

## **Robert Masson**

I will argue somewhat provocatively that cognitive linguistics, not mentioned in the call for papers, provides crucial data and insights for understanding how biology, psychology, and culture interact in the evolution of religion and religious expressions.

The paper will propose an irenic challenge to framing the question about the origin of religion in a way that ignores cognitive linguistics' research into the neural and cognitive mechanisms entailed in the emergence in our ancestors of meaning-making, conceptualization, and reasoning. Fauconnier and Turner's conceptual blending theory suggests that the emergence of religion, art, culture, and the sciences are grounded in the same neural and cognitive mechanisms and are deeply interrelated in the evolution of novel networks of meaning for negotiating the world and for tectonically expanding humanity's worlds of meanings.

As programmatic, the paper will indirectly address all five specified questions, but given the interdisciplinary character of the audience, and assuming unfamiliarity with cognitive linguistics, will focus on explaining HOW cognitive linguistics understands meaning-making, conceptualization, and reasoning, and HOW this has significance for understanding how biology, psychology, and culture interact in the evolution of religion and religious expressions. But the aim is to give the audience some sense of WHY bringing cognitive linguistics to the table is significant for the convention topic. The degree to which I explain rather than call attention to this line of thinking will be determined by how much time the conveners assign to papers.

My 2014 book, *Without Metaphor, No Saving God: Theology After Cognitive Linguistics* (Leuven) presented an analogous case to academic theology, arguing that cognitive linguistics provides crucial data and insights for understanding the workings of the religious imagination and theological reasoning. My presentation at this conference, as an extension of that argument, will summarize some of the key notions relevant to how biology, psychology, and culture interact in the evolution of religion and religious expressions. By way of illustration, it will then suggest how a cognitive linguistic account challenges findings in CSR that appear to disclose that religious beliefs are merely by-products of mental tools that evolved for other natural functions.

In brief, cognitive linguistics and blending theory have been investigating how behavioral and linguistic structures are mapped to meanings, and ultimately how meanings are mapped to the neural processes of the brain. The hypothesis, for which significant evidence has been discovered, is that the brain uses the structures it has, such as the networks for sensory-motor concepts. The brain adapts these neural structures to do other things, such as map progressively more abstract domains of experience. The neural mapping in the brain undergirds the emergence of ever new and more complex mappings that transcend those sensory-motor moorings. The meanings and logic of the resultant behaviors and language is thus a function of these complex networks of meanings and cannot be accurately interpreted apart from them. Understanding how biology, psychology, and culture interact in the evolution of religion and religious expressions requires understanding how these networks of meanings, conceptualization, and inference evolve and interact.