Development of prayer in children

Rozwój modlitwy u dzieci

Summary
The present study was designed to address the following research question: how does the development of prayer happen in childhood? The study presents specificity of prayer from infancy to late childhood. At every stage, prayer takes on a different form, however, the same characteristics can appear in neighboring or more distant phases. Features of more mature religiosity can disappear temporarily or permanently. Nonetheless, the development of prayer is not sudden, but continuous and smooth. The same form of prayer sometimes occurs in different development periods and its new manifestations are formed in a specific period. Sometimes one form of prayer is maintained while new ones are being created.

Streszczenie
Prezentowany artykuł stanowi próbę udzielenia odpowiedzi na pytanie: jak przebiega rozwój modlitwy dziecka? W pracy przedstawiono rozwój modlitwy od okresu niemowlęcego do późnego dzieciństwa. Na każdym etapie modlitwa przyjmuje inną formę, jednak te same cechy mogą pojawiać się w sąsiednich lub bardziej odległych fazach. Cechy oznaczające bardziej dojrzłą religijność mogą zaniknąć czasowo, jak i na stałe. Niemniej jednak rozwój modlitwy nie jest nagły, ale stopniowy i występuje w sposób płynny. Ta sama forma modlitwy niekiedy występuje w różnych okresach rozwojowych, jak również kształtują się nowe jej przejawy, specyficzne dla danego okresu.

Keywords: development of prayer, infancy, early (2-3), middle (3-6), late (7-11/12) childhood
Słowa kluczowe: rozwój, rozwój modlitwy, okres niemowlęcy, wczesne dzieciństwo (2-3 r.ż.) średnie dzieciństwo (3-6), późne dzieciństwo (7-11/12)
Introduction

The issue of religiosity awakens constantly greater interest among researchers. In the framework of this research, the issue of prayer is also undertaken in this field. It comprises the subject of interest for many academic disciplines. Prayer, being a complex phenomenon, includes many aspects (Kulpaczyński, Tatala, 2000; Spilka, Ladd, 2013; Kostrubiec-Wojtachnio, Tatala, 2014; Walesa, 2016; Rydz, Walesa, Tatala, 2017; Zarzycka, 2017).

Prayer takes place in the contact of the personal relationship between man and God. This dialogue is a religious act by nature, however, it is based on psychological conditionings, which are different at particular levels of human development. This is why psychology created its own definition of prayer. On the one hand, the activity of a dynamic human spirit is included, as well as its maturity and sacrum. Nonetheless, on the other, prayer is interpreted as an escape from the real world (Tatala, 2002).

Developmental psychology distinguishes within a person’s ontogenesis several periods of religious development. Prayer is regarded as a component of religiosity. In the development of a positive relationship with God, people progress from the pre-religious period (up to about 15 months of age), through the period of first manifestations of religiosity (2–3 years of age), the period of so-called magical religiosity (from 3.5 to 6.5 years of age) and authoritarian-legal religiosity (from about 7 to 11 years of age) (Walesa, 2005, p. 137–280).

Although at each of these stages prayer assumes a slightly different form, the same aspects of prayer may occur in several neighboring, or even more distant developmental periods. Features indicating more mature religiosity may disappear temporarily or even permanently. However, the development of prayer does not happen during a sudden transformation from one form to another. It is a gradual and unstable process. Sometimes, one form of prayer is still retained, while others are just beginning to develop. Child prayer is expressed through mental processes e.g. cognition, action. Sometimes mental states are also present, for instance happiness, sorrow, hope, trust (Walesa, Tatala, Rydz, 2017).

This study is an attempt to answer the question of how prayer develops in children according to age, as well as determines which psychological factors favor this development and which hinder it. In order to respond to a research problem stated in this way, we are going to analyze the development of prayer from infancy to late childhood.
Prerequisites of prayer at infancy

It is characteristic that as an infant, the child relates to its environment by means of ostensive communication. It involves paying attention to objects in the environment and distinguishing them by means of gestures. Through gestures, the child distinguishes the objects and events in the world surrounding it. For example, a clenched fist put to the child’s ear represents the situation of making a phone call (Vasta, Haith, Miller, 1992). Gestures are used by the child in the communication process and fulfill a significant role in the development of its language. For instance, a general excitation of a baby, its increased mobility signifies longing for attention. The hands stretched out to the mother is the first, clear sign of the need for contact. At about 12 months of age, the child starts to link gestures with words. This is called labeling objects and events with gestures, and precedes labeling them with words (Kielar-Turska, Białecka-Pikul, 2000). On the basis of communication through the use of gestures, the first basic schemes of bonding with God are formed in the child, for example, the gesture of joined hands signifies praying (Walesa, 2005, p. 130–132).

Gestures are accompanied by a wealth of mimicry, as well as imitating the behavior of adults. The child copies some activities performed by people from its environment. Not only can it mimic the behavior of adults, but also imitate their mimicry and manners. At first, the child performs gestures involuntarily, inaccurately, selectively, and as it develops, its gestures are more and more conscious and accurate. Taking “first steps” in prayer development is also based on the mechanism of such natural imitation. The child’s mimicry expresses their feelings towards other people. Moreover, to some extent, involvement in “religious experiences” are revealed. Walesa points out two types of behaviors which are a form of preparation for religious relationship. These are the ability to concentrate on religious symbols and performative behaviors, which include single gestures and active participation in both prayer and singing with adults.

In the discussed period of its life, the child reveals quasi-religious types of behavior, among which there are several cognitive responses. For example, when the parents ask the child: “Where is God?”2, an infant as young as 8 months of age directs its eyes to a picture, cross, figure, etc., or points at one of these with its hand. It has been noticed that some infants exhibit a change of expression during eye contact with the devotional objects in the house. A slightly older baby (of 9–10 months) responds to the request: “Do amen” by joining their hands in an awkward way, while a child of 11–12 months can sometimes utter the word

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1 Among these are indicating and representing gestures. The indicating gestures occur between the 9th and 13th month of the child’s life and refer to orientation in the world of objects. The representing gestures begin to form from at about 14 months of age.

2 The presented accounts of children come from participative observation and their mothers’ diaries. The empirical material was presented as examples of research experience.
“amen”. The infant’s active speech consists of merely several two-syllable words. It includes the names of a few persons from the child’s environment, objects, parts of the body. In families where religious life is regarded as significant, the child’s language is supplemented by religious words of easy articulation, such as “God”, “bye-bye, God”; and the child usually deforms the uttered words (Walesa, Tatala, Rydz, 2017).

It can be stated that actual prayer is just beginning to develop in the period under discussion, although, according to Walesa (2005), the infant’s conditioned reflex response, which indicates the religious symbol at the word “God” can be perceived and interpreted as a certain kind of concentration and solemnity, typical of praying adults.

Even though in some infants quasi-religious kinds of behavior are absent, this does not prevent the development of their faith when they get older. Nevertheless, training the child in praying from the first months of its life is a significant departure for the formation of more and more mature prayer. Moreover, the influence of both faith and attitude of the parents on forming the ability to pray is worth noticing. First and foremost, prayer concerns only the parents, whereas the child takes part in it only by participating in the life of adults (Walesa, Tatala, Rydz, 2017).

Development of prayer in the early childhood

Between the first and second year of life, the child’s proper speech develops. Understanding speech comes a few months earlier than using it (Walesa, 2005). The child communicates with others by means of establishing verbal contact with them. The fact that the child has already mastered the skill of using the language makes him more susceptible to influence, i.e. the child obeys requests and orders. This makes it easier to manage them and form desirable behavioral habits.

A two-year old uses words without great precision, deforming them phonetically. Initially, their messages are holophrases (one-word utterances). Next, the child starts to create two-word structures, without applying grammatical rules (e.g. Mum, dolly, meaning: Mum, I want a doll). At this age, the expressive and impressive functions of speech dominate the development (expressing experiences and emotions, as well as influencing the listener, or the environment) (cf. Kielar-Turska, Białecka-Pikul, 2000).

A two-year old, having mastered the most basic vocabulary and some syntax, repeats short prayers after the mother. Although they do not understand the meaning, they comprehend the general sense of it. The example, prayer in this phase is making the sign of the cross, as a combination of gesture and words occurs. It is also a direct continuation of hands folding and saying the word “Amen” (Walesa, 2005).
A three-year old usually pronounces words without phonetic deformations and builds sentences in compliance with grammatical rules. On average, they contain 3–4 words, though sometimes syntactic structures of several elements can also occur. By the end of the 3rd year of life, the child’s vocabulary has already been differentiated into parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc.), which reflect various categories of reality. The utterances are of strong emotional coloring. At the beginning of pre-school age, the child can already construct all types of sentences (simple and complex sentences, declaratives, interrogatives, imperatives), in the native language, in accordance with grammatical rules.

In the period under discussion, two phases of religiosity can be distinguished: “after mother” religiosity (2 years of age), and the beginnings of individual religiosity (3 years of age). A two-year old usually prays “imitatively”, that is, they repeat, (usually after the mother), simple religious expressions, such as “amen” or “alleluia”. The child cannot carry on a dialogue with God in an individualized manner. A three-year old child, being brought up in a religious family, acquires their first religious terms: God, Jesus, Mother of God, angel, church, prayer, cross. They can also focus spontaneously and for a short period, with the result that in favorable conditions they can begin to experience independent prayer. These prayers are most often requests and thanksgiving, conditioned by situations, events, and impressions, e.g. “Dear God, can I have a good time, please”, “Good Lord, thank you for breakfast” (Walesa, 2005, p. 154–162).

Imitating the adults, children address God, angels and saints when they pray, often using diminutives. They are convinced that it is necessary to ask selected saints for specific things, e.g., when a favourite ball was lost, Saint Anthony should be asked for help. If the cult of a particular saint or angel is practiced at home, the child most often directs requests to them, as well as gives thanks if those requests were answered (Tatala, 2002).

In some external and internal situations, the child receives signals from God, saints and angels. For example, during adoration and certain liturgies, e.g. the Resurrection. It also happens that the child receives such signals at home, e.g. before falling asleep. The child’s prayer is essentially aware, although not all of its components are understandable by the child. There are, however, unconscious components too, sometimes similar to dreams (Walesa, 2005).

Three year old children understand prayer in their own, specific way, distinguish it from among other activities, remember the formula in prayers, sometimes pray independently, and even creatively. Gradually they spontaneously begin to arrange words into their own, simple prayers. If a child is not urged by their parents to recite prayers, especially in front of strangers, they sometimes look for quiet places, because they want to be seen and heard only by God. What is more, in the development of prayer, the active creativity factor with strong emo-

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3 All the utterances quoted in this paper come from members of families where prayer has been regarded as a significant value since the earliest moments of a child’s life.
tional hues appears. Therefore, scenes from the Scriptures, which evoke strong emotions, such as the Passion of Christ, should be presented to a young child in a schematic and softened way, to prevent them from intruding into their imagination and from discouraging them from prayer (Walesa, 2005).

The dynamic development of speech, which beings in the 2nd–3rd year of the child’s life, introduces a few language difficulties, resulting from the fact that he has not yet sufficiently mastered the rules of using the language. The most frequently encountered problems are, among others: hyper-generalizations and hypo-generalizations (cf. Vasta et al., 1992).

Hyper-generalizations involve using newly learned words in too broad a sense, when the child refers to things whose names they do not know yet (e.g. the child uses the word “doggie” to designate a cat, a fox, a rabbit, and many other animals; “bread” means everything that can be eaten; a painting, a cross, and other religious symbols are “God” for the child. What is reflected by hyper-generalizations is the poor range of vocabulary, rather than lack of understanding words. Although the child gives the collective name “God” to a crucifix, a figure of the Holy Mother, or a holy medal, they quite easily recognize and distinguish the objects of worship when asked to indicate them. The problem is not that the child mistakes, for example, a crucifix for a holy medallion, but that they do not know special vocabulary. Mothers play an extremely important role in the children’s learning process, as they correct mistakes and teach their child the proper names of objects which have been subjected to hyper-generalization. That is how children become acquainted with appropriate names (cf. Callaghan, 1999).

Hypo-generalizations are less common in speech than hyper-generalizations. However, they occur more often in the reasoning process. They involve narrow applications of certain names. For instance, when the child has learned the name “bird”, they apply it to swallows, sparrows, pigeons and other birds known to them. However, they will not call a hen, a turkey, or an ostrich “a bird”, because they do not suit the child’s stereotype of a bird. Moreover, it is possible that the child has never seen these animals. A hypo-generalizing child will identify Jesus with the one hanging on the cross in their bedroom, but they will not recognize the Lord Jesus in the figure that they could see in some other flat, for example at their friend’s, because of different shape, color, size and artistic expression of the crucifix (Tatala, 2002).

It is the parents who should take care of adding variety to a child’s prayers (request, thanksgiving, glory, apology). This, however, does not mean that all kinds of prayer need to be found in one meeting with God. Gradually, in accordance with general rules of child development, it is advisable to enrich prayer. Moreover, development of both speech and thinking affects the intellectual curiosity which is expressed in an increasing number of questions. At first, inquiries are very matter-of-fact and concern animals, objects, machines. Then, the child is more and more interested in causes and effects of the existence of particular

Development of prayer during middle childhood

A preschooler masters new cognitive and language skills. They become less dependent on the immediate situation, i.e. on external factors in their thinking. Viewing-kinetic thinking (typical of early childhood) gives way to viewing-graphic thinking, which is based on images. Children gradually learn the rules of grammar and broaden their vocabulary, which leads to fluent use of colloquial speech and makes communicating with the environment easier. What is characteristic of this notional development is progressing from simple forms to more complex ones and to the forms which are hierarchically ordered, as well as from general to detailed ones. According to Clark (1995), up to the end of pre-school age, children master on average 9–10 words a day. Speech slowly begins to control the child’s activities and is more than a phenomenon accompanying actions. This direction of language development is manifested through gradual disappearance of fully articulated speech, that is loudly talking to oneself, and through the occurrence of internal speech. The child broadens vocabulary range and creates many neologisms. They reveal the ability to make up new words by analogy to the ones they already know, broadening individual (active and passive) vocabulary. However, the tendency to create new words spontaneously disappears after the child reaches their 5th year of age (Walesa, 2005, 185–197).

The child also masters narrative skills and improves ability to enter into conversation. They learn expressions which allow establishing and maintaining interaction. Overcoming egocentrism, they slowly learn to take into consideration the recipient’s point of view. They also focus more while listening and analyze partner’s utterances, although they are not always able to find significant information in them (cf. Tatala, Mach, 2014).

The development of speech stimulates the child’s growing cognitive curiosity. This makes them generate more and more questions. A tendency to ask questions increases with age, and reaches its peak between 4 and 5 years of age, so this period is sometimes called “the age of questions”. The queries usually concern the basic aspects of reality: objects, phenomena, events. Among them, the important ones are the so-called heuristic questions, through which the child explains and arranges knowledge of the world (Kielar-Turska, 2000). They also concern the religious matters and then they assume the form of interrogatives, such as, for instance: “How old is Our Lady?” , “And where did God come from?”, “Where is heaven?” , “Where does God live?” , etc. (Walesa, 2005).

When the child has mastered speech, time perspective broadens. This makes it possible for them to recall the past phenomena and events (the child has kept their
images in memory). The images, events and situations which were accompanied by strong emotions, both positive and negative, are usually recorded in the child's memory (Bamford, Lagattuta, 2010).

Thanks to lexicon enrichment, the child also expresses himself better in meetings with God. Prayer becomes a comfortable and amiable conversation. At this point Leist (1971) stresses the fact that prayer development may sometimes be impeded by putting excessive pressure on memorizing short, rhymed prayers which make it harder for the child to connect with God personally.

The child prays for very serious things, for example when there is a threat to their brother’s or sister’s life, but also for such unimportant matters, as, for example, to ask God to make the child enjoy the dinner she or he is eating. A prayer for a good meal may assume the form of the following formula: “so that we can always have something to eat and so that I may enjoy my meals today”. (For example, after the child swallowed a few spoonfuls of soup, he said desperately: “I have prayed, and I still don’t like it”) (Tatala, 2002).

The form of a preschooler’s prayer depends to a great extent on the features characteristic of their religiosity, reflecting infantile ways of understanding reality. These are, among others: syncretism, egocentrism, animism, anthropomorphism and magical tendencies (Walesa, 2005, p. 174–185).

Syncretism involves global, and yet obscure rendering of a given domain of reality, without differentiating between significant and accidental features. Thus, some insignificant characteristic often produces or evokes a general image in the child’s mind, for example a lamb with a flag or an Easter egg may project upon the whole phenomenon of the Holiday of the Resurrection, without considering its deeper meaning. In a child’s prayer, syncretism is revealed through for example extending the physical act of kneeling for the significance of prayer itself. (The child sometimes understands that making the gesture of kneeling is tantamount to saying a prayer). However, it is obvious that it is not enough to assume the kneeling posture to make prayer happen (Tatala, Walesa, 2004).

Egocentrism is revealed in the little ability to consider any other perspective than one’s own. The child behaves as if everyone else shared their point of view. In the child’s religious life, egocentrism is manifested through a conviction that God exists to feed the child and look after them. The child puts their own needs and whims above all in the centre of their prayer life, treating dialogue with God like placing orders. A four-year old girl expresses this in the following way: “God, please, let me get a bicycle for Christmas.” Similarly, a five-year old boy says: “Lord Jesus, tell my Dad to buy me a car like the one I saw in the shop” (his father was absent during the prayer) (Tatala, Mach, 2014).

Animism is a tendency to attribute the features of life to inanimate objects. The basis for this phenomenon is the child’s aptitude to identify existence with movement. For a preschooler, what moves is alive. Some objects are alive when they are moving, and they are no longer alive when their movement stops.
The child also animates the objects of worship, attributes life to figures of saints, pictures and statues. When they pray in front of the picture of Our Lady, they are convinced that the image of the Virgin Mary can see and hear them. This is frequently caused by the parents’ suggestion that they can be heard by the Holy Mother. The child associates the person of Our Lady not with heaven, but rather with an image they see every day in the picture (Walesa, 2005).

Anthropomorphism involves attributing specifically human features to objects and phenomena. In relation to religiosity, it involves treating God as if He resembled man. A child with a tendency to anthropomorphism sees God as someone similar to their father or mother (including their mental and moral features). The only difference is that God possesses “a bit” greater possibilities than the child’s parents. If a child gets on well with his mother and father, they pray willingly, because they associates God with a good father and a caring mother, who provide safety, a pleasant atmosphere and joy. If, however, the child’s relationship with the parents is disturbed, they may avoid praying (cf. Tatala, Walesa, 2004).

The magical attitude reveals the child's belief in a supernatural power (or powers) which basically acts in accordance with certain rules and which can be used in order to modify reality. Thus, child prayer is then filled with (next to God, Jesus, Mother of God, Guardian Angel) various good spirits, angels and odd, fantastical creatures. With reference to religiosity, the magical attitude is accompanied by the child’s conviction that every time they address God, they will experience an immediate effect of the request. For example the child says the prayer “Hail Maria”, or “Guardian Angel” to make something incredible happen all of a sudden. God seems to be the most important, the strongest, somebody who can make all their wishes come true (Walesa, 2005).

A child who develops in a properly functioning family is basically able to overcome egocentrism and the above listed forms of infantile rendering of reality. This is indicated by what one of the interviewed fathers said about his son. He noticed that the boy was good at observing what is being talked about in the family and that he expressed it during the evening prayers. The fact that the child is a good observer is revealed in his prayers asking God for a little sister. When the boy saw that his mother was not praying for this intention, he asked why she was not asking God for it with him. When he got an evasive answer, he stated that “if mother doesn’t want this, nothing will come out of it” (cf. Tatala, Walesa, 2004).

In the pre-school period the growing child actively participates in the life of the Church. The child takes part in the liturgy of the community, Eucharist, divine services. He is also catechized in kindergarten. The main developmental difficulty connected with a preschooler’s participation in the mass is a lack of ability to concentrate for a longer period of time. A preschooler is kinesthetically active, cannot sit still for a whole hour, can demonstrate boredom and impatience. Although they sometimes join in common prayers, for example the “Our Father” and catchy
songs, yet it is more advantageous for them to take part in a mass for children\textsuperscript{4}. Prayer itself is not a difficulty for a pre-schooler. It is observed that children at this age exhibit commitment and willingness to pray (Walesa, 2005).

**Prayer in late childhood**

In the late childhood (7–11 years of age), especially due to her or his systematic education, communicative skills increase. A child can express and receive almost every form of meaning from every range of the phenomena of everyday life. Thanks to the development of thinking, attention, and empathy, the child becomes more able to assume the perspective of another person, which is reflected in the expression: “I think that’s how they see it.” Children compare the point of view of another person with their own. That is why not only do they declare or state something, they also look for proofs of their opinions and viewpoints. This makes it easier for the child to overcome egocentrism, which, in turn, becomes a basis for complex joint actions, for example cooperation, discussion and games with a set of rules.

In the period under discussion, especially in its first phase (7–9 years of age), the child’s thinking depends on specific contents, manifested in the fact that what happened rather than why it happened was more important for him. Thus, the directly observed events count more than the unobserved intentions. In the second phase (10–11 years of age), in some situations, the child detaches from actual situations and uses their sign (or symbolic) representations. These are the signals of the formation of abstract thinking. The range of notions significantly grows, which leads to their systematization and hierarchical arrangement. The usable and functional definitions (such as: “mother is for preparing dinner”) disappear as more difficult and descriptive definitions appear. In these, descriptions the child includes both significant and insignificant features of people, objects and phenomena. Children also become acquainted with many notions and uses them in conversations, which makes utterances much more understandable for the environment. School plays an invaluable role in forming communicative competence in speech and in writing (Stefańska-Klar, 2000; Walesa, 2005).

At the end of the late childhood years, the child has already developed a quite coherent and integrated cognitive system by means of which she or he renders and organizes reality. Having acquired the skills of analyzing, synthesizing, abstracting, and solving problems, the child more and more bravely enters into extra-familial structures, as well as various informal groups (including religious ones) by assuming various roles in them. Their religiosity (which was thus far

\textsuperscript{4} It should be stressed that masses specially designed for children are especially advisable. However, due to the necessity of creating mature patterns of praying, the child should take part in typical masses with the participation of adults, as his or her development might stop at infantile ways of prayer.
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of an authoritarian – legal type) now becomes personal and “reasonable,” that is, governed by principles based on the authorities of specific persons, as well as the laws of God and the Church. The child prays to satisfy the parents’ wishes, though initially it has an imitative nature. Prayer resembles the prayers of mother, father, and other persons who are important to them. Moreover, motivation becomes the basis of praying. This sometimes makes the child pray longer and with more commitment. Furthermore, participation in the liturgy (especially in the Eucharist) is of extreme importance, considering the fact that it is in this particular period of life when the child takes First Communion. It is an event which significantly influences further pray development. Thanks to First Communion, God, in the person of Jesus, becomes much more personal and realistic during the time of prayer (cf. Walesa, 2005, p. 241–247).

Judging by the emotional expression of the Communion hymns sung by child, a certain dose of fascination, which accompanies the celebrations, can be extrapolated onto the individual prayer. The child still understands God in an anthropomorphic way (a higher form of anthropomorphism – God as the King, the Ruler), but she or he is also aware of the distinct character of sacrum, often crediting God with the feature of spirituality. Prayer comprises actual events, needs and desires. The child sometimes talks to God about matters which she or he does not share with anyone else. The prayer of a child (especially an older one of 11 years of age) goes beyond the things happening “here and now” – they pray for peace in the world and for mutual love between people (Walesa, 2016).

From the age of 7–9, the child is able to distinguish prayer from other everyday events. They cannot, nevertheless, distinguish form over content. Usually they pray at a set time and place, fitting into their parents’ requirements. The dominant theme of prayers is for their wishes to come true and for help in doing things they are unable to do, such as doing homework, passing an exam. There are also requests connected with entering a new peer group: wishes for warm welcome, approval, recognition, position in the group. Children at the age of 10–11 often forget regular meetings with God, for they live in the present, and diverse experiences make them forget the duty of prayer. However, when former contact with God lacked constraint, at the age of 10–11 the child can carry on with prayer (Kulpaczyński, Tatala, 2000).

Ritualism is characteristic of both prayer and the child’s religiosity as far as this developmental period is concerned. The child adopts a whole set of various kinds of external worship behaviors over from the adults who are authorities for him. Moreover, they scrupulously observe those behaviors, as it is his conviction that any deviation in this matter is often equaled to sin (Bamford, Lagattuta, 2010).

As during every developmental stage and including the late childhood, there may occur some factors disturbing prayer. Among these are such expressions like: “the communion of saints”, “of visible and invisible things”, “the fruit of the womb”, which can be used mechanically by a praying child, without going into
their deeper meaning. Such mechanical repeating of unintelligible concepts can make praying an unattractive activity for the child. Another reason for their being reluctant to pray may be the beginning of the phase of realism, typical of this developmental stage, when the most important thing is what can be seen, touched and checked. In order to help the child in this developmental period, difficulties from the phase of realism need to be softened. Adults should wait these types of behavior out, with acceptance and understanding, yet without being passive. They should stimulate the child and patiently explain and dispel all of her or his doubts (Walesa, 2005, p. 258–266).

Conclusion

The presented paper was an attempt to approach the problems of praying in the light of developmental psychology. It focused on the interaction between prayer and its psychological conditionings.

Religiosity, as a personal and positive attitude of man to God, is accomplished throughout pray. From the psychological point of view, depending on the developmental period, this specific contact is conditioned by different factors, whose influence on the form of prayer is marked as early as in the fetal life of an individual. Each stage of human development contributes to successively aiming at achieving the best possible contact with God through prayer. The prayer in early developmental phases should not be treated as worse than the one observed in the later periods. Each of these stages is an indispensable link in the optimal development of prayer. One needs, however, to remember that prayer development does not terminate in young adulthood, but is a constant, permanent process which accompanies people throughout their life.

Prayer – even child prayer – is of autotelic character. It does not happen with the purpose of gaining benefits, its goal is to praise God. However, it unintentionally results in the development of the person praying as well as improving their relationship with other people. Prayer is not exclusive to adults, children can participate in it too. Those who think that children should not be included in prayer, as it is adult domain, are mistaken. Children themselves join in the prayer which happens among believing and loving families. The task of the adults is to sustain this tendency (cf. Rydz, Walesa, Tatala, 2017). In order to shape certain skills e.g. dancing, singing, sports or languages large sums of money are often needed. Prayer is formed in its own right and brings invaluable benefits.

The analyses we have made allow to draw the following conclusions:

1. In the initial phases of her or his development, the child makes use of adult forms of religiosity. Therefore, parents, as first educators, should be aware of their role in creating patterns and climate for prayer in the family and home.
2. When influencing the child in their process of religious education, we should help them to relate everyday experiences with religious ones, and introduce her or him to the contents of prayers.

3. From early stages of development, it is good to form a sense of responsibility for prayer in the child, as well as to motivate her or his efforts in praying and encourage them to tighten their bonds with God.

We invite future research analyze the child’s prayer from the perspective of the structure of religiosity by Walesa (2005).

References


