

# Oxford researchers get \$4 million to study origins of belief in God

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**By Brittani Hamm**

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LONDON (RNS)—Oxford University researchers have been given nearly \$4 million to investigate the origins of belief in God.

The three-year project titled “Empirical Expansion in Cognitive Science of Religion and Theology” is designed to determine if belief in a deity is instinctive or learned. It will be funded by the Pennsylvania-based [John Templeton Foundation](#).

Justin Barrett of Oxford University’s Center for Anthropology and Mind and Roger Trigg of Oxford’s Ian Ramsey Center for Science and Religion will lead the investigation.

“We don’t presume (that) this scientific research of what the causes of belief are necessarily undermines the beliefs,” Barrett said. “On the flip side, just because something is natural doesn’t mean it’s true.”

Barrett said developmental psychology has determined that faith in God is

a universal human impulse, found in all cultures and grasped from a young age. Researchers will use a variety of methods to try to determine if faith in a deity is inherent to cultures worldwide and throughout human history.

Both religious believers and non-believers will make up the research team, said Barrett.

“I’m certainly not smug enough to think that in three years’ time we’ll have all the answers, but we’re building on things we know, and fully optimistic we’ll make progress,” Barrett said.

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