Announcing the *Journal for the Cognitive Science of Religion*

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Welcome to the inaugural issue of the *Journal for the Cognitive Science of Religion* (JCSR).

The Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) is a burgeoning and highly interdisciplinary enterprise, encompassing scholars from such fields as the study of religion, psychology, neuroscience, linguistics, anthropology, sociology, history, and philosophy, among others. What unites these researchers is a shared focus on the role of human cognition in religious thought and behaviour, which they study by importing axiomatic assumptions from the cognitive revolution and their respective disciplines. The rich array of culturally postulated supernatural agents and supernatural realms, and the associated diversity of culturally prescribed and proscribed behaviours, are assumed to be constrained and canalized by genetically endowed cognitive capacities and structures shared by all typically developing humans. These structures are assumed to govern the types of information that is attended to, the contexts in which information is attended to, and the manner in which information is stored, processed and acted upon. These structures, moreover, are assumed to represent an evolutionary legacy—they evolved to solve recurrent adaptive problems in ancestral environments.

In short, CSR researchers aim to shed light both on the proximate psychological mechanisms underpinning religious belief and behaviour, and on the ultimate evolutionary forces that sustain religious representations. How are religious concepts generated, acquired, represented and transmitted? What are the cognitive structures governing and constraining these processes, and how have these structures been shaped? How does religious cognition manifest in religious behavior? To what extent does religious cognition influence and constrain behaviour more generally? And conversely, what are the effects of practices associated with religion on the practitioners’ beliefs and attitudes? These are some of the questions that CSR scholars are interested in.
Of course, scientific interest in the mental underpinnings of religion is not something new. It dates back at least to the beginnings of disciplines like psychology, sociology, and anthropology. However, after a long period of drought brought on by the neglect of mental processes during the reign of culturology, behaviourism, and the *sui generis* view of religion and culture, the cognitive revolution of the 1950s provided the rain that germinated these seeds.

The scene for the emergence of CSR was set by a resurgence in studies that focused on recurrent features of human thought and behaviour and by developments in relevant fields such as cognitive anthropology and sociobiology. In the 1970s, pioneers like Dan Sperber, who argued for a cognitive approach to cultural transmission, and Thomas E. Lawson and Fritz Staal, who attempted to apply Chomskyan principles to ritual structure, inspired scholars of religion to apply cognitive perspectives to their subject matter. The first comprehensive approach of this kind was Stewart Guthrie’s book *Faces in the Clouds* (1980). Some of the field’s most important theoretical foundations were laid in the 1990s, with the work of Pascal Boyer on counterintuitive concepts; of Harvey Whitehouse, Thomas E. Lawson and Robert McCauley on ritual transmission; and of those interested in the origins of the mind and religious thought like Steven Mithen, Merlin Donald, and Terrence Deacon. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, CSR underwent qualitative refinement and development, as the field applied more rigorous methodologies and steadily moved from mere theory-generation towards hypothesis-testing both in the lab and in the field.

The growth of the field during the last decade has been exponential in terms of individuals involved, publications produced, and institutional grounding secured. The first CSR hotspot was the Institute of Cognition and Culture (ICC), established at Queen’s University Belfast in 2004. Since then, a number of similar institutions have been established: the Religion, Cognition and Culture research unit (RCC) at Aarhus University; the Centre for Anthropology and Mind (CAM) and the Institute of Cognitive and Evolutionary Anthropology (ICEA) at Oxford University; the International Cognition and Culture Institute, run by the London School of Economics and the Institut Jean Nicod in Paris; the Centre for Human Evolution, Cognition, and Culture (HECC) at the University of British Columbia; the Institute for the Biocultural Study of Religion in Massachusetts; the Center for Mind, Brain, and Culture at Emory University; and more recently, the Laboratory for the Experimental Research of Religion (LEVYNA) at Masaryk University in Brno, which became the first institute exclusively dedicated to the experimental study of religion.

To support this growing academic community, the International Association for the Cognitive Science of Religion (IACSR) was founded in 2006. This is the
official journal of the IACSR. Although there already were some publication outlets relevant to CSR scholars, particularly the *Journal of Cognition and Culture* (since 2001) and more recently *Religion, Brain & Behavior* (since 2011), it is our view that there is space and need for one more journal. The *Journal for the Cognitive Science of Religion* is more specialized in scope than *JCC* and broader than *RBB*. Furthermore, we perceive a current and future need for more outlets for CSR publications. As noted above, the field now boasts several research centres, who produce several dozens of graduate students and several hundreds of publications every year (see figure). These scholars are publishing their research in journals across various disciplines, including the highest ranking of all scientific journals. We only expect this trend to grow as the graduates of those departments obtain academic positions and produce their own generations of students. On the other hand, more and more people from other disciplines are engaging with CSR and are increasingly submitting papers to CSR journals, a tendency which we also expect to grow. It is with this hope and anticipation that we present the first issue of the *Journal for the Cognitive Science of Religion*.

Like its parent organization, the IACSR, the *Journal for the Cognitive Science of Religion* seeks to advance the scientific study of religion. Accordingly, we seek to publish rigorous theoretical contributions and empirical studies that meet exacting scientific standards. We welcome the use of innovative methodologies and technologies. Although we aim to be a broad and inclusive outlet for cognitively and evolutionarily informed work on religion, certain issues are beyond our remit—for example issues such as the dialogue between science and religion, or any other issues of theological nature.

Each issue of *JCSR* will publish general and research articles (max. 6,000 words), research reports (max. 4,000 words) and short reports (max. 2,500 words), along with brief commentaries on recently published work and book reviews (max. 1,500 words). We intend to maintain a sizeable and vibrant book review section to keep our readers up to speed with the latest developments in the field. This issue includes five book reviews. We will also publish invited or target articles (max. 8,000 words) on issues of broad theoretical concern. For example, see Ilkka Pyysiäinen’s illuminating survey of the state of the art of the CSR in this issue. Furthermore, this issue includes articles by Sibley and Bulbulia; Sinding Jensen; Nielbo, Schjoedt, and Sørensen; and Purzycki. The next issue, due in late 2013, will be a special issue on the Experimental Research of Religion.

*JCSR* recognizes the need to publish up-to-date, cutting edge research, and thus applies a speedy review and publication process. Each accepted paper will be published online immediately after typesetting, and subsequently all articles in an issue will appear in print every six months. In all cases, we seek to publish
the widest possible diversity of critical inquiry into the relationship between cognition, culture and religion (see http://docs.equinoxpub.com/equinoxdownloads/authors/jcsrguide.pdf for detailed information about the submission and review process). We hope that you will enjoy this first issue, and we look forward to receiving your submissions.