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# Praying for Salvation: A Map of Relatedness

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## Abstract

*This paper attempts to push the work of Mauss (1909) to its fullest conclusion by arguing that prayer can be viewed anthropologically as providing a near complete map of social and emotional relatedness. Based on fieldwork among deep-sea fisher families living in Gamrie, Northeast Scotland, (home to 700 people and six Protestant churches), I take as my primary ethnographic departure the ritual of the 'mid-week prayer meeting'. Among the self-proclaimed 'fundamentalists' of Gamrie's Brethren and Presbyterian churches, attending the prayer meeting means praying for salvation. Yet, contrary to the stereotype of Protestant soteriology as highly individualist, in the context of Gamrie, salvation is not principally focused upon the self, but is instead sought on behalf of the 'unconverted' other. Locally, this 'other', is made sense of with reference to three different categories of relatedness: the family, the village and the nation. My argument is that each category of relatedness carries with it a different affective quality: anguish for one's family, resentment toward one's village, and resignation towards one's nation. As such, prayers for salvation establish and maintain not only vertical – human-divine – relatedness, but also horizontal relatedness between persons, while also giving them their emotional tenor. In 'fundamentalist' Gamrie, these human relationships, and crucially their affective asymmetries, may be mapped, therefore, only when treating prayers as social phenomena that seek to engage with a world dichotomised into vice and virtue, rebellion and submission, and ultimately, damnation and salvation.*

## Key Words

Mauss, Prayer, Salvation, Emotion, Protestantism, Relations, Fishing, Scotland

## **Introduction**

This paper attempts to push the work of Mauss (1909) to its fullest conclusion by arguing that prayer can be viewed anthropologically as providing a map of social and emotional relatedness. Among the deep-sea fisher families of Gamrie, Northeast Scotland, and particularly among the self-proclaimed 'fundamentalists' of the village's Brethren and Presbyterian churches, attending the prayer meeting meant praying for salvation. Yet, contrary to the stereotype of Protestant soteriology as highly individualist, in the context of Gamrie, salvation was not principally focused upon the self, but was instead sought on behalf of the 'unconverted' other. Locally, this 'other' was made sense of with reference to three different categories of relatedness: the family, the village and the nation.

I want to suggest, furthermore, that each category of relatedness carries with it a different emotional quality: anguish for one's family, resentment toward one's village, and resignation towards one's nation. As such, prayers for salvation establish and maintain not only vertical – human-divine – relatedness, but also horizontal relatedness between persons, while also giving them their emotional tenor.

## **Context**

Gilbert – a retired fisherman and born-again Christian in his 80's – sat down beside me as we waited for the mid-week prayer meeting to begin. We were in Gamrie, the small fishing

village in NE Scotland, where Gilbert was born and raised, and where I conducted my fieldwork; a village home to 700 people and six Protestant churches. The room we occupied, used only for prayer meetings and a Sunday school, was a tiny annex of the much larger and more impressive main sanctuary of Gamrie's newest church<sup>1</sup>, the Rehoboth Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster (FPCU).

While Gamrie was founded as a Presbyterian fishing village in 1721, it came to be dominated by a millenarian sect commonly referred to as the Plymouth Brethren with their arrival in the village in the mid to late nineteenth century. Despite being a Presbyterian all his life, like many of his fellow congregants, Gilbert had strong sympathies with the religious piety and revivalist intensity of the Brethren. More specifically, Gamrics had either 'converted' to, or like Gilbert, been strongly influenced by the dispensationalist eschatology of leading Brethren figure John Nelson Darby (1800-1882).

Darby's pre-tribulational pre-millennial 'end times' theology framed local imaginations of the unfolding of human history. By defining the past as a time of godly purity, the present as a time of extreme wickedness, and the future as a time of salvific 'rapture' and apocalyptic destruction, Gamrics could affirm their own 'eschatological agency' (Webster 2013a) through creative acts of millenarian sign searching that placed their everyday lives within the 'last of the last days' (cf. Robbins 2001). Despite this agreement upon the shape of the eschatological

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<sup>1</sup> A Northern Irish denomination founded in 1951 by firebrand preacher and politician Rev Ian Paisley. The denomination was established in Gamrie in 1998 as a result of a split in the local Church of Scotland three years earlier.

present and near future (cf. Guyer 2007), schism had been a common occurrence; as well as two Presbyterian churches, Gamrie also had four Brethren assemblies.

Other divisions existed within the village that had more to do with fishing than religion. A boom in the fishing industry in the 1960s and 1970s meant many local skippers had become millionaires. With mid-size trawlers costing over £2 million and much larger pelagic trawlers costing twelve times that amount, fewer Aberdeenshire skippers were able to operate within such a capital intensive industry. Gamrie, however, had become a locally infamous exception, with the village widely reputed to be home to the highest number of millionaires per head of population anywhere in Scotland. While other Aberdeenshire skippers were going bankrupt, many Gamrie skippers were building bigger vessels and buying larger quotas. And as the price of prawns increased, so too did their increasingly conspicuous fortunes.

This wealth, however, did not always find its way into the churches. A skipper's financial empire grew only by taking on further debt, requiring crew to be away at sea for longer periods to meet repayments. Consequently, Sabbatarianism was no longer the dominant principle around which a six day working week revolved. Sunday fishing became increasingly the norm, embraced, my older informants explained to me, by younger men who had chosen to worship money instead of God. With young and middle aged fishermen spending more time at sea and less time on shore for worship, those committed to Gamrie's prayer halls were elderly. With the passing of time, the religion of Gamrie was going extinct, a fact well known to my Christian friends in the village. It was this economic, demographic and eschatological context that framed the prayers of those few souls still attending Gamrie's prayer meetings.

## **Gilbert's Prayer**

Gilbert was one of only eight or so Christians present at the prayer meeting that night. Some stood to pray, gripping the chair in front of them for balance; others remained seated, bend double, with one hand clasped around the other, or with both hands tightly gripping their bible. All prayed with eyes tightly shut and brows creased, displaying tense and urgent emotional expressions. Some voices were hushed and reverent; others bellowed with great force and volume; still others snivelled their words through weepy sobs. Congregants would listen carefully to each other's prayers and would occasionally murmur supportive noises, sighs, or phrases.

Yet, the prayers my informants offered during these times were not for themselves, for they were already counted among 'the saved'. Their prayers were offered on behalf of those who had not been born-again; for all those family members, villagers, fellow Scots, and global foreigners who made up the ranks of 'the unsaved'. Despite the fact that Gamrie, Scotland and the world were readily divided into different emic categories – old/young, Presbyterian/Brethren, skipper/crew, wealthy/struggling, fisher/farmer, local/incomer, Scottish/foreign – the only classification that was held to have any ultimate meaning or value was that of 'saved' and 'unsaved'. Salvation and damnation, my Christian informants explained – once fixed by volition, death, or the Rapture – was fixed eternally.

The prayers of Gamrie's elderly Christians were often uttered with deep sorrow, and sometimes through tears. This pain was made all the more acute by the fact that time was said to be desperately short. As my informants went through daily life, they constantly sought to remind each other (and the 'unsaved') that Jesus would soon return to the earth in judgement, taking the righteous into heaven and casting the wicked into hell. The salvific stakes could not be higher; the end of the world was utterly imminent, meaning that that very night could have been the last chance my friends had to intercede for 'the lost'. Consider, in this context, the words that Gilbert prayed that night:

Gracious God and our Heavenly Father we do thank Thee for a sense of Thy presence with us. We praise and we thank Thee that the ear of God is opened unto the prayer of the righteous. Oh Father we marvel again at Thy good, great mercy and grace towards us in the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray, oh God, that as we meet with trials, help us to see they come in Thy mind and Thy will.

We ask, oh God, that Thou would prepare our hearts to come and to worship Thee. We pray Father that we may see unsaved souls coming under the sound of Thy Word. Father, there is a turning away. Few unsaved are coming under the sound of Thy Word. We pray for those who do come. We pray that as Thy Word is proclaimed that the Holy Spirit will apply that word to their heart. Bring them under the conviction of sin and their need of the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour. And oh we pray that in Thy will, on the Lord's Day, we may have cause to rejoice with the angels in heaven over some soul coming to know and to love Thee as their Saviour.

We thank Thee Father for those who are standing faithful to Thy Word, in days, Father, when the fundamentals are being cast aside. Oh God, we are living in evil days. There is a departure from Thy truth. But, oh, we pray, father, that Thou will be once again pleased to pour out Thy Holy Spirit, that Thou will move again in revival in this land of ours. We pray again Father for this corner of Thy vineyard, once greatly blessed by a sense of Thy Holy Spirit and the movement of Thy Holy Spirit.

We especially remember again our young people, loved ones, who are yet outside of Christ, without God and without hope in this world. Oh Father, our hearts are sad when we see so little interest in them concerning spiritual matters. We pray that Thou would be pleased once again to move in our midst, and lives will be changed and transformed. We do thank Thee Father that [Thy] ear is open unto our cry. In Jesus' name. Amen.

I heard many hundreds of prayers like Gilbert's during my time in Gamrie, the majority of which were focused on offering God petitions for salvation. Given its typicality, what are we to make of Gilbert's prayer – emotionally, theologically, and anthropologically? Despite the brevity of his unfinished thesis, Mauss' (2003) work on the sociality of prayer is helpful here, both in understanding the specificity of Gilbert's words, and the Protestant cosmology from which they emerge.

### **Mauss and the Social Life of Prayer**

Contradicting the conventional academic and confessional wisdom of his time, for Mauss, prayer, 'far from being the product of individual consciousness alone [is] beyond doubt a

social phenomenon' (2003: 32, 33). Prayer is said to be a 'fragment of a religion' (2003: 33).

Indeed, 'even when prayer is individual and free... what they say... uses hallowed language... endorsed by a social tradition... [and] the teaching of their own sect' (2003: 33).

All of this seems true of Gilbert's prayer.

In terms of individual freedom, Gilbert prayed spontaneously – 'from the heart' in local terms – choosing his own words, without liturgy or written notes. These efforts to achieve 'individual and free' prayer are not unique to Gamrie. Keane (1997, 2002, 2006) has shown how this specific use of language, which anxiously seeks to achieve a state of utter 'sincerity' by assiduously avoiding the words (and thus the 'meanings') of an external other, stems from broader notions of Calvinist personhood. Here, the aim of the pious Protestant is to make the internal self (imagined as 'real' and 'authentic') clearly visible to the outside world, without omission or distortion.

These notions of sincerity, while important, are now well rehearsed within the burgeoning literature on the anthropology of Christianity (Bielo 2009, Engelke and Tomlinson 2006, Engelke 2013, Mafra 2011). In broad terms, then, this Protestant ethno-critique, as framed by the logic of sincerity, is as follows: Catholic, Orthodox, and 'High Anglican' Christians do not know how to pray – at least not properly – because their liturgical use of language

emerges from 'fixed liturgy' and 'meaningless ritual' that produces only 'empty words' (cf. Keane 2007. Also Bandak, this issue). While clearly drawing on wider Protestant fundamentalist critiques of other forms of Christianity, this ideal-typical formulation was also an ethnographic reality in Gamrie. Informants returning from pilgrimage to Israel spoke to me in horrified tones about the outward ritual forms they observed among Catholic and Orthodox Christians<sup>2</sup>. By drawing upon prophetic biblical notions of the outward movement of the lips as contrasted with an inwardly unmoved heart (Isaiah 29.13, Matthew 15.8), in Gamrie, the 'sincere' Protestant self is affirmed as he – for this self is generally imagined to be male – who clearly transposes the internal (spirit) onto the external (body).

As well as the related (and generally anti-Catholic) critique that priests 'speak Latin' and use 'mystical ritual' to dominate and exclude their laity, what is less well rehearsed is the way in which these notions of sincerity also emerge from ethno-critiques of *Protestantism* that are deemed to be insufficiently 'Reformed'. With the growth of the Assemblies of God along the Aberdeenshire coast, for example, we find a quite different critique – that of Pentecostalism and the practice of praying in tongues. While some of my Presbyterian and Brethren informants were simply dismissive of glossolalia, referring to it as 'gibberish' and 'a lot of nonsense', others offered a different critique, stating that speaking in tongues during

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that my referring to Catholic and Orthodox groups as 'Christians' is something that my informants would explicitly reject. Indeed, they maintained that outwith a tiny percentage imagined to be miraculous exceptions, only certain groups of Protestants (usually their own, and others deemed similarly 'Biblical') properly understood the gospel, and thus were able to receive salvation.

Pentecostal worship seldom conformed to the biblical requirement for an accompanying 'interpretation' of the tongue, a failure which was imagined to result – as in the Latin Mass – in its meaning remaining *unclear*, even *hidden*. Still others suggested that glossolalia was of demonic origin, and represented a sinister form of speech that sought to add to and thus undermine the clarity and sufficiency of scripture.

This ethno-critique – that Pentecostal prayer involving glossolalia is 'gibberish', 'unbiblical', or even 'demonic' – takes us some way toward bridging Mauss' analytical comments on individual freedom and social tradition. Prayerful 'freedom of expression', it seems, has its limits. In Gamrie, prayer needed to freely reflect the emotional and religious 'heart condition' of the individual, but also needed to be intelligibly communicated to, and honestly shared with, those whom one prayed alongside. Among my Christian informants, successfully communicating and sharing one's 'heart' in prayer generally required the public expression of certain emotions, as framed by certain deployments of embodied language.

As when Gamrie's fishermen publicly 'gave testimony' about their 'born again' conversion, Gilbert's emotional prayer seemed to entail a sacrifice of masculine pride through personal admissions of 'childlike' dependence and 'feminine' weakness (Webster 2013a: 113-118). The strength of such outward emotional expression – Gilbert's repeated thanks for being a recipient of 'great mercy and grace', his meek acceptance of divine trials, and his cries to God

for help and blessing – when affirmed by others as sincere, indexed the depth of his salvific concern, and the strength of his eschatological conviction.

Anguished prayers that pleaded with God for the salvation of young grandchildren were offered in the recognition that ‘time was short’ *demographically*, because Gilbert and his fellow intercessors were elderly and would soon reach the end of their life course, and *eschatologically*, because Jesus would soon return in judgement<sup>3</sup>. Such emotional displays in prayer thus indexed both the state of one’s sociality and theology; if one weeps during prayer then one ‘really loves’ and ‘really believes’ (cf. Danforth 1982). Other emotional indexes – furrowed facial expressions, gesticulating with a closed fist, suddenly raising the pitch of one’s voice – while also used to index the related emotional states of seriousness, grief, determination and urgency, were less common than that of weeping to index ‘a love for the lost’.

As in many forms of Pentecostalism, within Gamrie’s Brethren and Presbyterian prayer meetings, individualism (Meyer 2004, Robbins 2010: 168-169) and individual freedom of emotional expression were highly valued. Yet, the very existence of a commonly held Christian lexicon and embodied register, whereby prayers could be judged to be ‘heartfelt’, also indicates the importance of ‘social tradition’. Words spoken in prayer had to be clearly

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<sup>3</sup> Note here the striking resemblance to the Biblical account of Abraham’s intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18).

intelligible, but also had to carefully conform to certain understandings of what was 'biblical', not only theologically, but also linguistically. Note here Gilbert's deliberate use of archaic words – 'Thee', 'Thou' and 'Thy' – drawn from the King James Version (KJV) of the bible, locally held to be the only properly reverential manner in which to address God. Gamrie prayer, then, had its own 'hallowed language' (Mauss 2003: 33).

This practice emerges from within the (somewhat disparate) 'King James Only' movement (cf. Malley 2004: 56-61), advocates of which state that the KJV of 1611 is the most accurate English translation of the bible, and, by God's divine providence and preservation, contains no translational errors and requires no improvements. In Gamrie, the KJV was used exclusively by the FPCU and Open Brethren, and was well known and widely used by members of Braehead and the Kirk. Only Gamrie's three Closed Brethren assemblies insisted on using the Darby Translation, a different but similarly archaic version, while nonetheless still affirming the accuracy of the KJV. Gilbert's own congregation had strong links with leading 'King James Only' organisation, the Trinitarian Bible Society, whose itinerant preachers publicly proclaim that all modern English translations are corrupt and of satanic origin (cf. Malley 2004: 58).

It is within the context of this 'social tradition' that King James English has become the 'hallowed language' of Gamrie prayer. Clearly, this complicates any claims about the

relationship between spontaneity and sincerity we may wish to make (cf. Haynes, this issue). In Gamrie prayer, agency is enacted through the take-up of locally structured models for appropriately reverential communication with the divine. These forms of communication themselves shape local categories of personhood, while also assigning them their emotional tenor. Here, language, emotion and religious ritual co-constitute each other, as do the structuring forces of social tradition and the agentive forces of free individual expression. With this in mind, let us now turn to consider the content of the social categories that framed Gamrie prayer.

### **Categories of Personhood in Gamrie**

The prayers of Gamrie's Christians (those Gilbert refers to as 'the righteous') are marked by their engagement with several different emic categories of personhood. I have already mentioned one, namely *God* (Gilbert's 'Heavenly Father'). Part of the social work of prayer in Gamrie, then, is to maintain the intimate transcendence of this 'fictive kinship' between God and 'His people'. In this relationship, it is the Christian self and community who collectively make up the ranks of 'the saved'. Thus, while some of my elderly Christian informants did worry about the veracity of the 'conversion experience' of some of Gamrie's youth who had made 'professions of born again faith' at Pentecostal youth rallies in the past (cf. Coleman 2013), generally speaking, the category of 'the saved' was marked by strong fixity. Indeed, anxieties about whether or not a young person had 'lost their salvation' (or was never

'genuinely converted' in the first instance) were only occasionally voiced, largely because the dominant ecclesial trend in Gamrie was not from Brethrenism to Pentecostalism, but from Brethrenism to attendance at no place of worship. Those left faithfully attending the mid-week meetings, while locally recognised as 'real prayer warriors', were growing old (cf. Naumescu 2013).

Contrary to the stereotype of Protestant soteriology as highly individualist, in Gamrie, prayers concerning salvation were not principally focused upon God and His ('saved') people, but were offered *relationally* (cf. Bielo 2012, Daswani 2011), on behalf of the 'unsaved' other, located either within the family, the village, the nation or the world. Each of these four categories of relatedness carried with it a different affective quality: (i) gratitude toward one's God; (ii) anguish for one's family; (iii) resentment toward one's village and; (iv) resignation for one's nation. While I comment on each of these categories, my focus is upon horizontal (human-to-human) sociality, and thus upon the latter three categories of personhood, which made up the ranks of the 'unsaved'. Despite being spiritually united by their collective lack of salvation, these groups remained distinguishable from each other due to their *increasing relational distance from the saved personhood of those who interceded on their behalf*.

## **Eleanor's Prayer**

Eleanor, a woman in her sixties from Northern Ireland, was a member of Gamrie's FPCU and the wife of a farmer who had sold up his holdings in Ulster to buy a much larger farm in Aberdeenshire. Eleanor's prayers were particularly moving because of the depth of sorrow they expressed. Frequently, her tearful prayers gave way to speechless weeping as she pleaded for the salvation of those 'still outside of Christ'. Her prayers were especially pained, I think, because of the physical separation she felt from 'unsaved family' in Ulster.

Oh, dear Father God, we would cry unto Thee, Lord. We remember especially, Lord, those still outside of Christ. We do pray for them tonight. Lord, Thou knowest each and every one of them, and we do pray that Thou would deal with their never dying souls.

Oh Lord, we do cry, especially for a generation that seems to be growing up heedless and careless of the things of Thyself. Lord, we do know that in a twinkling of an eye, they could be cut off from the seam of time. Oh Lord, we do pray that Thou would speak to a rising generation. It seems to be Lord that in our land, spiritual things are just going aside, that even in our schools, everything else comes first, except Thy name.

Remember our land at this time, oh Lord God. Our government seems to be heedless and careless, throwing in rules and regulations – everything to please the unbeliever [while] the Christians are oppressed.

Oh Lord God, we do pray that Thou would make us faithful unto Thyself, to keep Thy word precious, to stand four-square for Thy holy Word. We just look to Thee, for Thou art a great and wonderful God. And we give Thee all the praise and all the glory, in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

### **Steven's Prayer**

Steven was in his seventies and a member of Braehead, one of Gamrie's four Brethren assemblies. The prayers offered at Braehead were very similar to those of Gamrie's other Brethren assemblies, both in terms of their linguistic content and their emotional tone. Steven himself, whose prayers were typical in these respects, was softly spoken, and, like Eleanor, was frequently overcome by grief as he prayed. He seemed particularly to have his teenage grandchildren in mind as he did so.

Our heavenly Father, in our feeble, simple minds, we have to ask of Thee about many things in this world and especially one concerning the never dying soul. We pray for our grandchildren, all of our grandchildren. We commit them into Thy care this night. We pray for precious souls to be saved to Thee, Lord Jesus.

We know that everything is under Thy control Lord. They speak about global warming, but we know Lord, it doesn't matter what they do. Everything is under Thy control, and care and keeping. [We] commit all things [to Thee], looking for Thy coming, Lord Jesus. We ask this in simple faith. Amen.

Clearly, the social and emotional processes that are occurring within these prayers are complex. What I offer by way of analysis is not meant to be a complete account, nor is it given as a fixed schema that denies the possibility of categories bleeding into each other. It is offered, rather, in the spirit of a Weberian ideal type, as a way of saying *something* about social complexity, as opposed to the more accurate but less illuminating alternative of saying *nothing*.

### **Gratitude to God for Salvation**

Gamrie's elderly Christians not only understood themselves to be a part of God's 'saved people', but also, increasingly, as part of His small and ever shrinking 'faithful remnant'.

These sentiments of being on God's side also entailed the corollary, namely that God was on their side. Hence why Gilbert could pray: "*Heavenly Father we do thank Thee for a sense of Thy presence with us... We thank Thee that the ear of God is opened unto the prayer of the righteous*". This sense of being included within 'the righteous' stemmed from my informants sense of themselves as undeserving recipients of, in Gilbert's words, "*great mercy and grace*".

Eleanor echoed this same notion of precarious righteousness when she prayed to God to “*make us faithful unto Thyself*”, verbalising the heavy sense of innate moral depravity that was so central to my informants understanding of their human nature and thus their standing in relation to God. This was a constant worry for my informants, who interrogated their own thoughts and actions in an attempt to root out personal sin (cf. Robbins 2004). My informants went to the length of praying that God would reveal to them sins in their lives that they were unaware of – and because ignorance did not negate culpability, prayers for such revelation were also always prayers for forgiveness.

Thus, my informant’s experience of salvation as fixed did not preclude the possibility of ‘backsliding’, a withdrawal of God’s ‘blessing’, or the arrival of divinely appointed ‘trial’. For Eleanor, as for Gilbert and Steven, all these experiences were framed by expressions of adoration – “*Thou art a great and wonderful God. We give Thee all the praise and all the glory*”. My informants explained to me that the more they aged as Christians, the deeper their gratitude to God grew – and this, they said, was in direct proportion to their realisation of the depth the forgiveness shown to them by God. ‘He who has been forgiven much, loves much’ was a popular Biblical sentiment used locally to express this particular emotion.

Yet, the fundamental stability of vertical human-divine ‘fictive kinship’ was always affirmed in prayer. On this point, Steven prays with marked assurance, replacing self-doubt (cf.

Engelke 2005) with certainty in the Divine: *“everything is under Thy control. We commit all things to Thee, looking for Thy coming”*. These final words were of immense importance locally, for they contained a double-edged certainty that was joyous, and, at the same time, painful for my informants. The ‘coming’ Steven speaks of here is the ‘Second Coming’ of Christ; a coming which will finally separate Gamrie’s Christians (‘the saved’) from all those who have not received God’s *“great mercy and grace”* (‘the unsaved’). And it is this recognition that helps us to understand the strongest emotion within Gamrie prayer – anguish for one’s family.

### **Anguish for the family**

Gamrie’s prayer meetings were mostly attended by the elderly. Heartbroken grandparents who wept for their unsaved family prayed mainly for their grandchildren who were pitied for having no strong example of Christian leadership in the home. Think here of Eleanor’s prayer: *“Oh Lord, we do cry, especially for a generation that seems to be growing up heedless and careless of the things of Thyself”*. Gamrie’s elderly committed Christian parents had all but given up on their own children ‘converting’ since those in their middle age were seen as having already made a conscious decision to ‘reject Christ’. Here we see a break with

the traditional Calvinist theology of Scots-Presbyterianism – whereby ‘the elect’ are ‘predestined’ to ‘receive salvation’ – and the concomitant uptake of Arminian theologies now dominant among some Brethren groups, which instead emphasise human agency. Thus, Gilbert seemed to speak for all his fellow congregants that night when he prayed: *“Oh Father, our hearts are sad when we see so little interest in them concerning spiritual matters”*.

Because of this perceived lack of spiritual interest among the village’s young and middle aged adults, my elderly Christian informants had shifted their prayerful evangelism onto their grandchildren, who were ‘the future of the church’. Some grandparents went as far as bringing their grandchildren along to church in the absence of their parents. Generally, only the youngest children in the village – those too small to have the desire or means to resist the pious intentions of their grandparents – attended church in this way. And while the Church of Scotland Sunday School attracted solid numbers, with around 30 in regular attendance, several of the older Christians who volunteered to teach these children told me that many of their (young, non-church attending) parents brought them along to the mid-afternoon classes simply as a matter of free childcare.

Steven’s emotional request was made plainly: *“We pray for... [Voice breaks] our grandchildren. [Pause] All of our grandchildren. We pray for precious souls to be saved”*.

These were not the souls of some imagined and far off ‘heathen’, but the painfully close souls

of young family members deemed too immature to fully understand the gravity of the spiritual decision that faced them. Yet, what most pained my informants was their certainty that spiritual immaturity would not delay the soon to arrive apocalypse. Thus Eleanor prayed: *“Lord, we know that in a twinkling of an eye, they could be cut off from the seam of time”*.

Whether this severance occurred through natural death or eschatological judgement mattered little, for the effect was held to be the same: eternal damnation of the *“never dying soul”*. This local eschatological knowledge that Christ would soon return in judgement to take ‘the righteous’ into heaven and cast ‘the wicked’ into hell was always also a form of action, being bound up with acts of public weeping and acts of evangelism. Weeping in front of ‘the unsaved’, while giving testimony or preaching, was one such evangelistic act; an act that sought to emotionally move the hearer to ‘accept Jesus as their personal saviour’. Weeping in prayer in the absence of the ‘unsaved’ subject likewise sought to bring about a kind of emotional response, in this case within the heart of God, to act salvifically by blessing the preaching of ‘The Word’ and the ‘witness’ of ‘His people’.

Yet, connected to this powerful apocalyptic ‘mood’ and ‘motivation’, is the way in which anguished weeping for ‘unsaved’ family during public prayer, even when done in their absence, still remained, as Mauss recognised, as an individually agentive and eminently social act that occurred between ‘saved’ and ‘unsaved’ persons. Such prayers were imagined

to be causally active by bringing people *into* church and *under* 'The Word'. Praying for the salvation of loved ones was also said, as a result of providential 'Godincidence' (Webster 2013b), to create evangelistic opportunities within everyday life – at home; in the village shop; at the harbour – to communicate the immediate imperative of being 'born again'.

To this end, the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Matthew 25) – where those unprepared for the coming of the bridegroom are shut out of the wedding feast with the words 'I know you not' – was a particularly apt and much preached and prayed about passage of scripture. The assumption that, as with the foolish virgins, many of Gamrie's children and grandchildren would be 'shut out' of heaven because they are unprepared for the coming of Christ was understood by my informants to be a terrible truth that drove them (literally) to their knees to pray that '*precious souls to be saved to Thee, Lord Jesus*'. Such was the anguish of praying for 'household salvation'.

### **Resentment for the village**

What of *resentment* for one's village? Note how Gilbert prays for Gamrie by referring to it as "*this corner of Thy vineyard, once greatly blessed*". Gilbert here is drawing upon a well-established local narrative that posits coastal Aberdeenshire as a once devout but now sinful

land, sullied by the arrival of 'English incomers' and other irreligious types. During times of intercession, I often heard prayers for the salvation of 'the strangers in our village'. These prayers were always tinged with a resentment reserved for outsiders who transgressed Gamrie's social and moral codes. The emotion of these prayers was most noticeable in their being punctuated by heavy sighs. These disapproving noises were also frequently affirmed around the room by others who might silently shake their head, tut, or murmur in agreement to signal that they too had witnessed such transgressions.

Several such groups were mentioned by my Christian informants – both in prayer and in gossip – the most visible being a group of bikers, some of whom had taken up residence in the village. Their reputation for being 'druggies' and 'rebels' preceded them, a stereotype that was amply reinforced by their attire – leather jackets, piercings, tattoos, heavy rings and hefty boots – and by their fondness for timing their thunderous, exhaust-roaring descent down the brae to coincide with Sunday morning church services.

A community of artists had also formed in Gamrie's Seatown, nestled among holiday home owners and other 'English incomers'. These relatively wealthy retirees led a lifestyle that was markedly different from their local Christian agemates; the stereotype – painting, drinking wine, never attending church – was not one of wanton rebellion against, but thoughtless

disinterest in, Gamrie's religious mores. The arrival of incomer children had also brought change to local schools, where, as Eleanor prayed, "*everything else comes first, except Thy name*" – a change that was said to further undermine the assumption held by older Gamrics that attending Sunday school was just as important as attending primary school.

Praying for "*this corner of Thy vineyard*" generally meant praying for these transgressive 'strangers', and, by extension, for the soul of the village – a place that was once but no longer "*greatly blessed*". This decline in Gamrie's spiritual fortunes was also imagined to entail a decline in the social and economic foundations of the village. Gamrie's shops were closing, the school roll was falling, local families were moving away as skippers berthed their boats in nearby towns, and young men were leaving the trawlers to work on the oil rigs. Rumours of drug use and petty crime in Gamrie, as well as a general perception that the atmosphere and appearance of the village had deteriorated, meant that, according to many of my informants, Gamrie was 'like a foreign land these days'. The village was often described with marked bitterness as a place 'full of unknown faces' who lived in the village but who nonetheless remained aloof, unfriendly and removed from the lives of locals, most especially as experienced on the boats and in the prayer halls (cf. Nadel 1986).

The bitterness of this disconnect appeared mutual, with incomers of all 'types' agreeing that local Gamrics had not made them welcome in the village; the fishers, they said, were tribal

and insular, being unwilling to accept anyone from 'the outside'. Nadel's (1984) study of Ferryden, a comparable (Presbyterian) fishing community south of Aberdeen makes almost identical observations. In Ferryden, sentiments of resentment were a major emotional driving force in the community, understood as a product of a clash between 'fisher' and 'town' identities. Yet, while such occupational and residential clashes were present in Gamrie, for my elderly Christian informants, it was a loss of religious 'blessing' – imagined to coincide with the arrival of 'strangers' who neither noticed nor mourned the spiritual changes they had wrought – that most underpinned the resentful tone their prayers.

### **Resignation for the Nation**

And what of *resignation* for one's nation? Here, the prayers of Gamrie's Christians were less equivocal. "*In our land, spiritual things are just going aside*" Eleanor said with disappointment but no sense of surprise. The problem, locally understood, was that Scotland was once known as 'the Land of The Book', but was now "*turning away*" from God and the Bible. "*The fundamentals are being cast aside*" Gilbert lamented. The "*evil days*" he prayed about, as characterised by a "*departure from [God's] truth*", were, I was told, clearly prophesied in scripture. This helps explain Eleanor's lack of alarm about the government

*“throwing in rules and regulations... to please the unbeliever”*. For Gamrie’s Christians, this national decline into godlessness was an unstoppable eschatological imperative.

The incoming tide of moral degradation my informants believed was engulfing Scotland, was, empirically speaking, the stuff of newspapers headlines. Proposals to allow gay clergy to work within the Church of Scotland, fears about militant Islam, changes to EU fisheries policy, demographic trends toward increasing secularisation – these were the social, political and economic processes that evidenced the soon to arrive apocalypse. Such ‘signs’ were the topic of many prayers, which generally petitioned God to spare Gamrie – and to a lesser extent Scotland – from the worst effects of this pollution. Thus, while Eleanor’s plea for God to *“remember our land at this time”* was given in a pensive spirit of concern, her words need also to be related to Steven’s more resigned prayer about global warming: *“They speak about global warming, but we know Lord, it doesn’t matter what they do”*. Odd as this sudden switch in topic may seem, what Steven is commenting on here concerns not so much the specificities of climate change, but rather more general questions of agency (Webster 2013c). Who acts, and with what effects?

While in Gamrie cosmology, it was not humans, but God and the devil, who acted with ultimate agentive force, Gamrie’s Christians still acted with their own ‘eschatological agency’ in a range of different ways. These agentive efforts were often focused upon local Christian

Zionist fascinations with the state of Israel. Prayers for Israel called for God to 'bless', 'protect' and 'revive' His 'chosen people', politically, economically, and spiritually. At such moments, Gamrie's prayer meetings became expectant, even animated, as my informants eagerly anticipated the 'conversion of Israel', and thus, according to local theology, the end of the world.

Yet, these hopeful prayers offered for the benefit of a distant geo-political entity contrasted strongly with the resigned tone of prayers which referred to Scotland. While many similar issues were prayed about – upcoming elections, the recession, Islamic extremism – the words spoken contained nothing of the confidence or optimism that characterised my informants prayers for Israel. Speculating about the reasons for this difference is difficult, especially if one seeks to push beyond common sense notions of how significant social and geographical distance encourages the (in this case Israeli Jewish) 'other' to be viewed as both exotic and non-threatening. Clearly, the same orientalising tendency cannot be said to apply to prayers for Scotland, whose national 'immorality' was experienced as all too close and familiar. Thus, while my informants did ask God to "*remember*" Scotland, such requests were always held within the two-fold realisation that "*everything is under Thy control*" and that the world, in any case, will soon be judged by divine fire from heaven (see also Webster 2013c).

Such judgement, I was told, would be particularly severe for Scotland – a nation that had 'turned its back on God'. Scotland, as far as my informants were concerned, had had its

chance; its best days were behind it and God's presence and blessing had departed. With Scottish Christianity regarded as having been "*cast aside*" by the nation's leaders, my informants' reaction was to cast Scotland aside, which many did, for example, by not voting as a matter of conscience. Such was the extent of resignation for one's nation.

## **Conclusion**

Prayers for family, village and nation were united by a shared soteriology, yet differentiated by the social and emotional relationships they set up. In Gamrie, these asymmetrical relationships may be mapped by treating prayers as the product of collective thoughts, feelings, and actions – things which cannot easily be separated. Thinking of one's grandchildren eternally trapped in hell (a), feeling intense sorrow (b), and acting by publicly praying through sobbing tears for God's salvific intervention (c) – these do not appear to run in straight lines of causality. Yet this fact does not seem to pose much of a problem anthropologically. Taking Mauss' lead, what matters most is that anthropologists look at how (a), (b), and (c) are shared – how they are socially operationalised and collectively experienced.

Thus, 'instead of seeing in *individual* prayer the principle behind *collective* prayer, we are making the latter the principle behind the former' (Mauss 2003: 36). In Gamrie, this primacy

of collective prayer was seen in the fact that participation at mid-week prayers meetings, just as much as participation in communion, marked one out as a committed 'born again' member of 'the saved'. Importantly, this dual classification of persons did not exist separately from acts of prayer, but was instead brought into existence *through* prayer. This was the case insofar as the existence of 'the saved' and 'the unsaved' were ritually reconstituted at every midweek prayer meeting. Here, it was 'the saved' who pleaded on behalf of 'the unsaved'; they were 'righteous' because they *spoke* – in prayer – to a God whose ear was opened unto their cry. 'The unsaved', in contrast, neither spoke nor were listened to; they were constructed and reconstructed in weekly prayer meetings, not as fully agentic persons, but as religiously mute partial subjects (or perhaps even partial objects), as held within the linguistic and emotional projects of those who spoke, that is, of those who *prayed*.

Gamrie religion is indeed a 'book religion' (Weber 1978: 351), yet it is also a religion of prayer. What both of these elements (bibles and prayers) share is a logocentrism that prioritises language in all aspects of its practice – in reading scripture, in uttering prayers, in preaching, singing hymns, 'witnessing', and identifying 'signs of the end times'. In attempting to highlight the affective dynamics of this collective relatedness, I have intentionally echoed Mauss' exegetical treatment of prayer. Where this frames prayer as little more than a text to be explained, other aspects of intercession, such as its embodied character, are ignored.

Such a realisation, however, should not encourage anthropology to step outside of language, but to step into it, that is, to step into the embodied and material aspects of speaking and listening, of bowing one's head and closing one's eyes, of weeping and wiping away tears. Paying close attention to the *interplay* between word and body – through the expression of emotion – may be one way to balance this equation (Webster 2013a: 107. See also Asad 1993, Bialecki and Hoenes de Pinal 2011, Luhrmann 2004, 2012). The result, with much more work, would be a near complete map of relatedness, inclusive not only of family, village, and nation, but of all that Gamrie prayer claims to exert influence over, namely God and the devil, sinners and the saved, and the linguistic and material cosmos they collectively inhabit, both in the here and the hereafter.

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