

**Application: Programme of Excellence – Naturalism and Christian Semantics (5 years)  
Professor Troels Engberg-Pedersen (PI) and Professor Niels Henrik Gregersen (Co-PI)**

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

### **Aims and Visions**

The project aims to address the issue of *naturalism in relation to Christian thought* with a *triple* focus on (1) the current discussions of religious naturalism in systematic theology within the field of ‘Science & Religion’, (2) the current attempts in ‘Early Christian Studies’ of the first two centuries to reconceptualize the relationship between ancient philosophy (primarily Stoicism as opposed to Platonism) and early Christian reflection on nature and God and (3) a sustained attempt to correlate the two fields of research.

### ***Background and Social Context***

The last decade has witnessed sustained attempts to explain religion in purely naturalistic terms. Within *evolutionary biology*, multi-level selection theorists have argued that religions have an adaptational value for the stabilization and proliferation of social groups (David Sloan Wilson 2002). By contrast, proponents of *cognitive science* have rather tended to see religion as a mere by-product of the ordinary workings of human cognitive systems, developed in the Stone Age (Pascal Boyer 2001; Scott Atran 2002); on this view, religion may be seen as a cultural parasite, natural in its origin but utterly illusionary in its cognitive contents (Richard Dawkins 2006; Daniel Dennett 2006). A discussion of the adaptive or non-adaptive functions of religion (as well as the pro-social versus destructive influence of religion) has thus established itself across otherwise distinct disciplines such as evolutionary biology and psychology, developmental psychology, and religious studies.

These discussions have already drawn significant public attention in the media. But also religious self-reflection has been influenced by them. Proponents of a *religious naturalism*, based on science rather than on historically developed religions, have been presented (Ursula Goodenough 1998). Within theology various attempts have been made to absorb naturalism as a position implied by the Christian faith, either by an *atemporal theism* (Willem Drees 1996), *process theology* (David Griffin 2000) or by *panentheistic reconceptualizations* of classic Christian theology (Philip Clayton & Arthur Peacocke 2004; Peacocke 2007, in press). Even a prime mover of evolutionary psychology such as Julian Barrett (2004; 2007) understands theism (broadly understood as the belief in a transcendent-immanent God) as fully congruent with the findings of a cognitive science.

### ***Gains of a Combined Historical-Contemporary Project***

Theological responses, however, have tended to be apologetic and defensive rather than pursuing a self-reflective position based on Christianity’s own resources. The present project is probably unique by arguing that even culturally potent texts of Christianity such as the *canonical texts of Paul and John* themselves reflect a worldview of Stoic provenance rather than of Platonist orientation (Engberg-Pedersen). Likewise current discussion within *science & religion* suggests that a contemporary theology might be better pursued on the basis of an emergentist monism (Gregersen 2003; 2006; 2007) than on dualist assumptions of a soul-body divide, or a God-world separation. God is not necessarily to be perceived as a “supernatural” being, but rather as Being-Itself (Paul Tillich), or as “the power to be *in* everything that

exists” (K.E. Løgstrup). Against this background, significant new research will be pursued in a coordination of contemporary and historical perspectives dealing with the particular semantics of Christian thought and practices.

The expected outcome of the interdisciplinary project of ‘Naturalism and Christian Semantics’ is, on the one hand, to put new questions to a historical material (especially the early Stoic-Christian interface), and, on the other hand, to bring into the contemporary discussions between theology and the natural sciences a historical and semantic sensibility, whereby tendencies of sterilized dichotomies between naturalism and religious traditions may be overcome, or at least formulated in a new key. For example, What does it *mean* to say that “Nature is all that is”, and what does it *mean* to say that God permeates everything that exists, yet that God is more than the world?

### ***‘Naturalism and Christian Semantics’ in a Contemporary Perspective***

The goal of the contemporary part of the project is to analyze, and critically assess, some of the more recent proposals for *Religious Naturalism* in relation to the *prima facie* paradoxical examples of Christian naturalism, emerging in the interface between ‘soft’ comprehensive versions of naturalism, which claims that nature is simply “all-that-exists”, and theistic versions of naturalism, in which materially based reality is “all-that-exists”, but only within the world of creation. In order to situate this project in the more general discussions on naturalism(s), we include the following sub-projects under the umbrella of the proposal:

- 1 PhD student to work on varieties of religious naturalism in order to explore constructive theological proposals (theistic or non-theistic)
- 1 PostDoc to work on philosophical issues concerning evolutionary and cognitive theories of religion.

Contemporary options within the broad umbrella of ‘religious naturalism’ will be studied by two established PostDocs:

- 1 PostDoc (Anne Runehov, Uppsala/Copenhagen) will critically assess contemporary varieties of religious naturalism, especially within neurotheology and religious experience
- 1 PostDoc (Johanne Stubbe Teglbjærg; Copenhagen) will assess the possibility of a ‘theistic naturalism’ with new independent work on the phenomenology of the body and the notion of the bodiliness of God.

The co-principal investigator, Niels Henrik Gregersen, has a background as a philosopher of religion (1986-1989) and as a Research Professor in Theology and Science at Aarhus University (2000-2004). He has devoted the main bulk of his research to the critical absorption of scientific thinking within Christian theology, while focusing on the ways in which the Christian semantics is able to be informed by the sciences, yet also to transcend purely scientific (or semantically ‘thin’) descriptions of reality.

Within the sciences of complexity, forceful explanatory models of emergence have been developed (Clayton 2004). As a result of the combination of evolutionary thinking and computational complexity studies, the idea of distinctive levels of reality has been increasingly substantiated (though it is still controversial). Philosophers of biology use to argue that the explanatory concepts of biology are not reducible to physical concepts (epistemic non-reductionism), nor to the causal capacities of microphysical entities (ontological non-reductionism). For this reason, nature’s capacity for self-complexification will be at the core of Gregersen’s research, with special regard to potentially rich theological re-descriptions of nature’s creativity, in which new emergent properties and structures are propagated so as to flourish. The hypothesis is that this new picture of nature’s capacity for self-or-

ganization is congenial with the assumptions of Judeo-Christian creation theology, according to which God does not predetermine the individual natural events, but generously creates a fertile matrix for natural self-exploration. In collaboration with American and British colleagues, a theological position will be developed which examines the possibilities of divine action within the framework of the laws of nature, the selective rules of complexity, and natural capacities.

While a main focus of Gregersen's work will be the theological interpretation of the complexity studies, he is also going to devote his interest to the interrelation between complexity sciences and the new emerging concepts of 'matter' within the natural sciences. As long as matter was only conceived as 'the equivalence of mass and energy' (Einstein), the unavoidable result was a deterministic view of the universe. Religiously, this means that only a Spinozistic ontology is possible (unless one takes refuge in a Kantian partition of the universe). Today, we find a new interpretation of the linkage between quantum theory and information theory offered by Seth Lloyd (2006) at MIT. As a result of these very recent developments, the concept of *information* seems to be as basic as the concepts of mass and energy. Quantum information is thus responsible for the continuous production of *differences* within the web of nature, differences which sometimes will prove evolutionarily effective and create new structures. This offers ample space for a re-conceptualization of divine creativity

Gregersen thus commits himself to two monographs (see Research Plan), and the editing of a frontier book on the concepts of matter and information (featuring confirmed contributions from Paul Davies, Arthur Peacocke; Seth Lloyd; Holmes Rolston; Terrence Deacon; Bernd-Oluf Küppers; John Haught; Keith Ward; and Michael Welker). He also commits himself to publish at least 10 peer-review articles and 10 book chapters for international volumes (in 2006 he produced 6 peer-reviewed articles and 5 book-chapters).

### ***'Naturalism and Christian Semantics' Historically***

Around 100 CE, the Jewish historian Josephus wrote as follows: "In fact, Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, Plato, the Stoics who succeeded him, and indeed nearly all the philosophers appear to have held similar views [viz., to those of Moses] concerning the nature of God" (*Contra Apionem* 2.168).

This statement is hardly true as it stands, but it is noteworthy for the way in which it bridges a gap that has since then been seen as unbridgeable: between 'religion' and 'philosophy', between Judaism/Christianity ('Jerusalem') and Graeco-Roman thought ('Athens') – and much later between Christianity and 'humanism' or 'naturalism'. It is true that historians have fully recognized the way in which Graeco-Roman philosophy and early Christianity underwent a symbiosis from the latter half of the second century onwards when Platonism, in particular, became a dominant influence on some Christian thinkers. Before that, however, the general situation was rather different, both within ancient philosophy itself and with regard to the interaction between philosophy and early Christianity. It is this different situation – which is only gradually becoming clear to scholars – that the historical side of the project aims to address. Let us note here four developments in recent scholarship that raise new questions about this situation in relation to the issue of 'Naturalism and Christian Semantics'.

First, scholars have gradually come to take seriously the fact that it is highly misleading to operate with a contrast in the ancient world between a 'naturalistic' and a 'religious' understanding of the world. All the relevant main players in the Graeco-Roman philosophical tradition (including materialistic Stoicism, see below) had a religious understanding of the world. But they also operated by rational argument, which was centred on giving a full account of 'Nature' (*Peri Physeos*) that would include an account of God (*De Natura Deorum*). This is

the tradition of *philosophical theology*. By taking this tradition seriously, one may open up for a much more fruitful analysis than before of the relationship between Graeco-Roman philosophical theology and contemporary Jewish and early Christian theology in the first two centuries CE.

Second, this way of conceptualizing that relationship builds on a perspective that has been gaining ground in modern scholarship over the last few decades: that early Christian texts like the New Testament and even more so 2<sup>nd</sup> century Christian texts should in general be analysed ‘beyond the Judaism/ Hellenism divide’ (Engberg-Pedersen 2001). This perspective, which has broken with an age-old tradition of placing early Christianity in relation to *either* Jewish *or* ‘Hellenistic’ thought, has already been applied to a range of early Christian material, e.g. in the recent Copenhagen project on ‘Philosophy at the Roots of Christianity’. Oddly, however, the new perspective has never before been extended to address the central question of religious discourse: that of the nature of God and the nature of nature.

Third, following on the strongly invigorated focus within the last few decades on so-called ‘Hellenistic’ philosophy (the post-‘classical’ philosophy after Plato and Aristotle of Skepticism, Epicureanism and Stoicism, basically going down to the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE, cf. Long & Sedley 1987, Engberg-Pedersen 1990, Long 1996, Inwood 2003), scholars have now begun to pay the same kind of attention to the type of Graeco-Roman philosophy which began to be articulated in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE and which – together with Stoicism – constitutes the direct context for Hellenistic Jewish and early Christian theology: Middle Platonism. What is not clear, however, is the exact way in which Stoicism and Platonism interacted with one another to form the new amalgam of ‘Middle Platonism’ (cf. Boys-Stones 2001). Nor is it yet clear how Stoicism and Platonism may have informed Hellenistic Jewish and early Christian theologies as distinct and independent entities. This Stoicism-Platonism question is a crucial one, however, inasmuch as the Stoic *materialist* picture of God differs rather sharply from the Platonist *immaterialist* one. If some of the early Christian writings (e.g. the Gospel of John or the Pauline letters, cf. Engberg-Pedersen 2000) turn out to be influenced by Stoicism *instead of* Platonism, then their conception of God and nature will be far closer to modern conceptions than previously thought.

Fourth, during the last two decades the understanding of early Christianity in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century has been drastically altered as the new, so-called ‘Gnostic’ material discovered in Egypt (Nag Hammadi) in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century has been gradually incorporated into the picture of 2<sup>nd</sup> century Christianity (e.g. Williams 1996, King 2003). This raises a wholly new set of questions with regard to the role of Graeco-Roman philosophical theology for early Christian thought. In particular, what influence did it have on the ‘Gnostic’ texts? And how may such an influence serve to explain the rejection of ‘philosophy’ as a whole that one finds in other early Christian writers (e.g. Tertullian) who also rejected the ‘Gnostics’ and branded them as ‘heretics’? In other words, how was Graeco-Roman philosophical theology (now including Platonism) involved in the battles of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century that resulted in ‘orthodoxy’? And how may this very specific historical situation have influenced the relationship between ‘religion’ and philosophical ‘naturalism’ in the later Christian tradition?

Against this overall background the historical part of the project proposes to study the following special issues:

**1 The Stoic and Platonic traditions of philosophical theology in the first two centuries CE.** What was the role of Stoic ontology and metaphysics in the kind of philosophical theology that lay behind and went into Jewish and Christian conceptualizations of Nature and God in these two centuries? In particular, exactly how does Stoicism go into the scholarly construct of ‘Middle Platonism’? Was there a live discussion between a Stoicizing, materialist

way of thinking about the world and God and a Platonizing, immaterialist way (compare, e.g., the Wisdom of Solomon and Philo of Alexandria)? Did Stoicism constitute an independent tradition of philosophical theology alongside that of Middle Platonism? Work on this issue has been begun by Troels Engberg-Pedersen for the earlier period as part of the project on ‘Philosophy at the Roots of Christianity’. But a clear picture of the overall situation during the first two centuries is required.

**2 The ontology underlying the Gospel of John.** What is the ontology (if any) that lies behind the crucial concepts in the Gospel of John of Logos and Pneuma (spirit)? Are they to be related primarily to a Platonizing metaphysics and cosmology? Or should they rather be understood against a Stoic, materialist understanding of Nature and God? The latter answer has been argued in a recent PhD dissertation by Gitte Buch-Hansen under the project on ‘Philosophy at the Roots of Christianity’. But since that thesis is rather controversial, the question needs to be re-thought in the wider context established by work on issue no **1**. Troels Engberg-Pedersen aims to address both issues together on the basis of his own work on another central figure in the New Testament: Paul.

**3 Stoicism in 2<sup>nd</sup> century Christian texts.** How should one fit key figures and phenomena in the early Christian philosophical theology of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and early 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries into the overall picture? For instance, what is the role of Stoic metaphysics in Justin Martyr, in Tertullian and in Origen? And indeed, what should one say of Stoic influence on the ‘Gnostic’ writings of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century? Troels Engberg-Pedersen has already taken steps to throw light on some of these issues in connection with a book on ‘Stoicism in Early Christianity’ that he is editing together with two Finnish experts on Gnosticism (Ismo Dunderberg and Tuomas Rasimus). But there is much more work to be done, which will be undertaken by the PhD students involved in the project.

**4 Critique of religion in antiquity.** The issue of metaphysics and philosophical theology hangs closely together with the critique of religion that has a long tradition in both Jewish and Greek thought before the first two centuries CE. The question of the ancient critique of religion is currently being studied by Aleksandar Gusa with funding from the Carlsberg Foundation. There is a need, however, to connect it directly with the other question, and, indeed, to move the whole discussion up into the 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, that is, beyond the New Testament, with which Gusa stops in his present project. Gusa will be hired to carry this through.

## Research Plan

The project will be organized around five main elements.

**1 Graduate students.** With a view to graduate education and international co-operation we plan to appoint five PhD students (Danish or international), two of whom will work on the modern part of the project and three on the ancient part. We also plan to appoint three Post-Docs, two of whom have or will have taken their PhD degrees at the University of Copenhagen and one at the University of Uppsala.

The planned schedule is as follows:

- 1 PhD student to work on varieties of religious naturalism in order to explore constructive theological proposals (theistic or non-theistic): 11.1.2009-31.12.2011
- 1 PostDoc to work on philosophical issues concerning evolutionary and cognitive theories of religion: 1.2.2009-1.2.2011

- 1 PostDoc (Anne Runehov, Uppsala/Copenhagen) will critically assess contemporary varieties of religious naturalism, especially within neurotheology and religious experience: 1.9.2008-31.8.2010
- 1 PostDoc (PhD in spe Johanne Stubbe Teglbjærg, Copenhagen) to work on concepts of nature, body phenomenology and the bodiliness of God: 1.2.2009-31.1.2011
- 1 PhD student (Tilde Bak, Copenhagen) to work on Platonism and Stoicism in 2<sup>nd</sup> century 'Gnosticism': 1.9.2008-31.8.2011
- 3 PostDocs (Gitte Buch-Hansen and Stefan Nordgaard Svendsen, Copenhagen, and one open position) to work on the philosophical ontology, ethics and theology of select early Christian thinkers (e.g. Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Origen): 1.11.2008-30.10.2010 (Buch-Hansen and Nordgaard Svendsen) and 1.1.2009-31.12.2010 (open)
- 1 PostDoc (PhD Aleksandar Gusa, Copenhagen) to work on the role of metaphysics and philosophical theology in the critique of religion in the two first centuries CE: 1.10.2010-30.9.2012.

**2.1 Exploratory seminars.** During the first year of the project we plan to organize seven small exploratory seminars with selected international participants on the following topics:

- \* Varieties of naturalism
- \* Contemporary concepts of matter
- \* Naturalism and phenomenology
- \* Options for theistic naturalism
- \* Stoicism and Platonism in the first two centuries CE
- \* The philosophical ontology and theology of key early Christian thinkers
- \* Graeco-Roman ontology/theology and 2<sup>nd</sup> century 'Gnosticism'.

**2.2 Weekly meetings.** These seminars will form part of an intensive shared study activity of weekly meetings within the research group during the first three semesters of the project. It will be required that all members of the group participate in all activities in order to further co-operation between the historical and the contemporary parts of the project.

**3 Research leave.** The two main participants in the project (the principal investigator and the co-principal investigator) will have two full semesters of research leave from their jobs during the five-year period in addition to two other full semesters of research leave as part of their job.

Thus Troels Engberg-Pedersen will have research leave in the spring of 2010 and 2012 and Niels Henrik Gregersen in the fall of 2009 and 2011.

In addition to peer-reviewed articles Troels Engberg-Pedersen aims to publish a monograph on *The Gospel of John – Stoic or Platonist?* in 2011 and a monograph on *Stoicism in Philosophical Theology of the First Two Centuries CE* at the end of the project.

In addition to peer-reviewed articles Niels Henrik Gregersen aims to publish an edited volume, *Matter and Information from Physics to Metaphysics* (with Paul Davies) (2010), a monograph on *Theology and the Sciences of Complexity* (2012), and a theological study on *Creating Natural Creativity* (2013).

**4 1-week visits.** From the spring of 2009 we plan to organize 1-week visits by select international researchers twice per semester. The aim is to allow these international experts to conduct seminars to the research group (and other interested students at the University) and to receive their feedback on what the members of the research group themselves have to offer.

**5 Three concluding international seminars.** Towards the end of the project we plan to organize three more general international seminars on the three fundamental topics under the project:

- \* Naturalism and Christian semantics in a contemporary perspective;
- \* Naturalism and Christian semantics in an ancient philosophical and theological context;
- \* Similarities and differences in the conceptions of nature and God in antiquity and the present.

Each of these seminars is intended to result in a volume of essays edited by us.

The principal investigator and co-principal investigator together have extensive experience with the handling of research activities like those listed above.

## **Potential for producing outstanding and leading research results**

We would ourselves describe the potential of the principal investigator and the co-principal investigator for producing first-class research results in the proposed field as follows:

**1 Track-record in research.** As is clear from our CVs and lists of publications, we have both published very extensively internationally, both in the form of monographs and edited volumes published by recognized publishers, articles in peer-reviewed journals, contributions to volumes edited by others, and more.

**2 Honours.** In addition, the quality of our research has been internationally recognized. Thus Troels Engberg-Pedersen is a member of the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and the Norwegian Academy of Sciences. And his book, *Paul and the Stoics* (2000), received the *Biblical Archaeology Review* prize (Washington, DC) as Best Book Relating to the New Testament published in 1999 and 2000. Niels Henrik Gregersen is member of The Learned Society at Aarhus University and served as its President 2002-03, a member of Center of Theological Inquiry, Princeton, and has received several research awards, including a 100K \$ *Research Award on the Constructive Interface between Religion and the Sciences* from the Templeton Foundation 1999.

**3 International contacts.** During our academic careers, we have both built up very extensive networks of international contacts, on which we may draw for the project. We have both stayed for longer periods of time doing research abroad (both the UK and the US for Troels Engberg-Pedersen and the US for Niels Henrik Gregersen). We are regularly invited to speak at conferences abroad, including Asia and Africa. And we have ample experience from bringing international experts to Denmark.

**4 Research organization.** The principal investigator/academic project manager has extensive experience with organization of research.

- \* In 1889-1996 Troels Engberg-Pedersen was on the steering committee and chairman (on a rotational basis) of an inter-disciplinary research project on the Hellenistic period sponsored by the Danish Research Council for the Humanities.

\* In 1991 and again in 1997 he also convened two independent international conferences in his field, the results of which have been published both in the UK and the US.

\* In 2000-2001 he directed (with a younger colleague from Sweden) a Nordic research project sponsored by the Joint Committee of the Nordic Research Councils for the Humanities. Here the research results were published in Germany and the US.

\* In 2003-2007 he has been directing (with a younger Danish colleague) a research project on “Philosophy at the Roots of Christianity” sponsored by the Danish Research Council for the Humanities (now Culture and Communication). The research results (including two PhD dissertations) will be published internationally.

**5 Scientific preparedness.** We have both done research during more than ten years into our individual parts of the shared project. Troels Engberg-Pedersen was educated at Oxford in ancient philosophy (cf. his first, philosophical doctoral dissertation on Aristotle, published by Oxford University Press in 1983) and has since then moved into the study of early Christianity from a philosophical perspective (cf. his second, theological doctoral dissertation on the apostle Paul and Stoicism published in the UK and US in 2000). In the recent research project on “Philosophy at the Roots of Christianity” he has extended this double approach into ontology/cosmology and theology and is now ready to tackle his part of the overall theme of the present project : naturalism and Christian semantics within the engagement of Graeco-Roman philosophy and Christian thinking about God and nature in the first two centuries CE. Niels Henrik Gregersen was educated at Copenhagen University, where he earned his PhD, published with Aarhus University Press (1988, 2001<sup>2</sup>). He has been visiting professor at *CTI*, Princeton 1996-7, and has since then worked and published with premier scholars in the field of Science & Religion.

**6 The novelty of the project.** The project has a triple focus:

- \* to extend the frontline of the modern understanding of the relationship between naturalism as a comprehensive philosophical and scientific framework of understanding and theism;
- \* to reconceptualize the relationship between Graeco-Roman philosophy and early Christianity by reconsidering the relationship in the first two centuries CE between (materialistic and naturalistic) Stoicism and (immaterialistic) Platonism and their respective influences on contemporary Judaism and Christianity;
- \* to reconfigure the modern thinking about Christianity in relation to Christianity’s roots in the light of the two other themes, focusing on semantics rather than on abstract ontologies.

While the first theme is at the forefront of current discussion and the second theme has not yet been adequately addressed, the most obvious novelty of the project lies in its third focus of combining the perspectives adopted under the two former themes. For the sake of clarity, we wish to emphasize here that the overall aim is *not* an “apologetic” one of trying to find room in the contemporary world for Christianity by rewriting history. Rather, we aim to break down *traditional* oppositions (between naturalism and religion, philosophy and Christianity and the like) in order to get at the heart of the *real* differences wherever they are to be found.

## **Relevance to university curricula and society and long-term effects**

**1 Relevance to the university.** The project is designed to allow the principal investigator and the co-principal investigator to be fully present at their respective departments during the

whole five-year period. Only the teaching load will be diminished through salary replacements, whereby space will be provided for younger scholars at pre-PhD or post-PhD-level in the central life of the Faculty of Theology.

The involvement of three PostDocs who are already connected to the Faculty (and partly educated there) will significantly strengthen the Faculty's profile within graduate education. The same goes, of course, for the five PhD students who are planned to go into the research group. Here we would particularly mention that we plan to advertize the PhD scholarships internationally in order to obtain a good mixture of younger scholars from Denmark and abroad.

As regards the project's relevance to the curriculum in theology and the Faculty's long-term research planning, we would like to emphasize that the project will significantly strengthen the Faculty's involvement in the post-New Testament part of early Christian Studies, which – in its current, rejuvenated form, which focuses on new material and new methods – is one of the most flourishing fields both in the Nordic countries (e.g. Aarhus, Lund, Bergen and Helsinki) and abroad (USA). Likewise, the project serves to update and rejuvenate two of the research priority areas of the Department of Systematic Theology: “human nature and personhood” and “metaphysics and hermeneutics”. The project is furthermore designed to internationalize the Faculty's field of systematic theology, by bringing together Continental and Anglo-Saxon scholars of contemporary religion. In addition, the project is designed in a way that brings together, in a common inquiry, the historical and the systematic departments of the Faculty. The philosophical and cosmological dimensions of the project thus serve the purpose of strengthening theological work on the possibilities of religious naturalism for philosophical theology in general, and for Christian theology in particular.

Finally, the project is designed so as to facilitate strong contacts with the other faculties of Copenhagen University, in particular the departments of philosophy, the departments of the life sciences (which are particularly strong at Copenhagen University), and the Center for the Philosophy of Nature at the Niels Bohr Institute. Niels Henrik Gregersen, being a former Research professor in Theology & Science, is used to work in such interdisciplinary settings.

**2 Relevance to society.** Any society will only function adequately if it has a sufficient amount of institutions, practices and ideas that are solidly present in the minds and bodies of its members. While ideas are not necessarily the most important element here, it is gradually being realized (again) that ideas are in fact very important. The present project is intended to address a precise issue that has enormous ramifications in the present ideological situation where certain traditional oppositions between worldviews have become ingrained in the collective unconscious. We are convinced that the best way to contribute to the constant development of society is – in addition to much else – to *address, rethink* and *reevaluate* traditionally fixed ideological paradigms and, if possible, come up with something better. That is what we intend to do.

**3 Long-term synergistic effects.** At faculty level the project is designed so as to integrate historical and systematic departments. At the level of Copenhagen University the project will strengthen the ties between the “dry” and the “wet” faculties (especially the life sciences). Internationally, the project will bring together leading scholars within the sciences, philosophy, historical and systematic theology.

## Communication of results to the public

The project will establish a website and a series of working papers at low-cost level for junior and international scholars (in preparation of strong international publications). The two main investigators are both used to write in newspapers and to be used in the public media (newspapers, radio, TV). In 2000, we organized a series of 23 programs on “Christianity and Culture” for the National Danish Broadcasting (Program 1).

## Plans for attracting external funding

Our track record is quite good for helping qualified younger scholars to obtain support from

- the Danish National Research Council for Culture and Communication,
- the Carlsberg Foundation.

In addition we have successfully been able to obtain external funding for the publication of independent volumes in Denmark (e.g. a Festschrift for Mogens Müller published in 2006).

We may also consider applying for a continuation of the project under

- the Framework Programme (FP7): the future of European Union research policy, and
- The John Templeton Foundation, Philadelphia

However, we wish to emphasize to we shall not be able to reach the goal we have set up for this project if it is not fully supported by our own University.

## Letters of support from collaborators

We have requested letters of support from a number of potential collaborators in the project, who are at the same time leading figures internationally in their respective fields. All the scholars mentioned below have agreed to figure on the list.

Harold Attridge, Yale University (early Christian studies) – letter of support  
 George Boys-Stones, Durham University, UK (ancient philosophy) – letter of support  
 David Brakke, Indiana University (early Christian studies) – letter of support  
 Philip Clayton, Harvard University (science and religion) – letter of support  
 William B. Drees, Leiden University (philosophy of science) – letter of support  
 Ismo Dunderberg, University of Helsinki (early Christian studies) – letter of support  
 Hans Fink, University of Aarhus (philosophy) – letter of support  
 John Fitzgerald, Miami University (early Christian studies) – letter of support  
 Arne Grøn, University of Copenhagen (systematic theology)  
 Anders Lund Jacobsen, University of Aarhus (systematic theology, early Christian studies)  
 Halvor Moxnes, Oslo University (early Christian studies) – letter of support  
 Samuel Rubenson, Lund University (early Christian studies)  
 Jeff Schloss, Westmont College, Santa Barbara – letter of support  
 Dan Zahavi, University of Copenhagen (philosophy)