

Give Ear to My Cry: Exploring Prayer and the Bible

A Colloquium of the Loyola Institute (TCD), Trinity Centre for Biblical Studies (TCD)
and the Clough School of Theology and Ministry (BC)

Trinity College Dublin, School of Religion, Theology, and Peace Studies

Friday 9 May 2025

13:00 - 13:55

13:30 - 13:55 – Registration

14:00 - 14:15 – Welcome

14:15 – 15:45 – Session 1 (Chair: Benjamin Wold)

From the Heart? Jacob, Jonah, and the Prayers of Enigmatic Characters

Brad Anderson, Dublin City University, School of Theology, Philosophy and Music

Although readers often assume that prayer in the Bible is something done in earnest and with good intentions, there are examples where the motives or sincerity of the prayer pose challenges for interpreters. This is particularly true when the characters offering the prayers are themselves complex and sometimes ambiguous figures. This paper explores two such examples from the Hebrew Bible, looking at the patriarch Jacob's prayer in Genesis 32 as he prepares for his reunion with his brother Esau, and the prophet Jonah's prayer in Jonah 2 after being swallowed by the great fish. I will explore some of the challenges readers face when attempting to interpret these prayers, particularly in relation to the motives and intents of these characters, and outline some of the ways in which readers through the centuries have dealt with the interpretive challenges related to these prayers.

Attention and Affect: Formation through Prayer in Isaiah 63:15-64:12

Katie Heffelfinger, Church of Ireland Theological Institute/Trinity College Dublin

This paper will combine a lyric-informed poetic interpretive lens with insights from the history of Christian spirituality to the task of articulating the formational impulses of this prayer embedded in the larger poetic context of Isaiah 56-66. It will consider what the prayer's poetics drives the attention of the pray-er towards, how the prayer poetically evokes and invites divine attention, and the ways in which the images and emotional effects of the poetry forge and form affective orientation. Consideration will be given to the ways in which poetic prayer's affective persuasion functions to influence and reorient behaviours as well as beliefs.

15:45 – 16:15 – Break

16:15 – 17:45 – Session 2 (Chair: Angela Kim Harkins)

Jeremiah, the Praying Prophet

Jaime L. Waters, Boston College, Clough School of Theology and Ministry

Jeremiah is sometimes referred to as the Weeping Prophet because of the descriptions of him crying about his suffering and weeping because of the disobedience of the people of Judah. Perhaps Jeremiah, the Praying Prophet, is also an apt epithet. Throughout the book, Jeremiah engages in multiple types of prayers which serve different purposes, such as intercessory and imprecatory prayers and lamentations. Notably, God's reaction to the prophet's prayers is multifaceted. At times, God listens and responds to Jeremiah, but sometimes God rebuffs Jeremiah and even prevents him from praying, e.g., "Do not pray for this people" (Jer 7:16, 11:14). This paper explores the rhetorical function of prayer in Jeremiah, examining how prayer works within the larger theological agenda of the book. This paper also considers ways the book contributes to discussions of prayer within the wider biblical canon.

Praying with Creation in Psalms 96 and 98

Andrew R. Davis, Boston College, Clough School of Theology and Ministry

Nearly every interpreter of Psalms 96 and 98 has noticed their extraordinary depictions of the nonhuman creation as agents of praise and rejoicing. The heavens rejoice, the earth exults, the sea thunders, the fields triumph, the trees shout for joy, rivers clap their hands, and mountains sing (96:10-12; 98:7-8). What has not been appreciated is that Psalms 96 and 98 present these actions as prayers for the divine king. Some of the verbs ascribed to nonhuman creation represent human prayer elsewhere in the Psalter, and within Psalms 96 and 98 themselves the nonhuman praise comes after descriptions of human praise. Thus, these psalms offer a model of what it means for "all the earth" to pray together. It is also significant that this model occurs in the context of royal enthronement psalms. The common prayer of human and nonhuman creation is inextricably linked to divine justice and equity.

17:45 – 19:45 – Break for Dinner ([options locally](#))

19:45 – All colloquium presenters and attenders are warmly invited to attend a wine reception to celebrate the publication of TCBS member publications: Mark Sweetnam's *Paul's Last Letter* and Neil Morrison's *Retribution in Chronicles*. Please RSVP [here](#).

Saturday 10 May 2025

8:40 – 9:00 – Registration

09:00 – 10:30 – Session 3 (Chair: Daniele Pevarello)

A House Built To Last: In What Way is Psalm 127 Solomonic?

David J. Shepherd, Trinity College Dublin, School of Religion, Theology, and Peace Studies

While most commentators assume that the association of Psalm 127 with Solomon (v.1a) primarily reflects Solomon's building of the temple (1 Kgs 5-7), the present study considers the possibility that the superscriber's operative frame of reference was not Solomon's building of a physical house for YHWH (2 Sam 7:13) but rather YHWH's building of a house/dynasty for David and his descendants (2 Sam 7:11, 16, 18, 20 etc.). Reading Psalm 127 in light of the latter and especially David's final instructions to Solomon in 1 Kings 2 illuminates not only Psalm 127's emphasis on the city, but also the notion of rest, the importance of sons and what some have seen as the Psalm's wisdom character. What all of this suggests is that the superscriber's association of Psalm 127 with Solomon likely reflects the perception not that the Psalm was written *by* Solomon, or authored *for* him (i.e. on his behalf), but is instead wisdom *for* Solomon's benefit.

Psalm 72 [LXX Ps 71] and Its Relationship to Other Solomonic Writings in the Second Temple Period

Angela Kim Harkins, Boston College, Clough School of Theology and Ministry

The biblical king Solomon, the “Son of David,” was a figure who was associated with extraordinary knowledge of earthly, heavenly, and esoteric matters—including the composition of psalms and hymns. According to MT 1 Kgs 4:32, Solomon composed some 1005 songs, and a dramatically higher number of 5000 is recorded in the LXX of 1 Kgs 5:12. This paper looks closely at the psalmic writings associated with Solomon during the Second Temple period, with special attention to Ps. 72, a biblical psalm that bears the superscription “to/for Solomon”.

10:30 – 11:00 – Break

11:00 – 12:30 – Session 4 (Chair: Andrew R. Davis)

Praying for Wisdom in Wisdom of Solomon Between Jewish Piety and Ancient Philosophy

Daniele Pevarello, Trinity College Dublin, School of Religion, Theology, and Peace Studies

This paper analyses Pseudo-Solomon's retelling of King Solomon's request for wisdom (Wis 8:21–9:18, cf. 1 Kgs 3:5–15 and 2 Chr 1:6–12) in the light of ancient philosophical debates about the best way to address the gods in prayer. In Wis 7:7, King Solomon says “Therefore I

prayed and understanding was given to me, I called on God, and the spirit of wisdom came to me.” In ancient philosophical discussions about prayer, petitionary prayers requesting personal favours and private success are often seen as disrespectful towards the gods. Socratic traditions in Plato and Xenophon and Stoic sources invite the pious rather to pray for virtue and to trust that divine providence already knows what is good for humankind. Petitionary prayers seeking private success, say the philosophers, are the prayers of vulgar souls, self-interested expressions of popular piety, unworthy of the educated and the intellectually refined. In this paper, I argue that Pseudo-Solomon’s views on prayer display a similar dislike for petitionary prayers and popular religiosity. Thus, praying for wisdom in *Wisdom of Solomon* not only intends to connect Pseudo-Solomon’s text with the story of King Solomon, but also strives to depict Judaism as a rational and philosophically enlightened form of devotion and the expression of an intellectual elite.

Divine Titles in Ben Sira’s Prayers of Petition and Praise

Jeremy Corley, St. Patrick’s College, Maynooth

This study will investigate the divine titles used in Ben Sira’s prayers of petition (Sir 22:27–23:6; 36:1-22; 51:1-12) and praise (Sir 18:1-14; 39:12-35; 42:15–43:33; 45:25-26; 50:22-24). After juxtaposing the surviving Hebrew vocabulary with the Greek and Syriac, the study will briefly compare divine titles occurring in Ben Sira to the use of such titles in other ancient Jewish and Greek literature.

12:30 – 13:30 – Break for Lunch ([options on campus](#))

13:30 – 15:00 – Session 5 (Chair: Jaime L. Waters)

Prayers of Glorification: Jesus’ Prayer in John 17 and the Qumran Self-Glorification Hymn

Benjamin Wold, Trinity College Dublin, School of Religion, Theology, and Peace Studies

John 17 and the Qumran Self-Glorification Hymn (4Q491c 11 i 16–17) have several shared characteristics, most notably expressions of “glory”. In this paper, I will assess John 17, often referred to as “The High Priestly Prayer,” together with this Qumran fragment. Frequently argued within Qumran scholarship is that the speaker in the Hymn is to be identified as an eschatological high priest who is focused upon his own incomparability and glory as well as suffering. John 17 presents a Jesus who describes himself as being glorified in the Father’s presence (17:5) after suffering. The theme of degradation and affirmation of exaltation is a beloved trope in John’s Gospel, which finds resonances with this Qumran hymn. What is the relationship of suffering to glory? How do the prayers of exalted individuals relate to their communities? Reading these two different texts together, I shall argue, offers mutual illumination that significantly enhances our appreciation of these unique prayers.

“Yours, O Lord, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty” (1 Chr 29:11): The Chronicler’s Influence on the Doxology to the Lord’s Prayer (Matt 6:13)

Neil Morrison, Trinity College Dublin, School of Religion, Theology, and Peace Studies

The doxology appended to the Lord’s Prayer in many manuscripts of Matthew 6:13 appears to be dependent upon a prayer uttered by King David, representing his final words in the book of Chronicles. While the connection with Chronicles is often referenced in discussions about the originality of the doxology, there has been surprisingly little enquiry as to why this language was thought to form a fitting conclusion to the Lord’s Prayer, whether Matthew, a later scribe or the early Christian community were ultimately responsible for its incorporation. Furthermore, the Chronicler’s prayer (1 Chr 29:10-20) is itself a patchwork of existing prayers and the Chronicler is known for utilising and transforming psalmic prayers elsewhere in his work (1 Chr 16:8-36; 16:41; 2 Chr 5:13; 6:40-42). In its literary context, the prayer follows the generosity of David and the leaders of the people in providing freewill offerings to support the construction of the first temple. The prayer moves from extolling the pre-eminence of YHWH to the people’s recognition that their gifts have been offered out of the abundance which comes from his hand and ends with petitions that the people and Solomon will forever keep such priorities in their hearts, words which seem designed to resonate with the Chronicler’s contemporaries during the Second Temple period. Given how these words have been applied across many contexts, this paper aims to explicate David’s final prayer in Chronicles in order to better understand the impulses which led to the incorporation of verse 11 into the Lord’s Prayer. More broadly, the paper will offer some reflections on the skill of tradents in recycling and reshaping prayer formulations for new liturgical and Scriptural contexts.

15:00 – 15:30 – Break

15:30 – 17:00 – Session 6 (Chair: David J. Shepherd)

Origen’s Pauline Exegesis of the Lord’s Prayer in *De Oratione*

Miriam Jane De Cock, Dublin City University, School of Theology, Philosophy and Music

With his *De Oratione*, Origen (d. 253) made his contribution to ongoing philosophical discussions about prayer, providing an apology for its necessity and efficacy in light of the scriptural record. In his treatise, Origen sought to provide “an accurate and pious account of prayer,” which dealt appropriately with the prayers passed down in both the Hebrew Bible (LXX for him) and New Testament. In this context, as he interpreted the prayers of the Christian Old Testament, particularly those of women, he developed the themes of barrenness and fertility that he found in those prayers, working to show just how these women’s words were to be understood and used by all Christians, male and female alike. I will thus analyse Origen’s use of the prayers of female Old Testament figures within his presentation of the spiritual benefits of prayer.

Augustine and the Biblical Texture of Christian Prayer

Michael McCarthy, S. J., Boston College, Clough School of Theology and Ministry

Although Augustine did not write a treatise specifically on prayer, throughout his work he discusses its importance in the life of a Christian. In particular, scripture itself becomes the deep weave of his own personal prayer and that of the church he leads. The most obvious example is the way he uses the Psalms to express the desires and desolations of Christian pilgrims making their way to God. Yet his understanding of the relationship between scripture and prayer reflects deep—and fairly comprehensive—theologies of the human person, Christ, the nature of the Church, even the Bible as Word of God. After a brief overview of major themes in Augustine's treatment of prayer, this paper will turn to certain of his *Enarrationes in psalmos*, in order to illustrate how his distinctive theology of the psalms offers a way to imagine scripture itself as prayer.

17:00 Farewell

Contributors

Brad Anderson is Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible in the School of Theology, Philosophy, and Music at Dublin City University. His research focuses on the use and interpretation of the Torah and prophets, including the recently published *Hosea, Joel, and Obadiah Through the Centuries* (Wiley Blackwell 2024).

Miriam De Cock is Assistant Professor in New Testament and Early Christianity in the School of Theology, Philosophy and Music at Dublin City University. She has published primarily on early Christian biblical exegesis and exegetical culture. She is also increasingly interested in early Christian ideas about 'home' and travel, and is working on a short book that considers these themes (Cambridge University Press, under contract).

Jeremy Corley is Lecturer in Sacred Scripture at St Patrick's Pontifical University, Maynooth, Ireland. His main research area is deuterocanonical literature, especially Ben Sira. His monograph, *Ben Sira's Teaching on Friendship* (Brown Judaic Studies, 2nd ed., 2020) is available as an Open Access volume. With Bradley C. Gregory, he has just completed a volume for the ICC series, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Sirach 1:1–11:6* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, forthcoming).

Andrew R. Davis is Ordinary Professor of Old Testament at Boston College's Clough School of Theology and Ministry. He is the author of several monographs, including most recently, *The Book of Amos and Its Audiences: Prophecy, Poetry, and Rhetoric* (CUP, 2023). He is currently working on an introductory textbook (*Reading the Old Testament*, Paulist Press) and several projects related to the textual pluriformity of biblical traditions.

Angela Kim Harkins is Professor of New Testament / Professor Ordinaria at Boston College Clough School of Theology and Ministry. She is the author of three books, co-editor of 6 volumes, and the author of more than 40 journal articles and scholarly essays. Her publications engage the topics of prayer, apocalypticism, and religious experience in ancient Jewish and early Christian texts. Professor Harkins currently serves as the co-editor of the *Journal of Ancient Judaism* (Brill).

Katie M. Heffelfinger is Deputy Director and Lecturer in Biblical Studies and Hermeneutics at the Church of Ireland Theological Institute. Her research focusses on the poetics of exilic and post exilic Isaiah and includes, most recently, *Isaiah 40-66* (Cambridge University Press, 2024).

Michael C. McCarthy, S.J. is Dean and Professor of Theology at Boston College's Clough School of Theology and Ministry. His writing and research on early Christianity, religious belief and Augustine has appeared in various fora, including *Harvard Theological Review*, *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, *Theological Studies*, and *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*.

Neil J. Morrison is an Adjunct Assistant Professor in Hebrew Bible/Old Testament at Trinity College Dublin and an Associate Lecturer at Belfast School of Theology. He is interested in methods of studying the HB/OT, the ethics of biblical narratives, and hermeneutics. His PhD thesis *Retribution in Chronicles: Ideology and Reality* has recently been published by Mohr Siebeck.

Daniele Pevarello is Assistant Professor in Early Christianity in the School of Religion, Theology and Peace Studies at Trinity College Dublin. His published work focuses on the cultural history of Early Christianity with particular emphasis on Christian reception of Graeco-Roman literature and thought, wisdom traditions in Jewish and Christian antiquity, and early Christian ascetic practices, as in the monograph *The Sentences of Sextus and the Origins of Christian Asceticism* (Mohr Siebeck 2013).

David J. Shepherd is Professor in Hebrew Bible/Old Testament in the School of Religion, Theology, and Peace Studies at Trinity College Dublin and the Loyola Institute and current director of the Trinity Centre for Biblical Studies. He is the author of various works focusing on the Hebrew Bible in its literary context, in its ancient versions and in its reception in the visual and performing arts, including most recently, *King David, Innocent Blood, and Bloodguilt* (OUP, 2023).

Jaime L. Waters is Associate Professor of Old Testament in the Clough School of Theology and Ministry at Boston College. She is the author of works focused on prophetic literature and ecological and feminist readings of the Bible including, *What Does the Bible Say About Animals?* (New City Press, 2022) and *Threshing Floors in Ancient Israel* (Fortress Press, 2015).

Benjamin Wold is Professor in Ancient Judaism and Christianity in the School of Religion, Theology, and Peace Studies at Trinity College Dublin. He is the author of a variety of works focusing on the late Second Temple Period and nascent Christianity. His most recent monograph explores “wisdom” in the textual cultures of the Dead Sea Scrolls and early Christian literature, *Qumran Wisdom and the New Testament* (Cambridge University Press, 2023).