Imagery, Prayer, and Mind Wandering: Kataphatic Prayer

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Imagery, Prayer, and Mind Wandering: Kataphatic Prayer

Martha M.O. Duah

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Abstract
Can having petitioners engage in kataphatic prayer block or at least reduce mind wandering? Mind wandering—reduced attention to external events—during prayer could pose a problem for Christians. However, different types of prayer make different cognitive demands. Kataphatic prayer, a common type of evangelical Christian prayer, makes use of mental imagery in hopes of experiencing God in a richer sense. Because both mind wandering and kataphatic prayer require imagery, tying up imagery resources in kataphatic prayer should block mind wandering thereby improving focus.

Methodology
Participants
For this study 15 college students were recruited, both male and female, 18 years or older from Andrews University’s Behavioral Sciences Research Participation Pool. They all had to be Seventh-day Adventist for at least 3 months.

Conditions
The subjects were divided equally into three conditions. The first condition was a visual task. The subjects in this condition watched a YouTube video named “One Hour of Relaxing Hymns on Piano”. The subjects in this condition were given 15 minutes to watch the video and were instructed that every time they felt their mind wandering or when the needs to remind themselves to focus, they should toggle any key on the keyboard. This key press would be recorded on a button task window that was opened on the other screen. The second condition will have subjects engaging in kataphatic prayer. They will be read a passage from Steps to Christ and they would be then instructed to use vivid imagery while praying. They had a maximum prayer period for 15 minutes but were allowed to stop earlier than the allocated time. They also press a key on the computer whenever they experienced their mind wandering while praying. Subjects in the third group were simply asked to pray as they normally do, then press a key when their mind wanders; they were also the an allotted 15 minutes. After this, each subject was given a series of questionnaires to measure other possible correlates. This experiment took no more than 45 minutes to complete.

Results

Table 1
One-Way Analysis of Variance Summary for Prayer Conditions and Button Presses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>79.142</td>
<td>39.571</td>
<td>.827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>478.550</td>
<td>47.855</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>557.692</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2
Pearson’s Correlation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Button Press/ Minute</th>
<th>Internalization of Christianity (CRIS)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-.669*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Conclusions
• St. Hilare & Bailey 2014
• My findings replicated in a previous study which had
   participants pray for about 10 minutes.
• How to get Christians to internalize Christianity

Limitations
• Small sample size
• Length of manipulation
• Highly motivated individual vs. credit

Bibliography