

PRAYER IN CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM: A COMMON RITUAL FOR INTER-FAITH RELATIONS

MAKAFUI M. TAYVIAH¹

ABSTRACT

Prayer is an important and common ritual in Christianity and Islam. Christians and Muslims share a common belief that through prayer man communicates with God and builds a relationship with Him. Prayer in the two religions under study can either be said privately or publicly. The commonality of prayer in the two religions can be a means through which Christians and Muslims can relate better. This article discusses Prayer and how prayer could be used as a common ritual for inter-faith relations. This article also explores the types of prayer in Christianity and Islam as well as the difference between multireligious prayer and Interreligious prayer. Finally, this article outlines some points to consider before organising an interfaith prayer and concludes that a successful Interfaith prayer can lead religious people to mutually respect and understand each other.

INTRODUCTION

Christianity, Judaism and Islam are the three monotheistic religions which mainly believe that there is one God and He is the origin and source of everything that exists in the world. These three (3) religions believe that God cares about His entire creation and made man the head of creation by providing rules for man's guidance so that humankind may live righteously according to God's intention and will. As monotheistic religions, which share common ancestors, beliefs in divinely and revealed scriptures, common rituals and practices such as prayer, piety and charity, the three religions; Judaism, Christianity and Islam will naturally appear to co-exist peacefully.

Christianity and Islam have lived together for centuries. These two religions belong to the same Arab historical or traditional milieu and therefore share a common ground. They both trace their roots to Abraham and share similar beliefs of God, prophets, revelation, scripture, the judgement day and resurrection of the dead.

Prayer is a common ritual and practice in Christianity and Islam. In reality prayer can be a common ground for both religions as Christians and Muslims can be together in a self-consciously religious way for example at funerals, naming ceremonies, weddings and praying for peace.

PRAYER

The word 'prayer' and 'pray' has various meanings. The English word "pray" as well as "prayer," comes from the Latin *precare* which means "to ask earnestly, beg or entreat."² Prayer can be defined as a communication process between man and God. Prayer is also defined as a conversation with God'. "Prayer is an offering up of man's desires to God."³ Prayer can also be defined as petitioning God, making requests or asking God to meet our human needs. In other words, prayer is fellowshiping with God. When a Muslim or Christian prays, there is an assumption that the direction of prayer is toward God.

Prayer can be said privately or publicly. Prayer can also be said between people of the same faith or people of other faiths. Therefore, it is important to know the difference between multireligious prayer and Interreligious prayer. Multireligious prayer is defined as 'the gathering at which different religions prepare an order in which each religious tradition present prays in their own distinctive way in a serial

¹ Makafui M. Tayviah, PhD is a lecturer at the Department of Religious Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana

² <https://www.etymonline.com/word/pray> (Accessed on 8th December, 2017)

³ www.shortercatechism.com/resources/vincent/wsc_vi_098.html (Accessed on 8th December, 2017)

manner'. This is different from Interreligious prayer which occurs when 'different religions subsume their distinctive idioms in common expressions mingling their perceptions of God'.⁴ Gavin D'Costa defines 'inter religious prayer', to mean praying together using the same words with two religious groups united in heart and mind, while multireligious prayer, refers to prayer in the presence of another religious group.⁵ Multi-religious prayer also means the meeting of Muslims and Christians who will pray together, but each using their own prayers and explicitly not joining in with the other's prayers. Within multireligious prayer, there are further distinctions, such as serial multireligious prayer where each religious group prays in turn, while the others listen and perhaps participate silently in whatever manner they choose, or simultaneous multireligious prayer where each religion is allocated a different space in the same building, where they pray separately, but at the same time, for the same cause or concern for example, world peace. Multireligious prayer is praying one's own prayers in the presence of another religious group, where they are silent and respectful, and possibly may be joining in silently and internally.⁶

Interreligious prayer on the other hand is when Christians and Muslims mutually pray together by using each other's prayers or hybrid versions of each other's prayers.⁷ During an interreligious prayer the two religious groups unite in heart and mind to pray together using the same words. Prayer therefore can be a common religious ritual which Christians and Muslims practice and cannot do away with. In sum, prayer forms the basis of these two religions.

Prayer in Christianity

Prayer in the Bible is defined as "beseeching the Lord" (Ex 32:11); "pouring out the soul before the Lord" (1 Sam 1:15); "praying and crying to heaven" (2 Chr. 32:20); "seeking unto God and making supplication" (Job 8:5); "drawing near to God" (Ps 73:28); "bowing knees" (Eph 3: 14). The Bible also in Eph. 5:19 and Col.3:16 places emphasis on the spiritual aspect of worship. Prayer in Christianity is a communication between man and God. Prayer can be expressed in many ways namely: oral prayer, meditation, music with or without an accompanying text and physical movement like dance. Prayers can be said aloud, quietly or inwardly. For Christians, the origin of prayer lies in the prayer life of Jesus. Jesus was portrayed by the gospels as a man of prayer; there were times he withdrew to pray alone. Hence, Christians can pray privately or publicly. Christian prayer involves adoration of the father, praise, thanksgiving, request for forgiveness and hope for the future. Liturgical prayer is a communal prayer with prescribed rituals and texts. This kind of prayer is said during the Eucharist (communion), confirmation, penance, marriage, holy orders (ordination to the church's ministry, anointing of the sick and baptism. In some Christian traditions there are liturgical prayers for rain, successful birth and pilgrimages.

Private prayer may refer to prayer offered alone or in a group such as family prayers. Prayer whether said privately or publicly are in accordance with the commandment of Jesus to pray without ceasing (Mark 13:33, Luke 18:1-8, 21:36, Col. 1:9; I Thess 5:17, 2 Thess 1:11). Prayers can be said in an entirely free lifestyle or may be said using 'the Lord's prayer' the Psalms, any of the Christian creeds, Ave Maria (among Roman Catholics). Many Christians pray at their own time or at least twice in a day thus morning and evening. There is no position for Christian prayers hence during prayers, Christians can stand, kneel, bow, lie, sit at holy place (church) or at home. However, whichever way Christians choose they must concentrate

⁴ Islam in Europe Committee, Christians and Muslims: Praying together? *Reflections and Texts*. (Geneva, 2003),7

⁵ Gavin D'Costa, Interreligious prayer between Christians and Muslims, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Volume 24, Issue 1, (2013),1-14

⁶ Interreligious Prayer between Roman Catholic Christians and Muslims, In: *Ritual Participation and Interreligious Dialogue: Boundaries, Transgressions and Innovations*. Marianne Moyaert and Joris Geldhof (eds) (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 94-108

⁷ Gavin D'Costa, Interreligious Prayer between Christians and Muslims. In: Sugirtharajah S. (eds) *Religious Pluralism and the Modern World*. (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2012), 95-96

on God to become conscious of His presence and voice. Nonetheless, some Christians who wish to deepen their relationship with God may deepen their prayer life as well as read the Bible, meditate and contemplate. Prayer is directed to God through the mediation of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit; this is where the trinity of God comes to play. In the Catholic Church, the practice of asking the saints “to pray for us” is based on the assumption that they are intercessors.

Types of Prayer in Christianity

There are Nine (9) types of prayer found in the Bible.

1. **Prayer of Consecration or Prayer of Dedication and Submission:** This prayer make Christians dedicate and submit their lives to God more especially when Christians do not know God’s specific plan for their lives. This is the Prayer Jesus offered before going to the cross in Luke22:42.
2. **Prayer of Faith or the Prayer of Petition:** This prayer is said when Christians make requests for their personal needs with the faith that their prayers will be answered. Jesus taught Christians to pray this prayer in Mark11:24 and Matthew 21:22.
3. **The Prayer of Commitment:** This type of prayer enables Christians to cast all their cares and worries unto God. This type of prayer is based on I Peter 5:7 where Christians are admonished to “cast all your anxieties, all your worries, all your concerns unto God for He cares”.
4. **The Prayer of Praise and Worship or Prayer of thanksgiving:** This type of prayer allows Christians to express their love and devotion to God (Psalm 100:4 5).
5. **The Prayer of Agreement:** This is a prayer a Christian prays with another person to petition God. Thus the success of this prayer is based on two people being in full or complete agreement and faith to ask God for something (Matthew18:18-20, Deuteronomy 32:30).
6. **Prayer of Fellowship or United Prayer:** This type of prayer is based on Acts 4:23-24. This prayer is often referred to as group prayer or prayer of fellowship where Christians pray together in the church or any other Christian gatherings.
7. **The Prayer of Supplication:** In 1 Timothy 2:1, Christians are admonished to pray for each other. This type of prayer enables Christians to pray for other believers and make petitions to God on behalf of other believers.
8. **The Prayer of Intercession:** This type of prayer is similar to the prayer of supplication. However, the prayer of intercession is a type of prayer offered on behalf of unbelievers or a person who has backslidden and who feels they cannot reach out to God on their own. (Ezekiel 22:30). Examples of people who have mediated or pleaded on behalf of others are Abraham (Genesis18:16-33) and Moses (Exodus 32:914).
9. **Praying in the Spirit or in Tongues:** This type of prayer is based on 1 Cor 14:2, 1415; Eph 6:18 where Christians who pray this kind of prayer are empowered by the Holy Spirit where the Christian yields to the Holy Spirit.

PRAYER IN ISLAM

Muslims believe that through daily worship a person makes a direct connection to Allah. Daily prayers incorporate special words and actions which symbolise and express a person’s faith. In prayer, Muslims praise Allah, seek guidance and forgiveness, and develop self-discipline. In Islam, *ibāda* is a term used to suggest worship so prayer is an act of *ibāda*. Islam further distinguishes *salat* from *ibāda* as *salat* is the daily ritual prayers performed at certain prescribed times. This prayer can be personal, private or public. There are other types of *salat* that include *du’a* (invocation or petition), *munajarat* (intimate dialogue with God) and *dikr* (recollect/ remembering God in prayer).

Salat is the second pillar of Islam and an essential part of Muslim worship. The ritual prayer is performed five times daily namely *subh* (break of day), *zuhr* (at noon), *asr* (in the afternoon) *maghrib* (sunset) and *isha* (at night). The ideal place for a communal prayer for Muslims is the mosque. However, prayer can be performed personally or in small groups outside the mosque or in principle anywhere provided

the place is ritually clean by laying a clean carpet, cloth or paper, or in a circle of stones. One must face towards Mecca and one must be clean before praying because a clean and pure heart makes one ready to be in tune with God (Surah 2:222, 9:108). Thus the Muslim performs ablution (*surah* 5:6) ritual acts of washing either to wash the whole body (*ghul*) or part of it (*wudu*) but the most important thing here is a pure heart. This has a similar regulation in the Old Testament (Exodus 30, Lev. 18 and Deut 21, 23).

Every week, congregational prayers take place on Friday at noon. (*salat juma'a*). The rituals performed during *juma'a* are just like the daily prayer of a Muslim but the only difference is that *juma'a* extends with a sermon given by an imam or a Muslim with the ability. Prayer is also said during festivals such as *idul adha* (festival of sacrifice) and *idul fitr* (festival to end *Ramadan* or the month of fast). Prayers are also said for particular occasions such prayer for the rain, during natural disasters, during funerals, voluntary prayer (*nawafil*) (Surah 3:38, 19:2-4, 40:60) are also performed during Ramadan or at night (Qur'an 17:79).

CAN CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS PRAY TOGETHER?

Christians just like Muslims are called to offer fervent and steadfast prayers (I Thess. 5:17, Col. 4:2, *Surah* 20:13-14). Christians may develop relations of dialogue with Muslims and thereby wish to make living and fruitful the religious and spiritual bonds between Islam and Christianity that have been mentioned. Christians and Muslims are invited, first of all by God, but then through the silent expectation of so many people to be 'witnesses to the One and Unique', in the difference of their views of faith, in sometimes painful respect for this difference, and in encounter.⁸

Comparing Al-Fatiha and the Lord's Prayer

Christians and Muslims possess their own prayers- the Lord's Prayer and *al-Fatiha* respectfully. However, these prayers can be used during an interreligious prayer.

The Lord's Prayer	Al- Fatiha
Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, For ever and ever.	In the name of Allah, The Merciful, the compassionate Praise be to Allah, The Lord of the words The Merciful, the Compassionate The ruler on the Day of the Judgement You alone we serve, From you alone we seek our Help Lead us on the straight Path The path of those upon whom your wrath Rests nor on the path of the lost.

The *Fatiha* means 'the Opening' or the 'the Opening of the Fortress' because it comes first before all the other *suwar* (*surah*) in the Qur'an. It is considered to be directly inspired by Allah and is regarded by all Muslims as significant, unique and holy. The Lord's Prayer as found in Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4 contains the words of Jesus to his disciples when they asked him to teach them how to pray. Many Christian denominations teach the Lord's Prayer as their main component to their particular confession of faith, because it includes the basic tenets of the Gospel. Many Christians use this prayer during church services or alone. In Ghana for example, the Lord's Prayer is recited during morning Assembly meetings in many schools. The Lord's Prayer and the *Al-Fatiha* can be divided into three sections namely;

⁸ Christian W. Troll, "Can Christians And Muslims Pray Together?" *The Way*, 50/1 (January 2011),63-64

- Adoration
- Submission and
- Supplication

a. Adoration

Christianity

“Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,”

Islam

“In the name of Allah, The Merciful, the
compassionate, Praise be to Allah”

b. Submission

Christianity

“thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth
as it is in heaven”

Islam

“You alone we serve, From you alone we seek
our Help”

c. Supplication

Christianity

“Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive
those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us
from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and
the glory, For ever and ever”.

Islam

“Lead us on the straight Path
The path of those upon whom your wrath
resets nor on the path of the lost.”

From the above, it appears that both prayers are similar hence it is possible to pray together on common grounds of interreligious worship. In 1991, Christian, Jewish and Muslim clergy authored the prayer below following the Gulf war; this prayer was used in many places of interreligious worship and may also be said at interfaith gatherings now.

Prayer for Peace by Christian, Jewish and Muslim clergy⁹

Eternal God, Creator of the universe, there is no God but You.
Great and wonderful are Your works, wondrous are your ways.
Thank You for the many splendoured variety of Your creation.
Thank You for the many ways we affirm Your presence and purpose,
and the freedom to do so.
Forgive our violation of Your creation.
Forgive our violence toward each other.
We stand in awe and gratitude for Your persistent love
for each and all of Your children:
Christian, Jew, Muslim, as well as those with other faiths.
Grant to all and our leaders’ attributes of the strong;
Mutual respect in words and deed,
restraint in the exercise of power, and
the will for peace with justice, for all.
Eternal God, Creator of the universe, there is no God but You. Amen.

From the above prayer we see that all three religions acknowledge God as Eternal God and Creator of the universe. Judaism, Christianity and Islam acknowledge God’s variety of creation and ask for God’s

⁹ Excerpted from WCC Current Dialogue 24/93, 36

forgiveness of the violation of His creation and towards one another. Another aspect of this prayer is God's persistent love for his children irrespective of their religion. In the prayer, God is asked to grant leaders attributes of strong, mutual respect and the will for peace and justice for all. The last part of the prayer affirms the monotheistic nature of God which is also the basis for the three religions to be able to pray together especially for peace.

Challenges in Praying Together as Christians and Muslims

The question that is often asked is whether it is possible for Christians and Muslims to pray together? The answer is yes, because since religious people find themselves living in the same community then it is likely that certain events like marriage, outdooring and funerals will bring them together. Therefore, prayer is a ritual that cannot be avoided in any kind of the afore mentioned case. Sometimes the situations which require prayer are not usually planned but prayer comes in as a necessity to respond to public and civic life. For example, when there is an accident, war, flood, famine and drought, members of all religious traditions living within the same community are affected so prayers are said together irrespective of the religion of the affected persons.

The challenge that may arise from praying together is how to pray and which words to use in interfaith or interreligious prayers. Sometimes where to pray may also be a challenge for a common prayer. Other times, the question of whether or not to include confessional prayer during an interreligious prayer also poses a challenge. Finally, the question of whether it is the same God being worshipped during interfaith prayer also poses a challenge. However, the most important thing here is that prayer is offered to God and it binds humans together if said properly.

To be able to successfully do an interfaith prayer, participants should:

1. Respect each other
2. Members should be allowed to express an issue of common concern
3. Members of an interfaith prayer group must be allowed to acknowledge their differences.

The Experiences and Reactions of Praying Together

There are different events that bring people together irrespective of their religion. First, education brings people together. In many Ghanaian schools for example, prayers are said during morning assembly meetings and most of the time it is Christian prayer, the Lord's Prayer. During funerals, wedding ceremonies, naming ceremonies or other events, prayers are said and invitees respond or take part in these prayers without any ill feeling. As the world and national events unfold, prayers for peace, repentance and understanding have joined religious people together in many countries, cities, towns and villages. The tragedy of the 11th September, 2001 in America sparked many interfaith services across the world. Currently, the activities of many Islamic reform groups such as *Boko Haram*, *Al-Qaeda* and *Al-shabab*, have also sparked interfaith prayers since members of different religious groups who find themselves praying for victims and their families.

Another common occasion for interfaith prayers is during national holidays. During Ghana's Independence Day celebration held on the 6th of March every year, Christian and Muslim clergy as well as other religious leaders are invited. Prayers are said for the nation by an invited Priest or Pastor, an Imam and a Traditional priest in the form of thanksgiving for the country. Also some days are set aside for national prayers where every religion is supposed to pray for Ghana. Many governmental or organisational committees formed many at times include members of different religious groups. Religious groups invite the "other" to their festivities and they honour them. Normally, the reactions for praying together are positive.¹⁰

¹⁰ www. pluralism.org (Accessed on 8th December, 2017)

THE DOS AND DONT'S OF INTERRELIGIOUS PRAYER

For an Interfaith prayer to be successful there is the need for religious people to mutually respect and understand each other. There must be sensitive preparations for that purpose. The venue must be taken into consideration and it must be neat and spacious. The appropriate Christian-Muslim organisations have to be contacted for permission, participation and approval of interfaith prayer.

1. Prayer topics should be discussed before hand and should be of common concern; subjects like peace, justice, reconciliation, violence, ecological crisis, creation and the love and care for creation are good interfaith prayer topics.
2. The language used for the prayer must be known to all or majority otherwise organisers of the Interreligious prayer should make translations of common prayer available.
3. Dressing should be decent and women should always ask about how to dress their hair whether to cover it or leave it.
4. Avoid the use of images to present or depict a particular religious figure during common prayers.
5. Avoid the use of 'confessional statements' as it may arise fear of the "other" being coerced into conversion.
6. It is important to note that religious people belong to different cultures and so one must be mindful of the use of symbols because some symbols may be "inculturation" to some while others will understand it as "syncretism". Therefore, it is important for those who plan interfaith prayers to be sensitive to cultural expressions which are likely to be misunderstood.
7. The Programme of an interfaith service or event should be printed out as some of the events may be unfamiliar to some.

CONCLUSION

The world has come to a point where we cannot do away with the fact that humans will continue to exist together irrespective of their religious traditions. In this case, interreligious activities may not be overlooked. Prayer is a ritual that is practiced by many religions and it can be a source for common grounds if planned and said properly. The salutation of "peace be with you" "*shalom sabath*" and *Salam Male kum* connotes peace in all three religions hence praying together is possible. Furthermore, the quotation "as we move into deeper encounters of interreligious prayer, we might experience it as a journey, realising that prayer itself is open-ended, a sign into the mystery of God"¹¹ may be an answer to the question of the possibility of praying together irrespective of the differences in faith and belief.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arai, T. & Ariarajah, W. (eds). *Spirituality in Interfaith Dialogue*. Geneva: WCC, 1989.
- Ariarajah, W. "Dialogue and Spirituality: Can We Pray Together?" In: *Not Without My Neighbour: Issues in Interfaith Relations*. (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1999).
- Brown, S. E. *Meeting in Faith: Twenty Years of Christian-Muslim Conversations Sponsored by the World Council of Churches*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1989.
- Carmody, D. L. & Carmody J.T. *Prayer in World Religions*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis books, 1990
- Christian, W. T. "Can Christians and Muslims Pray Together?" *The Way*, 50/1 (January 2011).

¹¹ Ariarajah, W. Dialogue and Spirituality: Can We Pray Together? Chapter 3 of Not Without My Neighbour: Issues in Interfaith Relations. Geneva: World Council of Churches, (1999):26-28

- D'Costa G. Interreligious Prayer between Christians and Muslims. In: Sugirtharajah S. (eds) *Religious Pluralism and the Modern World*. (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2012).
- D'Costa, Gavin. Interreligious prayer between Christians and Muslims, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Volume 24, Issue 1, (2013).
- Inter-religious Prayer, *Pro Dialogue/Current Dialogue* (joint number), bulletin 98, (1998).
- Islam in Europe Committee. *Christians and Muslims: Praying together? Reflections and Texts*. Geneva. (2003).
- Parrinder, G. *Worship in the World's Religions*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1961.
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Interreligious Prayer: Walking Together Series*. Washinton DC. (2008), accessed August 11, 2012, url: www.pluralismproject.org