

# PRAYER AS A LIVED RELATIONSHIP

## A Psychological Study

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Questions about the contents and the various dimensions of a relationship lived with God in prayer can be asked and indeed they ought to be asked, even from the psychological point of view. How, indeed, is prayer structured? Does prayer vary from one sex to the other? Or from one culture to another?

Questions such as these shaped my investigation into the phenomenon of prayer.<sup>1</sup> My empirical project had a two-fold objective. The first was the development of a research instrument to be used in such an investigation.<sup>2</sup> The second was an application of this tool to religious experience and the phenomenon of prayer.

The first objective was necessary because the science of the psychology of religion has been notably lacking in studies on prayer. The few studies that do exist have, for the most part, been merely descriptive and they have been relatively deficient in the use of scientific methodology. These few studies have tended to concentrate on children and adolescents.

Raymond Kuhlen has, however, stressed the importance of various factors in the religious life of adults. He has underscored the need to describe and define religion with greater clarity.<sup>3</sup> Kuhlen cited the importance of data in the description and specific identification of the religious nature of adults, and suggested factor analysis as a means of investigation of the data. My own study has made use of factor analysis in the hope that, not only would it contribute to the development of scientific methodology in the psychology of religion, but also that it would contribute to a deeper understanding of prayer, the core of religion.

1. Fuller details are contained in my doctoral dissertation, *Prayer as a Lived Relationship: A Psychological Study* (Louvain 1986).

2. *The Religious Experience and Expression in Prayer Scale (REEPS)* is the name which I have given to the instrument.

3. See Raymond G. Kuhlen, "Trends in Religious Behaviour During the Adult Years," in Lawrence C. Little, ed., *Wider Horizons in Christian Adult Education* (University of Pittsburgh Press; Pittsburgh, PA 1962) 15-62.

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### A Point of Departure

As we begin with some basic operational aspects of the study, religion can be considered to be a felt practical relationship with what is believed to be superhuman being(s).<sup>4</sup> It has its roots in a life that is experientially lived. Antoon Vergote has correctly emphasized that the origin of religion is in the experience and existence of life.<sup>5</sup> He has stressed that that experience is dynamic and vital. As such, it exists in sharp contrast to inanimate objects and static artifacts. Thus, a very important first characteristic of religion is that it is a vital and very real fact of human life, as it is actually lived.

Another quality of religion is that it encompasses the whole person in his or her relationship with God. Religion and its various expressions are a response of the total human personality, with its individual and collective dimensions. Religion is a comprehensive experience and expression of life itself. One's relationship with God, represented and experienced affectively, is expressed through, and depends on, concrete symbols.<sup>6</sup> The all-pervasive nature of religion is bonded together in a dynamic unity of various elements. This unity consists of language, feelings, behaviour, and signs which refer to a supernatural being(s).

Accordingly, religion appears to be a specific cultural phenomenon. As a cultural phenomenon, religion has its nuances and its culturally-pertinent aspects. Moreover, religion comprises a symbolic system expressed in individual life and social institutions. Religion, then, is a complex and dynamic human reality with language, belief, feelings, symbols, and praxis.<sup>7</sup>

### Prayer

And what is prayer? "Prayer," according to the typical dictionary, is an address (as a petition) to God in word or set of words and thought; an earnest request; an act or practice of praying to God; or a religious service consisting chiefly of prayers. "To pray," as a transitive verb, means to entreat or implore, to get or bring about by praying; while the intransitive verb means to address God or a god with adoration, confession, supplication, or thanksgiving. Etymologically, the English terms derive from the Latin *precare* (to supplicate), a word which suggests the attitude of the

4. See R. H. Thouless, *An Introduction to the Psychology of Religion* (University Press; Cambridge 1971) 11.

5. See *Religie, geloof en ongeloof: psychologische Studie* (Nederlandsche Boekhandel; Antwerp 1984) 30.

6. See Vergote, *Religie*, 52-53.

7. See Vergote, *Religie*, 15-16.

human person who is aware of his or her own frailty before the Almighty.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, "Prayer expresses the consciousness that man has in speaking to his God of his precarious condition. The significant intention which animates prayer is the consciousness of a lack, even if one does not know what is lacking and prays only in order to know."<sup>9</sup> The fisherman's prayer is indeed apropos: "O God, thy sea is so great and my boat is so small."

### Communication

Prayer is a mode of communication, an encounter with the divine.<sup>10</sup> It is, as Vergote states, the activity by which a human being enters into communication with a supernatural being.<sup>11</sup> Communication includes an exchange of sentiments, ideas, and the like. It is truly interaction. Thus prayer is a dialogue,<sup>12</sup> conversation par excellence,<sup>13</sup> a conversation with Christ.<sup>14</sup> *Magna ars est conversari cum Deo*, said Thomas a Kempis. The root meaning of *conversatio* is keeping company with. Thus prayer is not merely a simple conversation; it is an intoxicating dialogue that unfolds through filial conversation and concentrated silence with God.<sup>15</sup> The essential pattern of prayer is that of a conversation between a human person and God, a conversation which arises from a bilateral and beneficial relationship rooted in God's graciousness and an individual's trust.<sup>16</sup>

### Experience and Expression of the Whole Person

Prayer explicitly involves the total human personality; it engages the whole being.<sup>17</sup> All human experiences are expressed in prayer, Vergote says.<sup>18</sup> For Vergote, prayer is an act which expresses the total human person. Prayer relates everything to God: one's desires, religious experiences, doubts, conflicts of faith,... etc.

8. See Y. Raquin, *How To Pray Today* (Abbey; St. Meinrad, IN 1973) 5.

9. Vergote, *Religie*, 259.

10. See Anthony Bloom, *School for Prayer* (Darton, Longman and Todd; London 1972) 63.

11. *Religie*, 256.

12. See D. Saliers, "Prayer and Emotion: Shaping and Expressing Christian Life," in John Gallen, ed., *Christians at Prayer* (University Press; Notre Dame, IN 1977) 46.

13. See P. Penning de Vries, "Experience of the Living God: The Core of Prayer," *Review for Religions* 37 (1978) 237-246.

14. See P. Rohrbach, *Conversation with Christ: An Introduction to Mental Prayer* (Dimension; Denville, NJ 3 1965).

15. See Paul VI, in *The Teachings of Pope Paul VI*, 3 (Vatican City 1971) 145.

16. Paul VI, 1976.

17. See Edgar N. Jackson, *Understanding Prayer: An Exploration of the Nature, Disciplines, and Growth of the Spiritual Life* (SCM; London 1980) 52.

18. Vergote, *Religie*, 256.

Prayer does indeed express many of the dimensions of being human. Different authors attest to this in various ways. For Charles A. Nash, for example, prayer is a unique experience of the internal awareness of God.<sup>19</sup> Prayer is an expression of desire, wrote Knight Dunlap.<sup>20</sup> Prayer focuses and expresses intention.<sup>21</sup>

As a reflective process, prayer is a functionally motivated behavioural event in order to achieve self-adequacy.<sup>22</sup> It focuses on a need.<sup>23</sup> Described in existential terms like awakening, awareness, an consciousness, prayer is not only an expression of one's being, it is also an experience of one's being. It relates to every possible circumstance of life.<sup>24</sup> It vividly describes a person's state.<sup>25</sup> All prayer is conscious, but it also expresses both unconscious urges and the real self.<sup>26</sup>

Prayer is the living embodiment of what one believes. It is an instrument by which faith expresses itself. The language of prayer is the primary language of faith,<sup>27</sup> yet the language of prayer is embedded in the fundamental gestures of the self and the community. Prayer not only expresses, it also forms, critiques, shapes, and refines emotions, beliefs, and one's way of relating to the world. A dialectic exists between the expression and the experience.

### **Activity of the Human Person and God**

Classically,, prayer is the elevation of the mind and heart to God.<sup>28</sup> It is an activity by which one enters into communication with God.<sup>29</sup> Prayer is both a human activity, and a gift, a way of being and of letting be, an expressing and a being formed.

Humanly speaking, prayer is an activity in which humans explore their life unto God. Prayer is the human person in the totality of its being stretching out to possess the transcendent God in the intimate inwardness or

19. *The Relation Between Dynamic Psychological Structure and the Spiritual Life* (Pontifical Gregorian University; Rome 1961) 30.

20. *Religion: Its Function in Human Life* (McGraw-Hill; New York 1946) 126.

21. See Gordon Allport, *The Individual and His Religion: A Psychological Interpretation* (Macmillan; New York 1964) 133-134.

22. See O. Strung, *A Redefinition of the Psychology of Religion with Special Reference to Certain Psychological Theories of G. Allport* (Ph.D. Dissertation; Boston University 1962) 104.

23. See Paul E. Johnson, *Psychology of Religion* (Abingdon; New York 1959) 131.

24. See B. Jarret, "Meditation for Lay-Folk," *Review for Religious* (1975) 34, 43.

25. See de Vries, "Experience," 237-246.

26. W. Clark, *The Psychology of Religion: An Introduction to Religious Experience and Behaviour* (Macmillan; New York 1958) 307-327.

27. See Saliers, "Prayer and Emotion," 46.

28. Eugene Boylan, *Difficulties in Mental Prayer* (Newman; Westminster, MD 1967) 1-2.

29. See Vergote, *Religie*, 255.

the deepest consciousness. The art, techniques, and methods of prayer emphasize how one can pray better.

On the other hand, however, prayer is also a gift. It is letting God speak. It is an attitude of receptivity: of waiting, listening, and responding to God's movement. It is active and expectant awareness. It is active availability before God.<sup>30</sup> The primary attitude of Christian prayer is receiving, learning to truly listen and wait.<sup>31</sup> Prayer is not a useful tool for bargaining, but a useless time of guilt, solitude, of sitting still and doing nothing in God's presence. It is not grabbing hold but letting go, not clamoring for attention, but learning the wordless art of silence.<sup>32</sup>

### **Experience and Expression of a Lived Relationship**

The core of prayer is the experience of the living God. Specifically, it is the experience of the presence of God and the discovery of God in the depth of one's self. As an experience of the presence of God, prayer actualizes the presence of God.<sup>33</sup> With its fundamental definition rooted in God, prayer is consciously being and living one's true self as having one's origin in God and finding completion only in Him. As Thomas Merton said, the purpose of prayer is experienced communion with God.<sup>34</sup> A person seeks intimacy or union with God in prayer. As spiritual writers have pointed out, the beginning of prayer is the discovery of God at the centre of one's very existence.

Within the context of Christian reflection, the experience of prayer can be explored by means of an analysis of its classic functions: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, intercession and petition.<sup>35</sup> Prayer is relationship and communication. Our working definition of prayer is that it is both an experience and an expression of a lived relationship with God. This experience and expression involves some complexity. It is not a matter of one single element. Rather there is a complexity of multi-faceted and interpenetrating psychic processes expressed in experience, thought, feelings, language, behaviour, signs and attitudes. All of these are caught up in the net of prayer.

30. See Vergote, *Religie*, 261.

31. See George Maloney, *Listen Prophets!* (Dimension; Denville, NJ 1977) 76.

32. See Nathan Mitchell, "Useless Prayer," in John Gallen, ed., *Christians at Prayer* (University Press; Notre Dame, IN 1977) 1-25.

33. See Abhishiktananda, "Prayer: The Presence of God," *Review for Religious* 34 (1975) 544.

34. *Spiritual Direction and Meditation* (Liturgical Press; Collegeville, MN 1960) 61-62.

35. See, for example, Gordon Wakefield, "Prayer: Confession," in G. Wakefield, ed., *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (SCM: London 1983) 307-313; Adolphe Tanqueray, *The Spiritual Life: A Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology* (Desclee; Tournai 21930) 243-248; Carl J. Pfeiffer and Janann Manternach, *Living Water: Prayer of Our Heritage* (Paulist; New York 1978) 62-80.

An experience is an act of trying, a direct participation in events, a conscious perception or apprehension of reality or of external, bodily or psychic events, of something personally encountered, undergone, or lived through. The very term implies not only that one has gone through something, but also that one has discovered something and retained the knowledge thereof. Psychologically, religious experience involves a mode of knowing through an intuitive and affective grasp of meanings and values perceived in a world which emits qualitatively differentiated religious or divine signs.<sup>36</sup>

Glock and Stark consider religious experience to be one of the five dimensions of religion.<sup>37</sup> Under religious experience, they include "all of those feelings, perceptions and sensations which are experienced by an actor or defined by a religious group as involving some communication, however, slight with a divine essence, i.e., with God, with ultimate reality, with transcendental authority."<sup>38</sup> They go on to say that "the essential element characterizing religious experience and distinguishing it from all other human experience is *some sense of contact with a supernatural agency.*"<sup>39</sup>

Religious experience is necessarily complex. It has a wide and varied fabric. It is composed of several interrelated and overlapping elements. Despite its complexity, we can, nonetheless, identify certain basic modalities of religious experience. Vergote has, in fact, identified five such basic modalities:

First, there is the intuitive and habitually accessible knowledge of a Transcendental Reality. The Transcendental Reality is perceived as immediately inherent in the world and/or in one's personal life, and as a mystery which is apparent through its manifestations. Second, there is a lived experience which is a profound affective knowing of a Supernatural Reality, which, in unveiling itself in its novelty, takes the person by surprise, summons him in his personal existence, and transforms him momentarily or in some lasting way. Third, there is the remembrance which is the fruit of personal and prolonged contact in which one is involved. Fourth, there is the mystical experience, expressed in the sustained event and systematic writings of the well-known mystics. Finally, there is the immediate knowledge coming from perception, for example, sight and hearing. For Vergote, each and every modality of awareness which is presented as instant knowledge is a form of experience.<sup>40</sup>

36. See A. Vergote, *Psychologie religieuse* (Dessart; Brussels 1966) 8, 36.

37. The others are the ritualistic, the ideological, the intellectual, and what they call the consequential dimensions of religiosity. See Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark, *Religion and Society in Tension* (Rand McNally; New York 1965) 20.

38. *Ibid.*

39. Their emphasis. See Glock and Stark, *Religion*, 41.

40. See Vergote, *Religie*, 116.

**A Method of Analysis:  
The Construction of a Prayer Scale**

In order to study the dimensions and structure of a particular form of religious experience, namely, prayer expressions at a conscious level, a fitting research instrument was needed. The construction of the *Religious Experience and Expressions in Prayer Scale (REEPS)* had its origins in Pieter Van Ginneken's 1976 study. After the administration of an initial questionnaire to groups of religious men and women, Van Ginneken<sup>41</sup> identified thirteen categories (with one hundred sub-categories), as follows: 1) the self-manifestation of God to the person; 2) communication between God and the person; 3) the recognition of God by the person; 4) the active relationship between God and the person; 5) the absence or refusal of relationship between God and a person; 6) the restoration of the God-person relationship; 7) the conquest of death; 8) struggle and effort; 9) activity and passivity; 10) God's fulfillment of the (human) needs of the person; 11) the social dimension; 12) evangelical life; 13) personalizations. Study of these categories by Van Ginneken and his team of collaborators<sup>42</sup> resulted in the formulation of a 79-item questionnaire which was then used in an investigation of the prayer expressions of male and female religious living in Belgium and in Holland.

Factor analysis was used to examine the results of the survey. In the process, the most intensive or most expressive family or group of words within the constructed factor was combined each time with one or two other family/group of words within the factor. This was done for both positive and negative items. Each factor included both more important and less important items. It was considered that five items per factor provided a good expression or image of the contents of the whole factor.

In order to assess and develop the intercultural utility of the questionnaire, I had it translated by four different translators, working independently of one another.<sup>43</sup> The resultant translations were compared and analyzed. This was done in order to test the validity of the questionnaire and to determine whether the items of the original questionnaire would be significant for lay people (Van Ginneken had worked only with religious) and for lay people in different cultures, specifically the Filipino and the American, as well as to lay the ground work for the possible identification of new categories.

41. Van Ginneken's questionnaire was distributed in French and in Dutch.

42. The team included Van Ginneken, Antoon Vergote, Dirk Hutsebaut, Lieve Leys, and myself.

43. None of the translators knew that others were involved in a similar task.

Methods similar to those originally employed by Van Ginneken were used to explore the possible expansion of the questionnaire by the addition of new items. A pre-testing group of ten respondents<sup>44</sup> was asked to identify the fundamental core of their prayer life by a choice of five texts from among fifty (eight from the Bible, ten from religious poetry, two from prose, and thirty from profane literature). The selection was to reflect God's presence in their lives and their attention to God.

The analysis of this pre-test revealed eleven of Van Ginneken's thirteen categories and thirty-six of his sub-categories. Seven new categories with twenty-nine sub-categories were also identified. In addition to the three relational dimensions identified by Van Ginneken, i.e., God to the person, the person to God, and a reciprocal relationship between God and the person, a fourth relational dimension was discerned, namely, an inter-personal relationship. This led to the formulation of thirty-nine new items for the questionnaire.

In pilot studies (Pretests 2 and 3), the questionnaire was administered respectively to a group of Filipinos and to a group of Americans.<sup>45</sup> Apart from some minor modifications, the proposed instrument was found to be useful for an investigation of how Filipinos and Americans experience their personal relationship with God in prayer. The definitive 118-item questionnaire, to be self-administered, was prepared for distribution in a sixteen-page booklet.

346 subjects, of whom 43.4% were American and 56.6% were Filipino, 47.1% female and 52% male, participated in the test. Ranging in age from 19 to 64 years, they had a median age of 36. The respondents were asked to provide, anonymously, certain biographical information, for example, with regard to their education as well as their religious beliefs and practices.<sup>46</sup> An open question<sup>47</sup> allowed them to describe expressions of prayer not explicitly covered by the questionnaire. The questionnaire contained 118 items, to which the subjects were asked to respond on an eight-point scale.<sup>48</sup> For example:

44. The sample comprised then Filipinos, six men and four women, with an average age of 27.2 years. One was a university student, four had completed their university studies, and three were M.A. candidates. According to occupation, there was one student, one librarian, three counsellors, and five teachers.

45. Subjects in pretest no. 2 were eight Filipinos, three men and five women, all unmarried. All but one were university graduates. The subjects in pretest no. 3 were ten Americans, five men and five women, four of whom were married while the others were single.

46. The questionnaire was administered to a Roman Catholic population, of whom 35% occasionally attended Mass on weekdays in addition to Sundays, 44.5 regularly attended Sunday Mass, 15.6% attended irregularly, while 4.1% attended hardly or never at all. 87.6% had an absolute belief in God, while 10.7% had questions, and 0.9% had doubts.

47. "Do you have any other expressions which have not been tapped in this questionnaire? If so, please describe or write them. Why do you find them important?"

48. The full questionnaire is contained in my dissertation, pp. 218-231.



1. I live God's presence as a mutual relationship of speaking and listening.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

10. The word of God always means to me a claim to conversion.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

14. Self-denial is necessary for me to reach God.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

35. The thought of death occupies a great part of my relationship with God.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

50. Prayer is a central part of my life and I try to keep it alive.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

70. "I praise you and I adore you, Lord" expresses exactly my attitude in prayer.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

101. I feel remorseful when I have spent a day without God.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

118. I am convinced that perfection is the unity and harmony of all my experiences.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

An analysis of the 346 responses was conducted by means of the Factor Analytic Procedure. This allowed for the reduction of the variables a smaller number of hypothetical and interpretable values.<sup>49</sup> Essential to the statistical analysis was the transformation of the raw data to a correlation or covariance matrix, the computation of the initial factor loading coefficients, and the rotation to a final solution.<sup>50</sup> Initially fifteen factors were identified, and these were subsequently reduced to twelve or thirteen, depending on the subject group under specific examination.<sup>51</sup>

The application of the instrument was admittedly limited. It was administered to a uniquely Roman Catholic population, with a higher than average socio-educational status. Nonetheless the instrument which had been designed seems to have been adequate to measure that which it was designed to measure and, in that sense, must be considered a valid instrument.<sup>52</sup> The reliability<sup>53</sup> of the test was confirmed by the consistency

49. See H. Harman, *Modern Factor Analysis* (University Press; Chicago 1967); K. Gorsuch, *Factor Analysis* (Saunders; Philadelphia 1974).

50. See P. Nie, et al., *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (McGraw-Hill; New York, 21975) 468-508.

51. Details of the application of the procedure can be found in my dissertation, pp. 72-73 and *passim*.

52. It could be legitimately administered to other populations with different religious, intellectual, social, and characteristics from those of the groups in my study. Indeed, the

of the factors as they emerged from an analysis of the prayer expressions of the different groups (Filipinos, Americans, males, females, Filipino males, Filipino females, American males, American females).

### **Some Results and a Discussion**

In response to the basic question which prompted the research, i.e., What are the contents and structure of a lived relationship with God in prayer, it is clear that it would be useful to examine all eight groups and make a comparison among them.<sup>54</sup> In the present article, the results of the analysis of the female and male subject groups will be analyzed. Intensity scores point to the differences between the two groups.

#### **Women:**

Analysis of the contents of the factors resulted in the following profile:

Factor I: The personal presence of God, marked by dependency and efforts in prayer; a positive attitude towards God; intimacy, yet there are also mediators in the relationship.

Factor II: A strong focus on ethical behaviour, coupled with a slight reference to religious values.

Factor III: A very dominant theme of intimacy with God, with a slight religious-ethical facet.

Factor IV: An experience of guilt and fear before God, linked with a desire to encounter Him through individual and social expressions of faith.

Factor V: The expressions of faith experience.

Factor VI: A dominant exercise of self-autonomy, linked with a slight dependency on God.

#### **Factor I: Interpretation**

The dependency is expressed in the woman's approach to God as the source of help, rest, peace, blessings, hope and mercy. There is a trustful

results of Van Ginneken's original study confirm the potential of application of the more refined instrument.

53. The reliability of an instrument is generally checked by the readministration of the test, or by the administration of a parallel test. The anonymity of the present subject group, and the wide geographical distribution of the subject population, preclude the possibility of retesting. Had a retest been possible, the results would have been somewhat skewed because of the subject groups familiarity with the instrument itself. Thus, internal consistency must be considered the primary criterion for judging the reliability of the instrument.

54. That has been done in my doctoral dissertation. See pp. 80-167.

surrender and recourse to the transcendent, but reliable, God who supports human beings in trying times. Since prayer facilitates intimacy with God, women make efforts to pray and to be regular in prayer. The Stations of the Cross were identified as a meaningful form of prayer.

A broad positive attitude towards God is marked by praise, adoration, joy, and the importance of being called God's child and finding a new identity in Him. There is an awareness of keeping God as life's objective, and remorse which is felt in God's absence. Detachment and attentiveness are necessary in order that God be reached; woman's choice of God is based on her personal freedom.

Intimacy with God is characterized by union, the experience of God as He is, in a mutual and personal relationship of indwelling. Relational mediation is effected through the personhood of Christ and of Mary. The mediating channels are the inspiring Word of God (the Bible) and woman's conscience, where God's presence is manifested.

### **Factor II: Interpretation**

A strong focus on ethical behaviour is found together with but slight reference to religious values. An ethical orientation can be discerned in three areas:

First, with regard to themselves, women experience a need to work out of their personal egoism in order to gain the full appreciation of others and of the world at large. Sincerity and honesty are essential. Attention must be paid to needs, which must be understood and taken seriously. A full life is desired. Commitment to a meaningful value system and one's life objective facilitates this full life.

Secondly, with regard to her relationships, woman needs to have confidence in her fellow human beings, within a context of respect for the interdependence and uniqueness of persons. Love is expressed explicitly by means of attention and responsiveness, as well as care, respect, responsibility, loyalty, and productivity.

Thirdly, with regard to her tasks, woman experiences a need to implement her great ideas and her ideals. Through career and work, women can improve the world. Immortality is based on the realization of good deeds.

The slight religious reference is expressed in the praxis of Christian love, that is, especially compassion. There is some desire to learn from God, whom woman approaches with affection despite the fact that God is seen as beyond her. God's will is discerned through woman's solitude and her awareness that religious values are to be integrated in one's day-to-day life.

### **Factor III: Interpretation**

Intimacy with God is articulated as a mystical experience or union with him, as evidenced in the attraction to a spirituality of the desert, as an experience of the world together with God, or as seeing God as the Mother to whom women can cling.

The slight religious-ethical facet focuses on the woman's relationship with herself, i.e., the awareness that she needs to be gentle with herself. This is a form of authentic and healthy love of self. Intimacy with God finds expression in Christian ethical praxis in a woman's loving those who are perceived as hating her.

### **Factor IV: Interpretation**

Women experience strong feelings of guilt and fear in the presence of God. Specifically, there is a fear of wasting His gift of life and its opportunities. Occasionally there is a desire to hide from Him, to escape his terrifying and critical glance. In her relationship with God, woman is aware of death and life's fragility.

The opposite facet of desiring to meet God's revealed in an individualized pattern of self-denial, renunciation, and discernment. Woman's identity is placed in the presence of God; she needs to understand His will with tranquility of mind. The social or institutional expression of faith is manifested in obedience to ecclesiastical laws and in religious vocations. In the celebration of the sacraments with others, woman's faith takes on its true form.

### **Factor V: Interpretation**

The significance of the woman's faith experience is expressed in three areas. First, in regard to herself, achieving a living faith means to be open or vulnerable in her life experiences. Specifically, she embraces the full life through a *loving-doing-hoping* package. A sense of gratitude is also important. Secondly, with respect to others, her love is expressed in the giving of her time, attention, and presence to a significant other. Finally, as regards her relationship with God, her prayer is relative to her personal needs and the daily experiences of her life. Although God is always present, He is clearly different from others. Woman brings her self-identity into God's presence, i.e. she brings to Him who she really is and who she is able to become.

### Factor VI: Interpretation

Strong personal autonomy is shown in the development of a *fighting spirit* in order to tackle life's burdens. There is a quest for perfection, i.e. the unity and harmony of life's experiences. There is an awareness of the importance of discipline in education; this is achieved only by means of personal struggle and self-mastery. Encountering God is based on her joy of living and her personal freedom.

The slight dependency on God is manifested in a trustful approach to Him as benefactor and refuge.

#### Men:

Analysis of the contents of the factors resulted in the following profile:

Factor I: The personal presence of God, characterized by intimacy, a positive attitude, efforts in prayer, and dependency.

Factor II: Ethical valency with a light religious touch.

Factor III: Guilt and fear before God, linked with dependency upon Him.

Factor IV: A desire to reach God in a distant relationship between Him and man.

Factor V: Dialectical tension between reliance upon God and the exercise of self-autonomy.

Factor VI: Receptivity and affection for a transcendent God.

### Factor I: Interpretation

The demension of the male's intimacy with God is characterized by a mutuality of speaking and listening, a strong desire to be united with God, a belonging to and a new identity in God, a mystical experience of mutual dwelling, an attraction for the spirituality of the desert, a personal relationship in which man experiences the world together with God and where he experiences God as He is, a mutuality of affection, and the importance of being called a son of God.

A positive attitude is expressed in openness and receptivity, in trust and joy. There is praise and adoration. God is seen as a source of rest, warmth, peace, and love. There is a desire to learn from God, and the Christian praxis of loving those by whom one is hated.

Men put effort into the regularity, intimacy, and vividness of prayer. For them the celebration of sacraments with others and the Stations of the Cross are valuable forms of prayer. Mediating elements in men's relationships with God are God's word and the personhood of Christ.

Dependency is seen in approaching God confidently as for help and guidance. God is seen as one who supports men in difficult periods. God gives men what they need. He is the source of all. The male feels remorse in God's absence.

### **Factor II: Interpretation**

In terms of his relationships, the male recognizes a need for confidence in his fellow men. Love is seen as a specific expression of care, respect, responsibility, loyalty, and creativity. It includes an attentiveness and responsiveness to the loved one's deepest needs and desires. There is an awareness of the individuality and interdependence of persons. The only specifically religious aspect was the praxis of Christian love which speaks of compassion, particularly to strangers.

With regards to tasks, man desires to strive for and realize his noble ideas and his ideals. In worthwhile actions he can build upon his immortality, for example, through work or the pursuit of his career, he can improve the world. Fidelity to a true value system is called for, especially in the interrelated values of a loving, active, and hoping praxis.

In regards to himself, man realizes the importance of sincerity, honesty, and the transcendence of his egoism in order to fully understand others. Man sees life as uncertain and desires to live a full life despite its fragility. Man needs to cultivate an attitude of gratefulness for blessings received. The deeper needs of the self are recognized, such as the need to be listened to, or the need to be understood or taken seriously. There is need for a purpose in life and a need to be gentle with oneself.

### **Factor III: Interpretation**

Generally the man has a strong feeling of guilt or fear before God. Specifically this guilt results from the disobedience to church law and the denial of religious vocation. Dependency is manifested by man's approaching God as a source of help and blessings, especially in difficult times.

### **Factor IV: Interpretation**

Longing for an encounter with God and the desire to understand Him is realized in receptive modes of detachment, self-denial, renunciation, solitude, and attentiveness towards God. The distance between man and God points to a God who sees men from everywhere, who is omnipresent but who is also unapproachably different from others.

Furthermore, the distance is widened when man, through sin, transgresses against God's fatherly love. God's look, then, can be either liberating or frightening.

On the other hand, man meets God through life itself. On the positive side, man needs to be open and vulnerable to his experiences. He needs to integrate his religious values into his day-to-day life. His prayer is relative to his needs and experiences of the day. On the negative side, man fears that he might waste God's gift of life and its opportunities.

### **Factor V: Interpretation**

There is a dialectical tension between reliance upon God and the exercise of self-autonomy. Trusting recourse to God is experienced as confidently approaching Him as help, benefactor, and refuge in difficult times. Man is aware of the finitude of life. He experiences God like a mother to whom he can cling. Observance of parental teachings are considered to be important in religion.

Autonomy is manifested in a *fighting spirit* to face one's troubles in life. The discipline of struggle and self-mastery is necessary to the quest for perfection, which is the harmonious unity of all one's experiences. Man actively seeks God through his efforts in prayer. It is through Mary's mediating person that man becomes familiar with Christ.

### **Factor VI: Interpretation**

A transcendent God is approached by man with an attitude of receptivity, the attraction to discern God's will in solitude, and affection in a relationship that is considered personal.

### **A Comparison**

There were specific differences between males and females on the scores of some ten items in the testing process, for example, with regard to items 6, 11, 13, and 49, that is: (6) "I try to regularly maintain an intimate relationship of prayer with God;" (11) "I like to pray to Mary as the one who makes us familiar with her Son;" (13) "Sometimes I experience God as a mother in whom I can hide myself and to whom I can cling;" and (49) "The fact that God dwells in me never ceases to amaze me but I rejoice nonetheless in His presence."

In the process of factor analysis, it was discovered that among men there was an emphasis within factor IV, that is, the desire to reach God in the distant relation between Him and man. On the other hand, there was

an accentuation discerned among the female respondents with regards to factors III, "Very dominant theme of intimacy with God with a slight ethical-religious facet," I, "Personal presence of God marked by dependency, efforts in prayer, a positive attitude towards God, intimacy, and mediators in the relationship," and II, "Strong focus on ethical praxis together with but a slight reference to religious values."

What differentiates women from men are women's efforts in prayer, their tender affection for God, and their reliance upon Him. Their striving in prayer reflects a desire to maintain the presence of God and intimacy with Him. The nature of these women's tender affection is evident in the significance attached to being identified as God's children, experiencing God like a mother to whom one can cling, and experiencing God as He is. There is, in addition, particular reliance upon God, that is, the conviction that God helps in times of trouble. For these Roman Catholic women, Mary, in particular, serves as a mediator in the prayer relationship with God through Christ.

While motifs such as freedom generally distinguish the psychological profile of the American prayer experience from that of the Filipino and feelings of inferiority and insecurity characterize the Filipino profile in comparison with that of the American, some additional differences can be discerned when the tests of American women are compared with those of American men, and the tests of Filipino women with those of Filipino men.

When the prayer experiences of American women are compared with those of American men, among women there was a dominant emphasis with regards to four factors: (I) A personal presence of God marked by intimacy, dependency, and affection, along with efforts in prayer, (VI) the recognition of deep needs associated with seeing God as the norm for life, (V) a great attachment to a transcendent God and a dependency upon Him along with confidence in one's own efforts, and (III, bipolar) an awareness of a strong guilt before God, coupled with affection, as opposed to an awareness of self-confidence.

Among the men there was likewise a dominant emphasis with regards to four factors, as follows: (II, bipolar), with realization of ethical values in life, as but slightly opposed to seeing God acting in the conflicting roles of father and judge, (VI, bipolar), an active receptivity towards God, but slightly opposed to an active disposition towards others, (I) the personal presence of God, marked by dependency, receptivity, affection, modes in the relationship, and mystical experience, and (V) a refinement of one's attitude towards the self in order to facilitate a full appreciation of others and God.

What generally distinguishes the prayer experience of American women from that of men is the strong desire for union with God. The union



that is hoped for is characterized by mystical experience, the nearness of God's presence, and feelings of warmth and happiness. With that intimacy comes a certainty that God helps in difficulties. Secondly, God is seen as the norm for life, the locus for the unfolding of the self. Thirdly, a need for self-development is realized through the significance of expressions of love, the loss of self-centeredness in order to facilitate the appreciation of others and the world.

When Filipino women are compared with Filipino men, the mutuality of the relationship with God, characterized by intimacy and reciprocity, is seen to be particularly significant among women. There is, moreover, a desire to deepen that intimacy, a desire for union with the God who is unapproachably different from others. Striving for union with God leads to a discipline of prayer and self-renouncement, particularly in working through faults and weaknesses. Finally, the relationship with God is experienced as beneficial, that is, His presence leads to peace, rest, and other blessings in life.

In sum, affectivity and desire for union seem to be the prevalent mode in the religious relationship among women. Generally the results indicate that, in prayer, women strive for a deeper intimacy with God. This intimacy is characterized by tender affection along with a reliance on divine assistance. For women, the relationship with God is organized around a modal element with love as a central focus, that is, affective intimacy with a desire for union. Thus sexual differences do seem to imprint their psychological character on the relationship with God in prayer.<sup>55</sup>

### A General Reflection

It is obvious that not every aspect of religion, nor of prayer, can be reduced to the psychological. Yet religion and prayer are human phenomena and, as such, are subject to psychological inquiry. When it does so, it reveals the complexity of the religious phenomenon. Not only does it exist within a particular symbolic system, the Roman Catholic system in the present study, but it is also concretely subject to the variables of gender and cultural differences.

Specifically, the lived relationship with God in prayer seems to be structured in function of the psyche, as well as in function of religion.

55. The results of this empirical study thus seem to generally confirm the insights of Vergote who wrote that "in presenting God in the masculine, religion surely puts "Him" within the compass of a woman's heteroerosexual love; in this way, the desire for union seems to be a predetermined mode for women to live their religious faith," Vergote, *Religie*, 246.

From a pluriform religious experience a religious attitude arises. Religious feelings are experiences in which a person is aware of God's living presence as expressed in the affective modes. The lived relationship with God engages the totality of the person; it is the total human person which is expressed in prayer.

In short, prayer is an expression of a dynamic and complex relationship with God. This complexity is manifest in the tension of various bipolar elements brought into view by our study, for example, the experience of intimacy with God and an awareness of distance in the relationship, the need for self-autonomy and reliance on divine assistance, feelings of tender affection and the experience of fear and guilt before God. In sum, lived faith, as this is expressed in a lived prayer relationship, encompasses the real human person with the totality of his or her psyche.