A Child Given
An Empirical Practical Theological Research on Spirituality with Flemish Heterosexual Couples During the Perinatal Period
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Introduction
- Two passions
- Subject of (this practical-theological) research
  - lived spirituality of ‘ordinary people’ in their daily life and at life’s milestones (‘lived religion’)
    - espoused theology
    - directed towards transformation
    - suggestions for spiritual care

Research Question
- How do Flemish heterosexual couples experience spirituality in the context of the pregnancy, the birth and the early parenting of a child,
- what could these experiences mean for (practical) theology,
- and how could the personal spirituality of (future) parents be supported in this specific context?

Research aims
- Pragmatic: research on experiences of spirituality in the perinatal period with a view to
  - spiritual support to (future) parents
  - increase attention to personal spirituality in the care for (future) parents
- Theoretical: gain deep insights into experiences of spirituality during the perinatal period
  - as a locus for theology
- Focus: ‘human flourishing’ - ‘life-giving spirituality’
Research methodology

"practical-theological method" : praxis-theory-praxis

Osmer: 4 tasks
1. descriptive-empirical task: empirical research with Flemish couples
2. interpretive task: dialogue between own empirical research results and other empirical and theological research insights
3. normative task: life-giving spirituality
4. pragmatic task: suggestions for spiritual and pastoral care

Empirical research method

Qualitative survey research: H. Jansen

Criterion-based sampling
12 heterosexual Flemish couples
1 interested in Christian religion and spirituality

In-depth interviews
- individual and joint interviews

Thematic content analysis

Lived religion and spirituality

Broad and inclusive notion of spirituality
- broader than conventional religious indicators (prayer, church attendance,...)
- every person has a spiritual dimension

Lived religion
- research on 'lived religion' starts from what 'ordinary' people consider to be of a spiritual or religious nature

Empirical research question

3 scheme's = answer to the twofold research question
- On the one hand: how do Flemish men and women experience pregnancy, childbirth and early parenting and in what ways are these experiences related to their spirituality? (scheme 1)
- On the other: what do Flemish parents think of spirituality in general and according to their own experience, (scheme 2)
and how is this reflected in their experiences of pregnancy, childbirth and early parenting? (scheme 3)
Suggestions for spiritual and pastoral care

1. Room for reflection and meaning-making
2. Attention to connectedness and the relational nature of experiences
3. Rituals and other practices
Conclusion: life-giving spirituality?

- A spirituality that is balanced
- A spirituality that can achieve the “right” balance between
  - Positive and negative experiences
  - Opposite attitudes and perceptions
- A spirituality that can endure ambiguity
- A spirituality that can put someone’s heart at rest, that doesn’t make great demands

Thank you!

Questions?