Trends and Challenges in the Cognitive Science of Religion,

Helsinki 3-4 March, 2015

Venue: Faculty Room, Faculty of Theology, University of Helsinki, Vuorikatu 3, 5th floor

Organizers: Ritual and the Emergence of Early Christian Religion (REECR, Risto Uro) CoE on Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions (CSTT, Martti Nissinen)

Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) emerged in the 1990s to explain regularities of religious phenomena across time and place by using the growing body of knowledge from cognitive and evolutionary sciences. Today CSR is a pluralistic and interdisciplinary field that focuses on the intuitive mental mechanisms underpinning religious beliefs and behaviours as well as on the interaction of the human mind, social cognition, and cultural environment. CSR applies a wide variety of different theoretical perspectives, for example, from experimental psychology, neurosciences, biology and research on emotions.

The meeting will provide an opportunity to discuss recent developments and challenges in CSR. Responses will be given by scholars from different fields (philosophy of science, biblical studies, comparative religion and the science of religion.

Registration is needed for the coffee and reception on 3 March, which are free for all registrants, and for the sessions of 4 March. Registrants will be sent the abstracts and seminar papers beforehand. Lunch is at one’s own expense.

**Registration** by 23 Feb 2015: <https://elomake.helsinki.fi/lomakkeet/58178/>

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**PROGRAM**

Tuesday 3 March

The meeting starts with the papers from two keynote speakers, Armin W. Geertz and István Czachesz, and responses to these papers. The keynotes have been asked to address the following questions:

* What is the most important (potential) contribution of CSR to your academic subfield in religious studies/theology?
* Can you identify any significant challenges for CSR at the moment and how would you address them?
* What are in your opinion the most important approaches in CSR and how would see their relationship?
* What future directions do you envisage for CSR?

9:00–9:45 Keynote: Armin W. Geertz, University of Aarhus

10:00–10:45 Keynote: István Czachesz, University of Heidelberg

10:45–11:15 Coffee

11:15–11:30 Aku Visala, University of Helsinki (Response)

11:30–11:45 Martti Nissinen, University of Helsinki (Response)

11:45–12:00 Ilkka Pyysiäinen, University of Helsinki (Response)

11:45-13:00 Discussion

13:00-14:30 Lunch

14:30–15:30 Elisa Järnefelt, Coventry University, UK: “Experimental humanities – absurdity or possibility?”

15:30–16:00 Coffee

16:00–17:00 Outi Pohjanheimo, University of Helsinki: “Two routes of enrichment of magical thinking”

17:00–18:00 Jani Närhi, University of Helsinki: “Afterlife representations and cognition – what can and cannot be inferred from historical data”

18:00–20:00 Reception

Wednesday 4 March

REECR and CSTT joint workshop sessions with guest speakers and other interested participants

10:00–12:00 CSTT, Team 4 “Society and Religion in Late Second Temple Judaism” (Jeremy Penner, University of Helsinki; Jutta Jokiranta, University of Helsinki)

12:00–14:00 Lunch

14:00–16:00 REECR (Rikard Roitto, Stockholm School of Theology)

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**Armin W. Geertz** is Professor in the History of Religions and one of leading scholars and pioneers in the Cognitive Science of Religion. He is known for his work on evolutionary theory and on religious narrative and cognition. Geertz has advanced a bio-cultural theory of religion, which examines religious behavior and ideas in the interplay between neurocognitive, psychological, social and cultural mechanisms and factors. Geertz is Chair of the Religion, Cognition and Culture (RCC) Research Unit at Aarhus University and the leader of the Cognition and Culture section in the cross-cutting neuroscience and cognition research framework MIND*Lab* (<https://mindlab.au.dk/>). He has also served as the president of the International Association for the Cognitive Science of Religion (IACSR).

**István Czachesz** is a leading pioneer of cognitive science approaches in biblical studies. He has published extensively on early Christian literature, Apocrypha and ancient religions. His many research focuses include images of the human body, transmission of religious traditions, magic, and religious experience in antiquity. Czachesz is currently a Heisenberg Fellow of the German Research Foundation and Privatdozent of Protestant Theology at the University of Heidelberg. In, 2007‒2009, Czachesz was a research fellow of the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies. Czachesz maintains the Early Christian Mind Website, which gives an informative overview of his innovative approach, combining both historical and systematic research interests: <http://www.religionandcognition.com/ecm/>.

**Elisa Järnefelt,** Post-doc researcher in Coventry University, UK. Her thesis: “Created by Some Being: Theoretical and Empirical Exploration of Adults’ Automatic and Reflective Beliefs about the Origin of Natural Phenomena,” <https://helda.helsinki.fi/handle/10138/41789>. See also: <http://www.elisajarnefelt.com/>

**Jani Närhi**, post-doc researcher in University of Helsinki. His thesis: ”Honey Flows through Fertile Valleys. The Cognitive and Evolutionary Roots of Paradise Representations”: <https://helda.helsinki.fi/handle/10138/19190>. See also [http://janinarhi.net/index.html#](http://janinarhi.net/index.html)

**Outi Pohjanheimo,** teacher and doctoral student in the Study of Religions in University of Helsinki. Her study deals with intuitive assumptions and enrichment of magical thinking in the context of spiritual-based healing. See more. <http://tuhat.halvi.helsinki.fi/portal/fi/person/pohjanhe>

**Martti Nissinen**, Professor in Old Testament Studies, Director of The Centre of Excellence in 'Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions' (CSTT), funded by the Academy of Finland <http://blogs.helsinki.fi/sacredtexts/>. See also <http://tuhat.halvi.helsinki.fi/portal/en/person/mnissine>

**Aku Visala**, Post Doctoral Fellow, Center of Theological Inquiry, Princeton, USA <http://www.ianramseycentre.info/personnel/visitors/dr-aku-visala-phd-helsinki.html>

**Ilkka Pyysiäinen**, Docent in University of Helsinki and University of Turku, <http://tuhat.halvi.helsinki.fi/portal/en/person/ipyysiai>