New Directions in the Study of Prayer
Research Initiative

Request for Proposals

The Social Science Research Council, with the support of the John Templeton Foundation, invites proposals from scholars in all disciplines for studies that will enhance knowledge of the social, cultural, psychological, and cognitive dimensions of prayer, and of its origins, variations, and correlations in human life.

Approximately twenty to twenty-five grants, ranging from $50,000 to $200,000, each with a duration of two years, will be awarded. Both individual and collaborative projects will be considered.

The deadline for Letters of Intent is *December 1, 2011*.

Overview

Prayer and associated practices are widely shared aspects of human life. While in the past much attention has been given to questions concerning the efficacy of prayer, much remains to be discovered about its sources, varieties, and relations to other important aspects of modern society and culture. The aim of the New Directions in the Study of Prayer initiative is to facilitate research that brings innovative perspectives, methods, and approaches to previously under-investigated or poorly understood dimensions of prayer.

Of special interest are proposals for research that will shed new light on the relationships between the practice of prayer and virtue, human flourishing, altruism, and creativity, or that examine the cognitive aspects of prayer, the embeddedness of prayer in religious and nonreligious institutions, the social dimensions of prayer, and cultural variations in prayer across societies and religious traditions.

In Western religious traditions, in particular, prayer is usually understood as a way of communicating with God. However, the activities that are commonly described as prayer vary widely, ranging from brief thoughts uttered in private to conversational prayers in small groups to formal prayers recited in liturgical settings, and from vague yearnings of the heart to enduring practices, disciplines, and expressions

in song, art, and visual culture. In the world's major religious traditions, the object of veneration to whom prayers are directed is understood variously, as are the reasons for and expectations associated with prayer, the contexts in which it is practiced, and the languages used to describe it.

Given such widely varying practices and descriptions, no single or simple definition of prayer need or should be imposed on proposed studies. Rather, requests for funding must specify which aspects and varieties of prayer are to be investigated, and how the proposed investigation promises to make significant contributions to the study of prayer and associated fields. At the present moment, when religious traditions are in greater contact with one another than ever before, and when questions about the meaning and value of religion and spirituality are being asked in both academic and non-academic settings, rigorous empirical investigations that shed new light on the varieties of the practice and experience of prayer are in order.

Proposals are especially encouraged from, but not restricted to, the following disciplines: anthropology, cognitive science, history, linguistics, neuroscience, philosophy, psychology, religious studies, and sociology. New Directions in the Study of Prayer welcomes proposals for projects that study any religious tradition(s) and milieu(s), and that focus on populations in any geographical region(s) of the world.

Proposals must include a clearly articulated program of empirical research. Proposals may include a focus on theology but should not be restricted to theological inquiry. Historical topics are of interest only insofar as they specifically contribute to understanding practices of prayer in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

This research initiative is sponsored by the John Templeton Foundation and administered by the Social Science Research Council, Brooklyn, NY.

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Research Themes

New Directions in the Study of Prayer will consider proposals in four broad yet focused areas of inquiry. Each research theme considers prayer as a practice, an event, and a cultural object that can be studied empirically and with a range of research methods and analytical approaches. Both discipline-specific and interdisciplinary proposals are encouraged.

• *Prayer, Virtues, and Human Flourishing*

Prayer is often studied in the social and natural sciences as an instrumental activity engaged in for personal benefits, such as health and emotional well-being, and as a particular form of "communication," but far less is known about the role of prayerfulness as a potential source of virtue and a vehicle of moral or ethical development. Research in this thematic area will consider the relationship between prayer and specific virtues, and ask how prayer may serve either to constrain or to enable ethical development and human flourishing.

- How does prayer shape or mediate virtuous behavior or the practice of particular virtues (for example, joy, humility, and self-discipline)?
- How do distinct prayer practices (bodily techniques, disciplines, and related instruments) align with specific virtues and models of human flourishing?
- What models of virtuous or ethical communication (between humans, or between humans and the divine) are learned through different kinds of prayer?
- How does the experience of prayer shape conceptions and manifestations of creativity and ingenuity?

• *Prayer in Social and Institutional Contexts*

More than a merely solitary activity, prayer is frequently practiced in groups and employed in various forms of religious education, and conceptions of its meaning, emotional value, and proper execution have developed along with the evolution of religious traditions, communities, and institutions. Research in this thematic area will concentrate on the social and institutional dynamics that relate to and shape—or are shaped by—prayer.

- Does participation in group prayer change or reinforce participants' views of their role in society and potential for action in it?
- How do practices of prayer articulate with, enforce, or alter shared understandings of specific social obligations?
- How does setting shape the phenomenological aspects and the physical, or sensory, experience of prayer?
- How do communities determine the relative worth of variant types of prayer and the different virtues associated with them?

• *Comparative Perspectives*

Contemporary practices of prayer are informed by an array of distinct but intersecting religious traditions and have been shaped by far-reaching social and historical changes. Research in this thematic area will investigate the spread and relation of different forms of prayer, analyzing the processes and mechanisms through which forms and habits of prayer have been adopted, adapted, and transformed, and assessing the consequences and effects of these trajectories for contemporary understandings and practices of prayer.

- How, and to what effect, are practices of prayer iterated through their transmission in time and across cultural and geographical boundaries?
- How have practices, understandings, and representations of prayer changed in the recent past, and with what effects on the bodies, emotional states, or spiritual experiences of those who pray?
- How do changes in communication technologies and forms of social mediation influence prayer and social understandings of its efficacy?
- How have contemporary understandings and practices of prayer been shaped by large-scale social changes, political and intellectual transformations, and scientific developments?

• *Cognitive and Psychological Perspectives*

Much prior research on prayer has focused on questions related to the efficacy of intercessory prayers and patterns of brain activation during either prayer or meditation, while further efforts have focused on identifying how and why people pray. Research in this thematic area will seek to creatively move beyond these initial observations to provide new perspectives on the physiological and psychological components of prayer as well as prayer's role in moral development and ethical formation.

- How is prayer similar to or different from other intensive mental activities?
- Does the particular form of prayer practiced determine prayer's cognitive, psychological, or physiological effects?
- How do the physiological and socio-cultural dimensions of prayer influence one another?
- What kinds of mental or cognitive functions are developed or diminished as individuals adopt sustained prayer practices, and how robust is the correlation between prayer and the development of such functions?

Application Procedure

Scholars interested in being considered for funding should submit a three-page, single-spaced Letter of Intent (LOI) by December 1, 2011, at 5:00PM EST. The letter should describe the proposed project concretely and in detail, and it should indicate clearly why the study envisioned promises significant contributions to the relevant scholarly literature. Only LOIs of this length and with a thorough description of the proposed research will be considered. Casual inquiries are not invited.

The LOIs will be reviewed and evaluated by an interdisciplinary Selection Committee, who will select the most promising and appropriate of the proposed projects. The corresponding principal investigators will be notified by January 15, 2012, and invited to a Finalists' Symposium in New York City, at which they will present their proposals to the Selection Committee, other finalists, and invited guests. Full proposals must then be submitted by May 15, 2012. The full proposals will be reviewed by the Selection Committee, and awardees will be notified by July 1, 2012.

Letters of Intent

The Letter of Intent (LOI) should be *no longer than three (3) pages* and should include:

1. the title of the proposed project;
2. a description of the specific aims of the research;
3. an explanation of how the proposed project fits within this initiative;
4. specific information about the research methods to be used;
5. a summary statement of the anticipated significance of the project;
6. the estimated total budget needed to complete the research;
7. a brief explanation of major budget items; and
8. identification of any collaborators (if applicable).

The LOI must be delivered with:

1. a Letter of Intent cover sheet (*single-spaced, single-sided, 12-point Times New Roman font, with one-inch margins*); and
2. a one-page biographical sketch, inclusive of all investigators (*this does not count toward the three-page limit*).

The LOI, cover sheet, and biographical sketch must be received by 5:00PM EST, December 1, 2011. These materials should be sent, as attachments to a single email, to the Social Science Research Council, at religion@ssrc.org. Confirmation of receipt will be sent in return.

Guidelines for Full Proposals

This section is only for researchers whose Letters of Inquiry have been reviewed and approved, and who have been invited to submit full proposals.

Full proposals must be received by May 15, 2012, and must follow the format and guidelines below in order to be considered. Scholars invited to submit full proposals will be notified by January 15, 2012. Further details on the proposal submission process will be communicated at that time.

All proposals must be submitted in **English**, **single-spaced**, and **typed** with **one-inch margins.** Font size may be no smaller than **11-point and no larger than 12-point,** and font type must be **Times New Roman**. *Proposals that do not follow these font and margin specifications will not be accepted.* Emphasis should also be placed on completeness and clarity of content. **The full proposal must include all content that is outlined below.**

Full Proposal Content
The following is a description of documents that will be required for all full proposal submissions.

1. Cover Sheet (downloadable from website)
2. Table of Contents
3. Project Summary
4. Project Description
5. Project Timeline
6. Curriculum Vitae
7. Detailed Budget
8. Budget Narrative

1. Full Proposal Cover Sheet
Please complete the cover sheet and include it as the first page of the proposal. It can be downloaded at http://www.ssrc.org/prayer. The principal investigator, who is ultimately responsible for the scientific conduct of the proposed project, must **ink sign** the cover sheet.

If applicable, the official of the applicant institution responsible for authorizing the proposed project and its budget must **ink sign** the cover sheet as well. As indicated on the cover sheet, be sure to identify as the financial contact the person who will handle all or most of the financial aspects of your project. If the proposed project uses human or animal subjects, please be certain to note any institutional review board (IRB) approvals required and/or already secured. Documentation of IRB and/or human subject approval authorization, or Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) approval of the use of animal subjects, will be required before any payment may be issued.

2. Table of Contents (1 page)

This one-page section of your full proposal is simply an outline of the proposal itself. Following the cover sheet, your table of contents should mirror the headings of each required section that is outlined in these guidelines, from *3. Project Summary* through *8. Budget Narrative.* You may include subheadings under each major section heading to provide detail, but the table of contents should not exceed one page.

3. Project Summary (1 page)

The proposal must contain a one-page, single-spaced summary of the proposed activity. The project summary should include a statement of research objectives and methods to be employed. Within the project summary, the author must clearly address in separate statements: (1) the intellectual merit of the proposed activity and (2) the broader impacts resulting from the proposed activity. It should be informative to other persons working in the same or related fields and, insofar as possible, understandable to a scientifically or technically literate lay reader.

4. Project Description (maximum of 10 pages, single spaced)

The central part of the proposal will be a narrative description of the project itself. Please limit the project description to no more than ten (10) pages (not including references/bibliography/appendices). It should include:

1. Research hypotheses (within which it is important to clarify your use of the term "prayer," as well as related terms);
2. the objectives for the period of the proposed work;
3. the relationship of the project to the relevant scholarly literature, and the project's distinctive contribution to research on prayer, including a description of how the project builds on previous research;
4. a detailed explanation of the activities of the project, including how the project will specifically examine manifestations and particular aspects of prayer;
5. a thoughtful explanation of how the project will further understanding of at least one of the following: 1) the effect of prayer on notions of virtue and human flourishing; 2) the social and institutional dynamics of prayer; 3) comparative analyses of prayer; and 4) the cognitive and psychological dimensions of prayer;
6. methodologies and plans for collection and analysis of empirical information;
7. statistical, linguistic, ethnographic, cross-cultural, or other technical considerations (if applicable);
8. any demonstrable commitment to interdisciplinary collaboration, including an explanation of the range and levels of

> involvement of scholars and researchers within multiple academic disciplines; and

9. statements elaborating on the expected significance of this work, with reference to the *Evaluation Criteria* of the New Directions in the Study of Prayer initiative.

NOTE: There is no page limit for the bibliography/references/appendices portion of the project description.

5. Project Timeline (1 page)
The project timeline should detail the major activities of the proposed project period, ending no later than August 31, 2014. Briefly describe the major goals, tactics, and responsible parties throughout the course of the project.

6. Curriculum Vitae
Names and full CVs of the principal investigator and all co-investigators participating in the project.

7. Detailed Budget Summary
Please submit a budget summary for each calendar year of the period (this will include all or part of the two consecutive years beginning September 1, 2012, and ending August 31, 2014) for which you are requesting funds. (Please refer to the instructions below for completing the budget summary.) We ask that you also include the "Total Projected Costs" within the budget.

8. Budget Justification Narrative (no page limit)
A budget justification narrative is required. Please explain the costs associated with each line item. (Please do not justify each twelve-month period separately.) Also, include some detail on other sources of funding, if applicable. There is no page limit, but you are encouraged to be succinct.

NOTE: All awards will formally be made on a cost-reimbursable basis. Awardees must invoice for costs that have actually been incurred during the invoice period. Invoicing against the budget (i.e., dividing the budget by the number of budget months) is not allowed. The invoice must be signed by a person who has responsibility for official financial data and can certify its validity. (The PI is usually not this person.) Payment will be provided within 30 days of invoice receipt. Invoices can be submitted monthly, quarterly, or annually for expenditures of $1,000 or more.

Budget Guidelines

I. General

A. Each grant proposal must contain a budget summary in the **required format**. Budget amounts must be entered in whole dollar (US) amounts (e.g., $2000 [correct]; $2000.50 [incorrect]).

B. Identify the yearly request for each line item. If applicable, please include any known sources of additional funding per line item. If you have no other sources of funding, then all values entered in this final column should match all values entered in the "Total Projected Costs" column.

II. Budget Line Items

Careful budgeting is encouraged in order to maximize the impact of the project as a whole, with emphasis on scholarly return per dollar rather than per proposal. Modest expenses (less than 15% of the total grant) for computer equipment, travel, publication charges, and supplies are allowable, provided that these items are clearly explained and justified in the proposal. The following is a brief outline of budget documentation requirements by line item.

NOTE: All documentation and justification/explanation required on the line items below should be provided in the budget justification narrative (Part 8 of the full proposal).

A. **Salaries, Wages, and Fringe Benefits.** List individually all senior personnel (names and abbreviated titles) and the percentage of their respective efforts to be dedicated to the project for each year's budget (e.g., "John Smith, Asst. Prof., 15%"). Grant funds may not be used to augment the total salary or rate of salary of faculty members during the period covered by the term of faculty appointment or to reimburse faculty members for consulting or other time in addition to a regular fulltime organization salary covering the same general period of employment. In most circumstances, particularly for institutions of higher education, salaries of administrative or clerical staff are included as part of the indirect costs. However, salaries of administrative or clerical staff may be requested as direct costs for a project requiring an extensive amount of administrative or clerical support, and where these costs can be readily and specifically identified with the project. For fringe benefits, please list the percentage of salary costs being applied to this grant as well as the normal institutional fringe benefits percentage in the budget justification narrative.

B. **Consultant or Subcontractor Services.** Consultant services should be justified and information furnished on each individual/firm's expertise, primary organizational affiliation, normal daily compensation rate, and number of days of expected service. Consultants' travel costs and per

diem allowances should be listed in the budget justification narrative. Payment for a consultant's services, exclusive of expenses, may not exceed the consultant's normal rate or the normal daily maximum rate established by the research organization, whichever is less. Indirect costs are not applied to consultant expenses or subcontracts.

C. **Equipment**. Items of required equipment should be listed individually by description and estimated cost, including tax, and adequately justified in the budget justification narrative. Purchase of general purpose equipment, such as a personal computer, is not eligible for support unless exclusively used in the actual conduct of this project. Indirect costs are not applied to equipment.

D. **Travel.** This line item refers to travel, if any, that is required for your project. Address the type and extent of travel and its relation to the project. The travel expenses for the required Project events are funded by the Social Science Research Council; therefore, the expenses for these events should **not** be reflected in your budget summary and budget justification narrative.

E. **Other Direct Costs.** Any costs charged to a grant must be reasonable and directly allocable to the supported activity. The budget should identify and itemize any anticipated direct costs not included under the headings above, including materials and supplies, publication costs, computer services, participant/subject costs, communications, and other direct expenses.

1. **Materials and Supplies:** Indicate types required and estimate costs.
2. **Participant Costs:** Indicate costs associated with testing on subjects, including fees and travel for human subjects as well as care costs for animal testing.
3. **Publication Costs:** Costs associated with editing, reviewing, and printing.
4. **Computer Services:** Include justification based on estimated computer service rates at the applicant institution. Purchase of equipment should be included under line item C.
5. **Communications:** Possible communications costs include online services used for the direct work of this grant, shipping costs directly associated with the work of this grant, or separate telephone services needed to complete the work of this grant.
6. **Other:** Itemize and justify.

F. **Total Direct Costs.** Sum of line items *A* through *E*.

G. **Indirect Costs.** Indirect costs/overhead are not levied on equipment, consultants/subcontractors, or any function that is outsourced, such as computer services. If this function is to be performed by staff of the

project's home institute, then indirect costs may be levied on it. **Indirect costs are limited to 15% of applicable line items**.

H. **Total Costs.** Sum of line items *F* and *G*.

III. Funding from Other Sources
Within this column of the detailed budget summary, be sure to identify, in whole dollar amounts, each pending and/or current grant that may overlap with your potential funding from the Social Science Research Council.

Evaluation Criteria

Significance
• Does the proposed study address an important problem or question in research on prayer?
• Does it account for and build upon the most important findings of prior research?
• If the study is successful, how will scholarly knowledge about prayer be advanced?
• What will be the effect of this study on the concepts or methods that currently define research on prayer?

Approach and Methods
• Are the conceptual framework, research design, methods, and analyses adequately developed and specified, and are they rigorous and fitting for the specific questions and goals of the project?
• Does the project seek to understand previously understudied aspects of prayer, and does it promise to investigate them in non-reductive ways?
• Is the applicant aware of potential problems and challenges involved in his or her approach and has he or she considered alternatives?

Innovation
• Does the project employ fresh and creative concepts, approaches, or methods?
• Does it challenge or innovate existing frameworks or develop new methodologies or analyses in appropriately creative ways?

Investigators
• Are the researchers well qualified to execute the project—i.e., do they demonstrate a genuine scholarly interest in the variety, manifestations, practices, and functioning of prayer?
• Do the investigators have the ability to communicate the significance of their research findings beyond academia?
• Does the project involve identifying, recruiting, and training young scholars?

Financial Responsibility
- Do the detailed financial documents convey reasonable uses of funds and smart budgeting for the proposed scope of the project?
- Does the project employ effective collaborative arrangements or take advantage of special opportunities or available synergies in the research enterprise?

Potential Scholarly Influence
- How publishable will the results of the project be?
- What scholarly networks or communities will the results engage and influence?
- In what ways might the project help to build greater interest in scholarly research on prayer?
- Will the proposed project intersect valuably with other projects funded through the initiative, and will it contribute to the final edited volumes?

Institutional and Collateral Support
- Is there evidence of real institutional support for the project?
- Are resources available to leverage support for the long-term development of the research project?

Notice of Awards

A Notice of Awards will be posted on the Social Science Research Council website, at http://www.ssrc.org/prayer. Letters will also be sent by post to Principal Investigators informing them of the initiative's intent to enter into a contract. Approval will be contingent upon confirmation of eligibility criteria and upon possible adjustments to the proposal before the final award letter is sent out. The award letter will stipulate all terms and conditions of payment.

Award Obligations

The Principal Investigators of all funded projects will be brought together for four workshops over the course of the initiative to network with and share their research and findings with other scholars. Three workshops will be held in New York City, and a fourth will be held virtually. Acceptance of project funding entails a commitment to prepare for, be present at, and participate in all workshops.

Documents Required at Award Stage
Award recipients from this Request for Proposals (RFP) may be required to furnish some of the following additional documents: Institutional Review Board (IRB) or Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) Approval Letters and documentation of tax–exempt status. For

applicants who are affiliated with foreign institutions, copies of the institution's most recent audited financial statements will be requested if the applicant is selected as a grantee. All award recipients will be prompted to submit such additional materials after the grant award winners are announced.

1. IRB and IACUC Approvals (if applicable)
Evidence of IRB approval (or submission for approval) for research involving human subjects is required. Please submit IRB requests early, and in the event that they have not been fully approved by the time of full proposal submission, include status and assurance number of the pending approval on the Cover Sheet Template. PIs will be required to submit a current IRB or IACUC Letter of Approval. Documentation of IRB and/or human subject approval authorization will be required before initial payment may be made. Please note that if human or animal subjects are involved in the research project, the PI must be affiliated with an institution since such studies require approval from the institution's IRB or IACUC.

2. Tax-exempt Status
At the award stage, PIs need to provide evidence of tax-exempt status from the sponsoring institution. 501(c)(3) organizations must include copies of IRS determination letters and an EIN number.

All awarded projects will need to comply with the following conditions:

1. Authority to Bind the Principal Investigator's Institution into Contract
Each PI must provide full name and university address. The proposal cover sheet must be signed by the PI and the authorized institutional signatory. Failure to sign the proposal may disqualify it.

2. Award Obligations
Please be aware that attendance and active participation by PIs in the initiative's events are required in order to enter this final level of competition. Furthermore, if PIs are awarded a grant as a result of this RFP, funds received are contingent upon attendance and active participation in four mandatory project meetings. **If a PI is unable to attend one or more of these project events, notification will need to be sent immediately.** Also, be aware that each PI is required to contribute a publishable chapter to the edited books to be planned at the end of the project. A first draft of the chapter is required at the time of the second workshop, and a final draft is required by August 31, 2014.

3. Communications
All PIs will be required to work with the initiative's Communications Coordinator to help disseminate their research findings periodically throughout the course and upon completion of their projects. This will require working with the Communications Coordinator to develop

updates on their project findings suitable for the project website, reports, and press releases.

4. Additional Information Requested
Please indicate if the PI and/or affiliated research administration has been cited and/or fined within the last five (5) years by any Federal, State, or Local regulatory agency. If so, PIs will need to provide the following information: Date; Identity of the agency issuing the citation or fine; Description of the violation; and Final rulings of the agency.

5. Right of Rejection
The project reserves the right to reject any proposal, to waive any informalities or irregularities in proposals, and/or to negotiate separately the terms and conditions of all or any parts of the proposals, as determined to be in the Social Science Research Council's best interests in its sole discretion.

6. Advice of Omission or Misstatement
In the event that it is evident to a PI responding to this RFP that the Social Science Research Council has omitted or misstated a material requirement to this RFP and/or the services required by this RFP, the responding PI shall advise the Program Director of such omission or misstatement.

7. Cost of Preparation
The Social Science Research Council **will not** pay any costs incurred in the preparation of the full proposal, printing, or submission process. (Expenses related to the Finalists' Symposium **will** be covered by the SSRC.)

8. Notification of Withdrawal
Full proposals may be withdrawn prior to the deadline specified for submissions with a formal written notice by an authorized representative of the PI. Proposals submitted will become the property of the Social Science Research Council after the submission deadline.

9. Rights to Pertinent Materials
All responses, inquires, and correspondence relating to this RFP and all reports, charts, displays, schedules, exhibits, and other documentation produced by the PIs and submitted as part of the RFP shall become the property of the Social Science Research Council after the RFP submission deadline.

Point of Contact

Social Science Research Council staff shall be the sole points of contact regarding this Request for Proposals. All questions concerning both the administrative and technical aspects of this RFP can be e–mailed to religion@ssrc.org.

Program Timeline

December 1, 2011	Deadline for Letters of Intent
January 15, 2012	Finalists notified of their selection and invited to submit full proposals
Date TBD (March 2012)	Finalists' Symposium
May 15, 2012	Deadline for full proposals (*by invitation only*)
July 1, 2012	Grant winners announced
September 1, 2012	Start date for all funded projects
August 31, 2014	End date for all funded projects
Date TBD	Capstone Conference