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# PRAYER IN PEASANT COMMUNITIES

IDEALS AND PRACTICES OF PRAYER IN  
THE LATE MEDIEVAL ECCLESIASTICAL  
PROVINCE OF UPPSALA, SWEDEN

INSTITUTIONEN FÖR LITTERATUR, IDÉHISTORIA  
OCH RELIGION, GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET



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# Abstract

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**Title:** Prayer in Peasant Communities: Ideals and Practices of Prayer in the Late Medieval Ecclesiastical Province of Uppsala, Sweden

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The aim of this study has been to identify, explain and delineate praying among peasant communities in the ecclesiastical province of Uppsala, Sweden. Four aspects have been examined through the perspectives of ideals and practices, namely the standards of prayer, devotional prayer, prayer in times of need and prayer cultures. The standards of prayer considered the physical and mental behaviour of the praying peasant woman or man. The most ordinary way to act during prayer was to stand with hands together, palm against palm, and to pray in the vernacular often using mental themes to enhance the devotion. Devotional prayers were foremost the three 'standard' prayers Paternoster, Hail Mary and Apostolic Creed, and could be used separately or combined. Prayer in times of need was possibly considered a matter of praying to saints, something that cannot be proven to have been either practiced or recommended on other, ordinary occasions where God and the Virgin Mary were considered the proper recipients of prayer. A few authentic prayers exist that were possibly said by peasant women and men in connection with miracles and these show the ability to construct elaborate prayers and to propose businesslike agreements with saints. These three prayers were required knowledge for a peasant woman or man and were put to the test in order to become a godparent, and were therefore made available in the vernacular by the parish priests. Ways to maintain the prayer cultures were through mnemonic techniques, and indulgences stipulating and confirming prayers used or to be used in connection with certain churches, days and places within the churches. Name saints could also be used, since the person and the name saint were considered to have a special bond. Prayer could also be used as protection for the living; since a prayer was considered to generate either merits or favours from a celestial patron to his or her client. The prayer life of those belonging to peasant communities was both elaborate and full of nuances.

**Keywords:** prayer, devotion, peasantry, medieval, Middle Ages, laity, practical theology, Church history, theology, Sweden, Finland.