



For immediate release
May 30, 2006

Contact:
William Grassie
215.789.2200
tarp@metanexus.net

Institute Awards \$4.6 million to Further Scientific Research on Religion

PHILADELPHIA - The Philadelphia-based Metanexus Institute announced today the awarding of \$4.6 million to fund eleven research teams seeking to further the scientific understanding of religion and spirituality. Grants in the Templeton Advanced Research Project (TARP), funded by the John Templeton Foundation as part of its mission to advance religion and science, were made by competitive application from over 400 qualified proposals.

"Most scientific studies of religion focus on specific faith communities and utilize a single social scientific paradigm," noted William Grassie, Executive Director of the Metanexus Institute. "What is unique about this project, and the Templeton Foundation in general, is the attempt to do broad comparative studies of religion and spirituality using multiple methods spanning disciplines as diverse as economics and the neurosciences." Grassie worked with a team of twelve distinguished judges and over sixty external peer reviewers to make the difficult selections of which projects will utilize the most innovative methodologies and promise the most significant results.

The Templeton Advanced Research Project is broken down into three topical areas with different levels of funding. Two awards of \$1 million each were made on the theme of "Religion, Spirituality, Healing and Health Outcomes." The funded projects are:

Michael Boivin, Principal Investigator, at Michigan State University will lead a three-year study of Breast Cancer Disease and Treatment: Modeling the Relationships Among Spiritual and Emotional Well-Being, Quality of Life, Neuropsychological Function and Immunological Resilience.

Brenda Cole, Principal Investigator at the University of Pittsburgh, will lead a three-year study of The Health Effects of Spiritually-focused Meditation for People with Acute Leukemia.

Two awards of \$1 million each were made on the theme of "Religion, Spirituality and Human Flourishing". The funded projects are:

Dacher Keltner, Principal Investigator at University of California, Berkeley, will lead a three-year study of Spiritual Experience, Pro-Social Emotion, and Human Flourishing.

Petr Janata, Principal Investigator at University of California, Davis, will lead a three-year study of Music, Spirituality, Religion, and the Human Brain.

Seven awards varying from \$50,000 to \$150,000 were made on the theme of “Competitive Dynamics and Cultural Evolution of Religions and God Concepts”. The funded projects are:

Pascal Boyer, Principal Investigator at Washington University, St. Louis, will lead a two-year study of Ritual Behavior and the Dynamics of Religious Commitment.

Adam Cohen, Principal Investigator at Arizona State University, will lead a two-year a two-year study of Effects of Faith, Nature of God, and Community on Health and Well-Being: A Multi-Method, Multicultural Study.

Virginia Garrard-Burnett, Principal Investigator at the University of Texas at Austin, will lead a two-year study of Faces of God in Latin America.

Scott Garrels, Principal Investigator at Fuller Graduate School of Psychology, Pasadena, California, will lead a two-year study of Imitation, Mimetic Theory, and Religious and Cultural Evolution.

Michael Graves, Principal Investigator at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, will lead a two-year study of The Ecological Evolutionary Dynamics of Hawaiian Ritual and Social Complexity.

Tom Smith, Principal Investigator at the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, will lead a two-year study of Basic Theories and Models of Religious Change.

David Sloan Wilson, Binghamton University, and William Scott Green, University of Miami, Co-Investigators, will lead a two-year study of Religious Conceptions of the Afterlife from a Cultural Evolutionary Perspective and a General Field of Evolutionary Religious Studies.

For more information on the Templeton Advanced Research Project including detail on the funded projects, bios of the principal investigators, lists of the judges and reviewers, selection criteria, and field analyses, go to: <http://www.metanexus.net/tarp> .

∞ ∞ ∞

Quotes from Principal Investigators

“Never before have the fields of neuropsychology, immunology, fMRI brain imaging, psychological and emotional well-being, and spirituality within a theology of personhood been brought together by such an accomplished team of experts.”

- Michael Boivin.

“My colleagues and I are trying to understand why most religious traditions have rituals. They study the brain processes at work when people perform rituals and consider how these processes create or strengthen religious commitment”

– Pascal Boyer

“This research builds on work in cultural psychology, personality psychology, and psychology of religion in a number of ways. First, it uses multiple methods, as opposed to asking people to tell us about their conscious views of God. We use a sophisticated computer program to analyze the meaning of people’s descriptions of God. We will also use computer software to time how long

it takes people to answer questions about their views of God, to gain insight into the structure of their unconscious attitudes. Second, we are examining views of God in different religious groups and countries, to gain insight into how views of God and broad cultural syndromes build upon each other.”

– Adam B. Cohen

“This project is significant because it will allow for the initiation of cross-fertilization between imitation researchers and mimetic scholars who, up to this point, have more or less been working independently from one another, yet at the same time have been calling for a dramatic shift in thought and research based on the rediscovery of imitation as an incredibly dynamic and foundational force in human development and cultural evolution.”

– Scott Garrels

“We will study the co-evolution of traditional Hawaiian religious practices with social strategies and natural environmental variability from AD 1300-1825. This work is innovative in its integration of archaeological and historical materials within an explicit evolutionary framework that includes the development of social simulations based on agent based models.”

– Michael Graves

“This is the first large-scale scientific research project that critically examines what seems to be a universal link between music and spirituality. We hope to understand the interaction of these core human experiences and how they facilitate human social and emotional well-being.”

– Petr Janata

“Our program of research is based on the assumption that spiritual experiences of different kinds amplify the central of pro-social emotions like compassion, gratitude, awe, and love of humanity in the individual’s life. Our work will begin to characterize how spiritual transformation: (1) activates central nervous system structures involved in compassion and awe; (2) creates a pro-social orientation that leads to the contagion of cooperation; and (3) plays a role in the lives of women in their seventies, and traces back to certain life histories and predicts long term life outcomes.”

– Dacher Keltner

“This project will be the most comprehensive review to date on what people believe about God and other transcendental matters and how those beliefs have changed across time and countries. Major data sources such as the General Social Surveys and the International Social Survey Program studies will be analyzed to examine people’s view across cohorts, time, and nations.”

– Tom Smith

“This project will study the diversity of conceptions of the afterlife in the same way that evolutionists study the diversity of biological life forms. In addition, the project is designed to accelerate the establishment of evolutionary religious studies as a general field of inquiry.”

– David Sloan Wilson