the extent that prayers are a means of spiritual connectivity, “a form of teamwork and not instances of self-centred solitude” (Ladd and Spilka 2006, 245). The psychological study of praying, however, primarily focusses upon the health-related effects of personal praying and praying for others (intercessory prayer), rather than on practices of praying that involve spiritual care givers, such as pastors and chaplains, which confines the study of praying to personal devotion (Spilka and Ladd 2012).

Sociologists broaden the scientific approach of praying. A study of Pentecostal-charismatic prayer (‘soaking prayer’) shows that in a kind of non-verbal prayer that is mostly meditative, groups of people open their hearts and minds to God’s love, they ask each other what they think God is telling them. There appears to be a clear relationship between participating in soaking prayer and social engagement. Research

demonstrates significant correlations between high frequencies of prayer, and social engagement as well as a strong sense of compassion and altruism (Wilkinson and Althouse 2013). In comparing several sociological studies on prayer, Linda Woodhead comments that while “prayer varies enormously according to social group and level of religious formation and commitment”, topics such as illness / health and death / bereavement are surprisingly on the top of the list of prayer requests in cathedrals. Perhaps this is due to the fact that cathedrals represent the liminal space between time and eternity “in which the boundary between life and death is thin?” Woodhead wonders (Woodhead and Giordan 2015, 216). In her analysis she stresses the variety of prayer from a sociological perspective: variations in content, varied addressees, emotions, embodiments and uses. Finally, she identifies three common aspects: from formalised to less scripted prayer; less a bodily routine than a personally-meaningful experience; and praying as ‘accessing God,’ God is a very real presence while this does not imply that accessibility rules out transcendence (Woodhead and Giordan 2015, 221–224).

In sum, anthropological research shows that praying is a complex psychological and social phenomenon. It is in need of theological analysis, as Giordan and Woodhead imply when they write that praying “takes place within the relational dynamics between Higher Power and the subject who begs. It is within this relationship that the elements that make praying effective emerge, beyond the material realization of what is begged for.” (Giordan and Woodhead 2013, 3)

6 Practical Theological Analysis: Performativity, Religious Language and Divine Presence

Practical theology develops theological theories of religious practices. The specific contribution of practical theology consists in its articulation of non-reductive, theological and situated accounts of religious practices such as pastoral praying. It is *non-reductive* in relation to psychological theories of coping, in other words: pastoral praying is not sufficiently explained with the help of the psychological concept of coping. It is *theological* in articulating the divine-human dynamics in praying and thus applying theological concepts to understanding the phenomenon of pastoral praying. And lastly, it is *situated* with respect to the fact that practices are always located in time, place, tradition and with concrete actors that act within the permeable boundaries and cultures of specific religious communities and cultures. A practical theological approach thus needs its own scientific openness towards the phenomenon being studied, while acknowledging the validity and value of knowledge that is produced in comparative, historical and anthropological studies.

In the case of praying in situations of illness or in times of death, a practical-theological account for instance entails the simple open question: ‘what happens

when we pray?' This question has three aspects: *performativity*, *religious language*, and the theme of '*God's presence*'.

Religious performativity is a central concept in contemporary practical-theological discourse to understand the nature of religious practices (Schirr 2018; Immink 2014). It conveys the idea that the religious effect of a practice is inherent in the practice itself: religion happens in doing. Praying with a parishioner in the final stage of life, for instance, evokes rest for the soul, trust in God, hope for the unknown things to come. These are all inner 'effects' of praying, generated *in* the act of prayer.

Performativity connects embodiment, aesthetics, community, and intentionality. In concrete bodily actions (embodiment), people direct their minds towards something or someone (intentionality), using linguistic or other artistic devices (aesthetics) and in doing so, they shape relationships (community). Or as Gerrit Immink puts it: "language, gestures and rituals do not only serve to describe or to convey information, but also to set things in motion. In this vein practices bring-into-practice their intrinsic goods and values. What they aim for happens in the enactment." (Immink 2014, 131) The notion of performativity focusses the practical theological analysis less on that what is external to the practice, such as societal transformations or political effects, but calls for an analysis of the practice as such. The idea of 'performativity' locates the effect in the actual practice; a notion that was already hinted upon in sociological studies of prayer (Woodhead and Giordan 2015).

The internal effect of praying is also implied in psychological theories that approach prayer in terms of coping strategies. Indeed, prayer may help severely ill patients to cope with medically unchangeable conditions. Religious performativity, however, includes other notions of understanding the inner 'effects' of praying, such as 'community' and 'intentionality.' In pastoral praying, the one who is prayed for experiences a strengthened relationship with the pastor who prays and the religious community that the pastor represents: pastoral prayer constitutes and shapes an instant religious community. Further, in praying, the minds of the those who pray are directed towards God, the One who is addressed in prayer (Immink 2014).

Next, two other questions help to unfold its conceptual potential for a deeper theological analysis of praying: 'how do we pray?' (The language and embodiment of praying) and 'to whom do we pray?' (The religious addressee in praying). This opens up two other areas of praying: *religious language* and *divine presence*.

Praying is naturally associated with the use of (religious) language. Obviously, praying is broader; it takes place in silence, and the practice of praying is an embodied practice, which is particularly exemplified in various types of 'bodily praying' such as Christian Yoga, the contemplative Jesus-prayer, or meditations of the cross (Koll 2007). Praying, however, may be considered to be the most appropriate example of religious language: language addressed to the divine takes us to the heart of religion. Yet this has many empirical forms: words, phrases, shorter and longer texts, responses that include multiple praying subjects, corporate prayers prayed with a larger group, received 'texts', or scripts that create fixed praying patterns – predominantly in corporate worship services, or free expressions of the praying subject, ex

tempore formulated. Among these linguistic aspects, the difference between ‘scripted prayers’ and ‘free prayers’ is particularly significant in the case of pastoral praying.

Reformed tradition with its emphasis on ‘free’ prayer as guided by the Spirit in the moment, is particularly charged with a critique of scripted praying. Yet reality is more complex. Theodore Beza compiled a selection of prayers. These ‘scripted prayers’ include a prayer on the visitation of the sick; a prayer that according to Scott Manetsch in his study on Reformed pastoral ministry, reflects the Reformed view on human suffering, divine providence and pastoral consolation:

Since it has pleased you, O just and merciful Father, to visit this poor sick person with your rod, afflicting him for his offenses, as he himself has confessed, we beseech you that... he may with quiet obedience bear your visitation, submitting himself willingly with all his heart to your holy will. May he trust that you strike him, not as a severe judge, but as a most merciful Father, whereby he may learn to rest his whole trust and assurance in your love, you who are the Author of his life. (quoted in Manetsch 2013, 292)

Scripted prayer clearly has two aspects. First, the language conveys a shared spiritual identity. “[M]erciful Father”, “God’s holy will”, “trust and assurance in God’s love”, these references to God do not emerge from pious minds of individual praying subjects. The fact that they are part of a script entails that they resonate with a confessional identity; in praying this script the praying minds become directed to the reality that is expressed: God’s mercy, God’s faithfulness, or God’s power. The script exemplifies how God is addressed in prayer. The identity expressed in Beza’s prayer entails a Trinitarian theology, as it addresses God as Father and Creator (Author of life), taking its starting point in the traditional Christian threefold structure of addressing God as Father, Son and Spirit. Scripted prayer also explicates an ecclesial aspect of praying: the religious community (‘church’) not only expresses its faith, but in praying the prayer of the church the praying subjects actually ‘are’ church. The script of the prayer thus entertains the relation between the praying subjects. Scripted prayer communicates confessional identity, it defines praying subjects as belonging to the same religious community and it demonstrates various modes of ecclesial praying.

Pastoral prayers are often a mixture of situated personal references with scripted elements. Margriet van der Kooi-Dijkstra, a Dutch protestant health-care chaplain reports a prayer during a small-scale pastoral meeting for the anointing of Anne¹ who is terminally ill:

God, very much has been good, and there is an abundance of love in this house; not just this afternoon; so it was in Anne’s life. And we also know that you are short of us, and we are short of each other. We love, but not like you, and often not at all. We are indifferent and slow at all times when it counts. You are a God who knows just that: after all, you made us yourself. Forgive whatever gets in the way in view of each other and you. (van der Kooi-Dijkstra and van der Kooi 2017, 129)

¹ Anne is the name of the sick woman in the reported case.

Likewise, another pastor in the hospice who prays with ‘Joe’ in the face of death stresses God’s love and God’s presence in all circumstances and for all involved:

God, thank you for being with us right now. We confess that we don’t understand why things happen the way they do. We don’t understand why illness comes into our lives, but we do know that you walk every path of life with us. Remind Joe that you are walking with him right now. Remind Joe that you love him, no matter what he is going through. I also pray for Joe’s family. Give them your strength as they care for Joe. God, we thank you that you never leave us, that you never forsake us, but you love us. We trust you and pray this in your name. Amen.²

These two examples demonstrate how praying constitutes a dialogue; between humans, the sick person and the pastor who offers a prayer, and between humans and God. This dialogue is also a dialogue that involves spiritualities. The pastor who prays with Joe in the hospice stresses divine acceptance and God’s love. The language is more generally religious. The pastor who prays with Anne touches more explicitly upon Christian understandings of God: The One who knows, the Creator who made us as bearers of God’s image, and the One we need to rely upon for forgiveness. In praying, the presence of God is evoked, a loving presence, a forgiving presence, and a presence of the One who knows our frailty and our faults, and who can be trusted not to leave us.

The two aspects of performativity, religious language, and the presence of God, point to a specific internal effect of praying. Religious practices such as praying also have external effects: they motivate people to act in a certain way, the “politics of prayer” (Cocksworth 2018). Another type of consequences is of crucial theological importance, namely the issue of divine action. Especially in times of illness questions emerge like does God change our world after prayer, or does God bring about physical or mental health? These aspects can only be assessed within religious traditions. Interreligious conversations need to take into account the various answers given by various culturally embedded types of Christianity or by different religious traditions.

7 Praying, Practical Theology and the Study of Religion

There are two ways to look at religion, according to philosopher Merold Westphal: religion as means and as end. “The believing soul”, he writes, “resists the reduction of the religious life to utility, expediency, and the instrumental” and this does not apply to Christianity only. To illustrate religion as an end in itself, Westphal gives

² <https://www.crossroadshospice.com/hospice-palliative-care-blog/2017/may/04/prayers-for-the-dying-a-prayer-for-hospice-patients/> (30.11.2021).

the example of songs. Songs of praise, like many Psalms, should be seen as gifts to God. We praise God, because it is appropriate to do so (Westphal 1984, 129). If there is one practice, however, that seems to fit the approach of religion as a means for something else, one might think of praying. On the one hand, petitionary prayer, the form of prayer in which the believer approaches God with a request, intends to improve the situation of the believer. Praying functions as a means of improving life and of coping with difficulties or of achieving salvation. On the other hand, however, Westphal argues, praying counts foremost as an example of “useless self-transcendence.” Praying has an intrinsic value and is a prime example of a religious practice that directs “the self’s attention away from itself” (Westphal 1984, 138–139). Thus construed, in praying, the relationship between God and humans is at stake; a relationship that is an end in itself and thus “useless”. It refers beyond the praying subject and becomes a “self-transcending” phenomenon. In this vein, praying defines the nature of religion.

The practical theological study of religion challenges the engagement of the researcher. Empirical methods such as theological action research clarify this engagement for the sake of research and this methodological branch particularly brings into focus how a practical theological study of praying blurs a neat distinction between religion and theology. The study of praying thus contributes to the much-needed integrity of prayer and theology after theology’s disintegration in modernity, with its different motifs and aspects as analysed by Sarah Coakley, Rowan Williams, and John Webster among many others (Cocksworth 2018). When practical theologians start studying praying, as Butler persuasively argues, the utmost consequence is that practical theological methodology “has the potential to be prayer” (Butler 2020), a position that ultimately redefines the nature of practical theology as the theological analysis of religious practices as instances of ‘doxology,’ practices aimed to glorify God.

Bibliography

- Baschera, Luca, Angela Berlis, and Ralph Kunz. 2014. *Gemeinsames Gebet: Form und Wirkung des Gottesdienstes*. Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich.
- Blanton, Anderson. 2015. *Hittin’ the Prayer Bones: Materiality of Spirit in the Pentecostal South*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Butler, James E. 2020. “Prayer as Research Practice? What Corporate Practices of Prayer Disclose about Theological Action Research.” *Ecclesial Practices* 7:241–257.
- Calvin, John. 1960. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, edited by John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles. Louisville: Westminster Press.
- Cartledge, Mark J. 2015. *The Mediation of the Spirit: Interventions in Practical Theology*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Choudry, Mohsin, Aishah Latif, and Katharine G. Warburton. 2018. “An Overview of the Spiritual Importances of End-of-Life Care Among the Five Major Faiths of the United Kingdom.” *Clinical Medicine* 18:23–31.

- Coakley, Sarah. 2013. *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cocksworth, Ashley. 2018. *Prayer: A Guide for the Perplexed*. New York: T&T Clark.
- Giordan, Giuseppe, and Linda Woodhead. 2013. "Introduction: Prayer in Religion and Spirituality." In *Prayer in Religion and Spirituality*. Vol. 4, *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion*, edited by Giuseppe Giordan and Linda Woodhead, Leiden: Brill, 1–8.
- Hodge, David R. 2007. "A Systematic Review of the Empirical Literature on Intercessory Prayer." *Research on Social Work Practice* 17:174–187.
- Immink, Gerrit. 2014. "Theological Analysis of Religious Practices." *International Journal of Practical Theology* 18:127–138.
- Kao, Grace Y. 2010. "Mission Impossible: 'Nonsectarian' Prayer in the Military Chaplaincy." *Political Theology* 11:577–606.
- Koll, Julia. 2007. *Körper beten: religiöse Praxis und Körpererleben*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag.
- Ladd, Kevin L., and Bernard Spilka. 2006. "Inward, Outward, Upward Prayer: Scale Reliability and Validation." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 45:233–251.
- Liefbroer, Anke I., and Joantine Berghuis. 2019. "Spiritual Care for Everyone? An Analysis of Personal and Organizational Differences in Perceptions of Religious Diversity Among Spiritual Caregivers." *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy* 25:110–129.
- Lunk, Johanna. 2014. *Das persönliche Gebet: Ergebnisse einer empirischen Studie im Vergleich mit praktisch-theologischen Gebetsauffassungen*. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt.
- Manetsch, Scott M. 2013. *Calvin's Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Church, 1536–1609*. Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press.
- Meyer-Blanck, Michael. 2019. *Das Gebet*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Muis, Jan. 2021. *The Implicit Theology of the Lord's Prayer: A Biblical and Theological Investigation*. Lanham: Fortress Academic.
- Kooi-Dijkstra, Margriet van der, and Kees van der Kooi. 2017. *Goed gereedschap is het halve werk. De urgentie van theologie in pastoraat en zielzorg [Good Tools are Half the Battle. The Urgency of Theology in Pastoral Care]*. Utrecht: Boekencentrum.
- Nieuw Amerongen-Meeuse, Joke C. van, Arjan W. Braam, Christa Anbeek, and Hanneke Schaap-Jonker. 2020. "'Beyond Boundaries or Best Practice' Prayer in Clinical Mental Health Care: Opinions of Professionals and Patients." *Religions* 11:492.
- Nolan, Steve. 2011. *Spiritual Care at the End of Life: The Chaplain As a 'Hopeful Presence'*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Pembroke, Neil. 2006. *Renewing Pastoral Practice: Trinitarian Perspectives on Pastoral Care and Counselling*. Aldershot / Burlington: Ashgate Publishing.
- Pleizier, Theo. 2010. *Religious Involvement in Hearing Sermons: A Grounded Theory Study in Empirical Theology and Homiletics*. Delft: Eburon Academic Publishers.
- Schirr, Bertram J. 2018. *Fürbitten als religiöse Performance: Eine ethnographisch-theologische Untersuchung in drei kontrastierenden Berliner Gottesdienstkulturen*. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt.
- Spilka, Bernard, and Kevin L. Ladd. 2012. *The Psychology of Prayer: A Scientific Approach*. New York: Guilford Publications.
- Voetius, Gisbert. 1996. *De praktijk der godzaligheid [The Practice of Piety]. Ta Asketika sive Exercitia pietatis (1644)*, edited by C.A. de Niet, Utrecht: De Banier.
- Vosper, Gretta. 2014. *Amen: What Prayer Can Mean in a World Beyond Belief*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Vries, Reijer J. de. 2018. "Models of Mutual Pastoral Care in the Footsteps of Martin Luther." *NTT Journal for Theology and the Study of Religion* 72:41–56.
- Westphal, Merold. 1984. *God, Guilt, and Death: An Existential Phenomenology of Religion*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

- Wilkinson, Michael, and Peter Althouse. 2013. "Pentecostal-Charismatic Prayer and Social Engagement." In *Prayer in Religion and Spirituality*. Vol. 4, *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion*, edited by Giuseppe Giordan and Linda Woodhead, Leiden: Brill, 221–241.
- Winter, R. Milton. 1986. "Presbyterians and Prayers for the Sick: Changing Patterns of Pastoral Ministry." *American Presbyterians* 64:141–155.
- Woodhead, Linda, and Giuseppe Giordan. 2015. *A Sociology of Prayer*. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing.
- Yoon, Seok Joon, Sang-Yeon Suh, Sun Hyun Kim, Jeanno Park, Yu Jung Kim, Beodeul Kang, Youngmin Park, Jung Hye Kwon, Kwonoh Park, Dong Wook Shin, Hyeon Jeong Kim, Hong-Yup Ahn, and David Hui. 2018. "Spiritual Well-Being among Palliative Care Patients with Different Religious Affiliations: A Multicenter Korean Study." *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management* 56:893–901.
- Zuckerman, Phil, John R. Shook, and Robert C. Fuller, eds. 2017. *Secular Spirituality*. Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press.