



*British Association
of Christians in
Psychology*

17th Annual BACIP Conference 2007

*Why would anyone believe
in God? A Christian view
of evolutionary psychology*

All Saints Pastoral Centre, St. Albans
2 – 4 March 2007

Keynote speaker:
Justin Barrett, Ph.D.
University of Oxford

Sunday service speaker:
Fraser Watts, Ph.D.
University of Cambridge

Booking forms and further details are available from
www.bacip.org.uk. Other details are available from
Mrs. Janet Jackson at conference@bacip.org.uk or
on 0116 230 1057.

Keynote Address 1

Friday 2 March, 20.45-21.45

Justin Barrett, Ph.D.
University of Oxford

*From academic life to Young Life and back: My journey as a
Christian psychologist (so far)*

Keynote Address 2

Saturday 3 March, 10.00-11.15

Justin Barrett, Ph.D.
University of Oxford

*Why would anyone believe in God? A cognitive and
evolutionary answer*

Throughout history and around the globe the vast majority of people have believed in gods. Why this universality of theism? Recent cognitive scientific approaches—many informed by evolutionary psychology—offer an answer to the question of why belief is so common. Religion arises naturally from the architecture of human minds interacting in historically common environments. Further, research suggests that belief in a super knowing, super powerful, creator God may be even more thoroughly supported by natural human cognition. I conclude by speculating what implications might be for the Christian doctrine of general revelation.

Parallel Session Option A

Saturday 3 March, 11.45-12.45

Eduardo J. Echeverria, Ph.D.
Sacred Heart Major Seminary, Detroit, MI

*Sensus Divinitatis, proper function and belief in God:
Reflections on Alvin Plantinga's religious epistemology*

If evolutionary explanations for the universal human tendency to believe in God are found such that we could show that there are natural processes that produce religious belief, then would such explanations discredit such beliefs? In this paper, I explore the answer to this question by leading Christian (Calvinist) philosopher Alvin Plantinga who argues that naturalistic explanations “would have no tendency to discredit religious belief.” “Perhaps God designed us in such a way that it is by virtue of those processes that we come to have knowledge of him.” He adds, “Clearly, it is possible both that there is an explanation in terms of natural processes of religious belief (perhaps a brain physiological account of what happens when someone holds religious beliefs), and that these beliefs have a perfectly respectable epistemic status” (*Warranted Christian Belief* [Oxford University Press, 2000], p. 145). In this paper, I make four points about Plantinga's religious epistemology in the following that bear upon the question of this conference: Why believe in God? First, naturalistic explanations of religious beliefs do not discredit the rationality of such beliefs. Second, properly functioning cognitive powers such as perception, memory, reasoning, introspection, induction, testimony, and more controversially, a moral sense and a *sensus divinitatis*, a natural, inborn sense of

God, for the most part deliver true belief. In short, people believe in God, according to Plantinga's view, because it is natural to do so, but that belief "has warrant just if it is produced by cognitive processes or faculties that are functioning properly" (*Warranted Christian Belief*, xi). In this connection, I outline Plantinga's model for warranted belief in God. Third, the notion of proper function is inextricably bound up with the notion of a design plan. "Human beings and their organs are so constructed that there is a way that they *should* work, a way they are *supposed* to work, a way they work when they work right; this is the way they work when there is no malfunction" (*Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 154). Plantinga argues that this design plan can be recognized whether or not one is a theist; for example, "it is perhaps possible that evolution (undirected by God or anyone else) has somehow furnished us with our design plans" (*Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 154). Fourth, and last, he argues that there is no viable naturalistic account of proper function; in short, he argues that naturalism is irrational.

**Parallel Session Option B:
*Religious beliefs and clinical
psychology qualitative research
workshop***

Saturday 3 March, 11.45-12.45

Religious beliefs and clinical psychology: Qualitative research workshop

Julia Little, D.Clin.Psy

South London and The Maudsley NHS Trust

**Martyn Baker, Psy.D
University of East London**

'Understanding my mental health problem': How religious service-users experienced the views of their local faith community, and those of the NHS mental health staff caring for them

An Interpretative Phenomenological Analytic approach was used to explore how Christians who have had an inpatient mental health admission, experience the views of their local faith community and those of their NHS mental health staff caring for them. Eight participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview format. The analysis suggested that participants could experience both the church and the mental health systems positively, as "sanctuary", or negatively, as "prison." Participants gave accounts of both the church and the mental health system providing explanations for their experiences. They described how they wanted to make sense of their experiences and that they developed their own explanations as a result of the process of coming into contact with the church and the mental health system. The analysis suggested that participants actively navigated their way through these systems in order to seek out "sanctuary" experiences and avoid "prison" experiences, primarily through the way that they would choose to disclose, or keep information hidden. The impact of these experiences on participants' own explanations is discussed.

**Rukhsana Arshad, B.Sc.
University of Leicester**

Working with religion in psychosis: A qualitative study of clinical psychologists in the NHS

Aim: To explore and gain an initial insight into how clinical psychologists may approach work with religious themes encountered in the therapeutic setting with clients who experience psychosis.

Method: Clinical psychologists were recruited from three NHS trusts who worked in specific services relating to the assessment and treatment of psychosis. To date, eight clinical psychologists have participated in semi-structured interviews which were transcribed and are being analysed using a Grounded Theory qualitative methodology.

Results: Analysis is currently ongoing. Initial findings to date indicate emerging themes from participants such as an attempt to unravel cases to detangle what religious themes may be related to the client before the onset of psychosis and what may have emerged later, and to what extent the religious themes are entwined in the psychosis. Themes around curiosity and having a non-judgemental approach to engage the clients have also been prevalent. **Conclusions:** The study is ongoing. It would be interesting to see how emerging findings match up with service users needs, in particular from BME communities.

**Sarah Longbotham, M.Sc.
University of Leicester**

An exploration of how carers of people with a diagnosis of psychosis interact with their religious beliefs and communities in relation to coping with their role as a carer

Objectives: To explore how carers of people with a diagnosis of psychosis interact with their religious beliefs and communities in relation to coping with their role as a carer. **Method:** Participants were recruited from voluntary carers support organisations. Carers from all faith backgrounds

were invited to participate. Eight carers were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. Grounded Theory was used to analyse the interview data, therefore data analysis was ongoing throughout the interview stage and relied on theoretical sampling to inform development of theory and to explore inconsistencies in interview data. **Results:** Thus far, results indicate that carers of people with psychosis have fluctuating beliefs about their relationship with their God and their religious communities. These relationships appear to be directly related to the perceived unpredictability of psychosis and the support that they receive from their faith community and mental health services. **Conclusions:** Data suggests that for carers who identify with a religion that this is central in attributions relating to the cause and cure of psychosis. These beliefs do not always appear to be consistent with treatment within a medical model.

Afternoon Plenary

Saturday 3 March, 15.45-16.45

Fraser Watts, Ph.D.
University of Cambridge

Christian belief in evolutionary context

Evolution has provided a rich context in which to re-frame Christian doctrine; no other area of science has been as fruitful in this regard. Evolution can be seen as the process by which God has brought different species in being. Some oppose that on the grounds that evolution is a purely chance process. However, there is clearly directional change in evolution, though the interpretation of that in terms

of purpose is speculative. Genesis 3 can also be interpreted in terms of evolution: the chapter describes the development of a differentiating consciousness, and thus casts in story form a transition that must have occurred in evolution. Good is distinguished off from evil; God is distinguished from humanity. Christ can also be seen as the culmination of evolution. It is more difficult to give an adequate account of the saving impact of Christ in evolutionary context, though some helpful steps can be taken in that direction.

Keynote Address 3

Sunday 4 March, 9.30-10.30

Justin Barrett, Ph.D.
University of Oxford

Evolutionary psychology and faith: The good, the bad, and the nonsense

Drawing primarily upon recent applications of evolutionary psychology to the study of religion, I share three reactions to the purported deliverances of the field. The Good: Evolutionary perspectives offer depth to psychological explanation, clues for directing research, and grounds for embracing the notion of pan-cultural “human nature”. The Bad: Evolutionary psychology's powerful rhetoric sometimes undermines genuine scientific inquiry and threatens a return to the mind-blind, dark ages of psychology. The Nonsense: Contrary to popular portrayals by anti-theists, evolutionary psychology does not threaten or undermine Christian faith even when it is applied to faith itself.

Sunday Service

Sunday 4 March, 11.00-12.30

Revd. Fraser Watts, Ph.D.
University of Cambridge

Presenters

Rukhsana Arshad, B.Sc. is a trainee clinical psychologist at the University of Leicester and is currently in her final year of study. She has an interest in working with BME communities and in addressing cultural and spiritual needs of clients. She is currently on placement at the Psychosis Intervention and Early Recovery (PIER) team in Leicester.

Martyn Baker, Psy.D. started working life as a research assistant, then clinical lecturer, at The Middlesex Hospital. He has since worked as a lecturer in psychology for about 30 years at University of East London. He has also maintained two sessions a week as honorary Clinical Psychologist within East London and The City Mental Health NHS Trust for almost as many years! He has become particularly interested in the experience in the workplace of Christian clinical psychologists within the NHS regarding the interface of religious/spiritual values and professional values.

Justin Barrett, Ph.D. is a leading figure in the cognitive science of religion field. After his Ph.D. at Cornell University, Justin served on the psychology faculties at Calvin College and the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, and then stepped out of academia to work with his wife as the area co-director of Young Life (a Christian youth ministry) in Lawrence, Kansas. He is now a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Oxford's Centre for Anthropology and Mind. His developmental and cognitive psychological work on the cognitive science of religion appears in numerous scientific

journals and was recently summarized in his book, *Why Would Anyone Believe in God?* (AltaMira, 2004).

Eduardo J. Echeverria, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at Sacred Heart Major Seminary, Detroit, Michigan. He has advanced degrees in philosophy and theology, and received his Ph.D. in philosophy from the Free University of Amsterdam in 1981. He has published articles in professional journals such as the *Thomist*, *Logos*, *Philosophia Reformata*, the *Journal of Markets and Morality*, and *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia*.

Sarah Longbotham, M.Sc. is a clinical psychology trainee in her final year of training at the University of Leicester. She is currently working in Nottingham within Early Intervention Services, specifically with young people and their families who have received a diagnosis of psychosis. She also works in Rehabilitation Services with people who have severe and enduring mental health problems.

Revd. Fraser Watts, Ph.D. is Reader in Theology and Natural Science at the Faculty of Divinity of the University of Cambridge, Director of the Psychology and Religion Research Group, Fellow of Queens' College, Cambridge, and Vicar-Chaplain of St Edward King and Martyr, Cambridge. Prior to his current posts, Fraser was Head of the Department of Clinical Psychology at King's College Hospital, London, and subsequently Senior Scientist at the Medical Research Council's Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit (then Applied Psychology Unit) in Cambridge. He is the founding editor of the journal *Cognition and Emotion* and is a former President of the British Psychological Society.