
ANNUAL REPORT OF THE LOS ALAMOS FAITH AND SCIENCE FORUM

November 2017

SUMMARY

2017 marked the first full year of the Los Alamos Faith and Science Forum's (LAF&SF) operation as an incorporated not-for-profit entity. As in earlier years, the main activities of the Forum consisted in (1) organizing a summer weekly seminar series with local speakers, and (2) hosting a speaker and author of international stature in a visit to Los Alamos to present several lectures to Forum members and the public. Members of the Forum's Board of Directors met monthly to guide the activities of the Forum. Forum board members also organized book studies, hosted viewing sessions for a video documentary on science/religion issues, and provided input to the New Mexico Public Education Department on science curriculum standards during a public-comment period. Several board members attended science/religion conferences in various locations around the US, and found them to be informative and inspiring. Membership in the Forum increased during the past year from 17 to 28 members.

SUMMER 2017 ACTIVITIES

SUMMER THEME AND WEEKLY PRESENTATIONS

The theme for the 2017 weekly seminar series was "Hope: Science, Religion, and The Future." The motivation for this theme was our desire to investigate conceptions of "The Future" and examine the basis for hope and optimism, or despair and pessimism, as we find it in science and religion. A list of local speakers and their presentation titles is given in the appendix. The curriculum committee, chaired by board member Gerry Wood, scheduled walk-throughs or dry runs of all local presentations before they were given to the public, and the consensus was that the preparation paid off in terms of better quality of the presentations.

The format was similar to that of past summers: each Wednesday evening we began at 6 PM with dinner provided by a local church, followed at 6:30 PM by the presentation (typically lasting 30-40 minutes). After the talk, the speaker answered a few questions with discussion

from the large group, and then we broke up into small group discussions, each with about 6 to 8 people around a table, moderated by facilitators. The event formally ended at 8 PM, although participants often extended their discussions beyond that time. The average attendance at the Wednesday night sessions was 44, with a high of 52 and a low of 38. In a change from preceding summers, all Wednesday night meetings took place at Los Alamos Unitarian Church, 1738 N Sage Loop. Weekly announcements advertising the Wednesday sessions were placed in local news media, and a publicity postcard was produced (see Appendix IV) for distribution in the community.



Audience at a typical Wednesday night dinner and presentation

VISITING SPEAKER

Our visiting speaker was theologian John Haught, Distinguished Research Professor at Georgetown University, Washington DC, formerly Professor in the Department of Theology at Georgetown (1970-2005) and Chair (1990-95), and the author of more than 20 books. Prof. Haught's area of specialization is systematic theology, with a particular interest in issues pertaining to science, cosmology, evolution, ecology, and religion.

Haught's two evening lectures, presented at Fuller Lodge on Thursday and Friday 22-23 June, were titled "Science, Religion, and Cosmic Purpose" and "Evolution and Faith: What Is at Stake". The events were well attended, with 65 persons present the first evening and 67 the second. We estimated that around 15 persons came on the second night who were not present on the first night, so that around 80 persons attended at least one of the lectures. The flyer used to advertise his lectures is included in Appendix III.

Prof. Haught also presented a small seminar on Thursday morning on the life and thought of Fr. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, which was publicized only to members of the Forum.

To prepare for Haught's visit, board members read his book *God After Darwin: A Theology of Evolution* (2008, 2nd ed.), and met twice in May for a discussion of the book, at the home of Board member Dan Winske.



Professor Jack Haught speaking at Fuller Lodge

BOOK STUDIES DURING WINTER 2016-2017

During the winter of 2016-17, the Forum conducted a “Winter Series” consisting of six book studies, organized in groups of about 5-8 participants, meeting at times and places convenient for the study members. The intention was for the ideas expressed in these groups to help stimulate thinking about possible themes and topics for Summer 2017. The six books were:

- Proposed by Dan Winske: “Science and Religion: A New Introduction (2nd Edition)” by Alister McGrath;
- Proposed by Laurie Triplett: “Solidarity Ethics: Transformation in a Globalized World” by Rebecca Todd Peters;

- Proposed by Morrie Pongratz: “God After Darwin: A Theology of Evolution” by John F. Haught and John Haught;
- Proposed by Glenn Magelssen: “Divine Vintage: Following the Wine Trail from Genesis to the Modern Age” by Randall Heshett and Joel Butler;
- Proposed by Bob Reinovsky: “One World” by John Polkinghorne;
- Proposed by Neil Goodman: “Dying into Life: the Yoga of Death, Loss and Transformation” by Guru Terath Khalsa, Ph.D.

ATTENDANCE AT NATIONAL CONFERENCES

Every year there are many conferences around the US devoted to the interaction of science and religion. In 2017, several members of the Board of Directors of the Los Alamos Faith and Science Forum attended a few of these conferences. Without exception, they found the conferences to be informative and stimulating, and valuable for suggesting topics and speakers for our future seminars. These conferences included:

- Goshen Conference – Deep Incarnation: From Cosmos to Commitment, 24-26 March 2017, Goshen College, Goshen IN, attended by Dan Winske;
- BioLogos Conference: Christ and Creation, 29-31 March 2017, Houston TX, attended by Glenn Magelssen;
- American Scientific Affiliation Conference: Exploring New Heights for Science and Stewardship, 28-31 July, Golden, CO, attended by Nels Hoffman.

These board members would be happy to provide interested persons with more details about the conferences. In all cases, they recommend Forum members seriously consider attending future conferences. Beyond their immediate value as an information resource and source of encouragement, such conferences are a way to make connections and keep in touch with current developments in the wider science/religion community.

“THE GOD QUESTION” VIDEO SERIES

In July, the Forum was contacted by Professor John Spence, OBE, FEng, FRSE, of the Department of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, Scotland. He had learned of the Forum through our web site, and wrote to inquire whether we would be interested in viewing a documentary video series called “The God Question”, which has been produced by a small charitable organization with which he is associated. The series addresses the question of whether there is a God, discussed over three sessions in the context of The Cosmos, Life & Evolution, and Mind & Consciousness,

with commentary by notable scientists, theologians, and philosophers who represented theistic, atheistic, or neutral viewpoints. He particularly asked if we would be willing to provide feedback based on our impressions of and reactions to the series. Board member Bob Reinovsky obtained a copy of the series on a set of DVDs, and hosted viewing sessions at his home during September and October for LAF&SF board members and members of his study group at White Rock Presbyterian Church. Participants found the videos to be well produced, fast paced, and thought provoking, but not entirely free of theistic bias. We are in the process of writing feedback comments for Prof. Spence. Future viewing sessions may be scheduled for the benefit of a larger group.

NEXT GENERATION SCIENCE STANDARDS CONTROVERSY

On 24 September, board member Morrie Pongratz alerted the LAF&SF board to a controversy surrounding a decision by the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) to implement new standards for the teaching of science in elementary through high school grades. PED intended to base its standards on the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), developed by the National Science Teachers Association, but had chosen to alter some of the wording, dropping some (but not all) references to evolution and the 4.6-billion-year age of the Earth, as well as to climate change. PED asked for comments on their proposed changes, and set up a web site for public input, as well as scheduling a public input session in Santa Fe on 16 October. LAF&SF board members Chick Keller and Glenn Magelssen attended the public input session, and Chick spoke there. It was reported that of 77 speakers at the public input session, not one supported PED's modifications to the NGSS. The LAF&SF board wrote a statement for input to the PED, signed by all ten board members, and reading as follows:

"We, the undersigned members of the Board of Directors of the Los Alamos Faith and Science Forum, have reviewed the New Mexico Public Education Department's proposed changes to the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). As scientists and people of faith, we see no need for the proposed modifications. The NGSS, before New Mexico's modifications, reflect the best current understanding of these subjects. Like the Psalmist, we believe that the heavens declare the glory of God. Like St. Augustine, we believe that we read about God in the pages of the Book of Nature, as we do in the pages of the Bible, and that these two books can never be inconsistent. Modern science has shown us how the Creator chose to create the cosmos, and thereby points to a much more subtle, intelligent, powerful, and loving God than many believers had suspected. We see great benefits in the constructive dialogue between science and scripture."

The board also submitted the statement as an [op-ed piece](#) in the Santa Fe New Mexican newspaper. On 25 October, it was reported by the New Mexican that PED had decided to adopt the NGSS in its entirety, with none of the proposed modifications.

APPENDIX I. 2017 LOCAL SUMMER SPEAKERS AND PRESENTATION TITLES
HOPE: SCIENCE, RELIGION, AND THE FUTURE

(Weekly sessions on Wednesday evenings at Los Alamos Unitarian Church, 1738 N Sage Loop, unless otherwise noted)

- I. Hope, Hopelessness, and the Future – May 31, Nels Hoffman
- II. Science of Hope – June 7, Gerry Wood
- III. Evolution and Hope – June 14, Morrie Pongratz
- IV. Guest Speaker, John Haught, 7:00 p.m., Fuller Lodge

June 22, Science, Religion, and Cosmic Purpose
June 23, Evolution and Faith: What is at Stake?
- V. Hopelessness – June 28, Bob Reinovsky
- VI. Looking into the Future – July 12, Dan Winske
- VII. Technology and Hope – July 19, Chick Keller
- VIII. Religions and Hope – July 26, Three speakers: Rabbi Jack Shlachter; Connon Odom with N. T. Wright video presentation; Sat Purkh Kaur Khalsa (trainer, musician, and author on women’s perspectives)

APPENDIX II: ORGANIZATION OF THE LOS ALAMOS FAITH AND SCIENCE FORUM

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Nelson Hoffman, President; Member, First United Methodist Church of Los Alamos

Gerry Wood, Vice-President; Elder, Los Alamos Church of Christ

Robert Reinovsky, Secretary; Elder, White Rock Presbyterian Church

Dan Winske, Treasurer; Member, Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church

Neil Goodman; Member, Unitarian Church of Los Alamos

Charles Keller; Member, Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church

Glenn Magelssen; Deacon, Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

Laura McClellan; Member, Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

Connon Odom; Deacon, Los Alamos Church of Christ

Morris Pongratz; Member, Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Budget – Dan Winske

Curriculum – Gerry Wood

Logistics – Laura McClellan (acting)

Membership – Chick Keller

Publicity – Morris Pongratz

Visiting Speaker – Nels Hoffman

Strategic Planning – Nels Hoffman (acting)

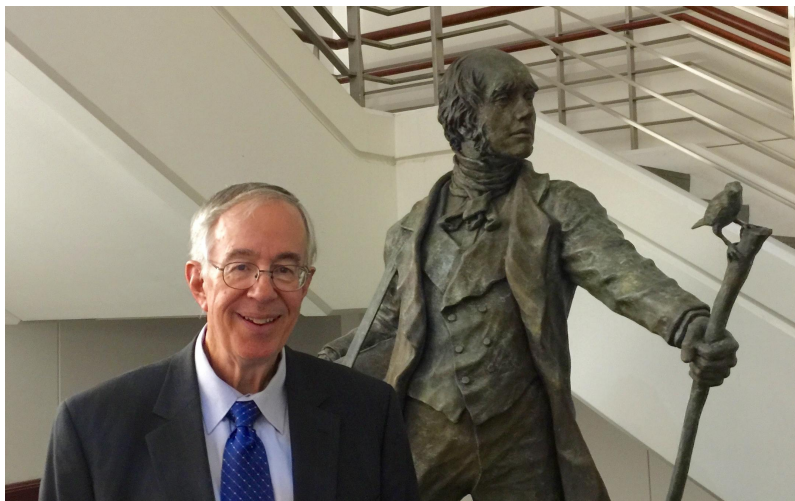
Appendix III: Advertising flyer for visit of Prof. John Haught

The Los Alamos Faith and Science Forum presents two lectures by John Haught

Distinguished Research Professor, Georgetown University,
Washington DC

June 22-23, 2017 at 7 PM

Fuller Lodge, 2132 Central Avenue, Los Alamos, NM



Thursday June 22: Science, Religion, and Cosmic Purpose

Most issues in contemporary discussions of science and religion come down to the question of whether the universe may reasonably be said to have a purpose. This lecture examines the question of whether the natural sciences are compatible with the widespread religious claim that the universe is here for a reason.

Friday June 23: Evolution and Faith: What Is at Stake

In 1859 Charles Darwin (1809-1882) published *On the Origin of Species* introducing his famous theory of evolution. Biologists today marvel at how well the theory has held up during the last century and a half. This lecture examines the question of the compatibility of contemporary evolutionary biology with religion and specifically with biblical faith.

John F. Haught (Ph. D. Catholic University, 1970) is Distinguished Research Professor, Georgetown University, Washington DC. He was formerly Professor in the Department of Theology at Georgetown University (1970-2005) and Chair (1990-95). His area of specialization is systematic theology, with a particular interest in issues pertaining to science, cosmology, evolution, ecology, and religion. He has written more than twenty books, including: *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe* (2017); *Resting On the Future: Catholic Theology for an Unfinished Universe* (2015); *Making Sense of Evolution: Darwin, God, and The Drama of Life* (2010); *God and the New Atheism: A*

Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens (2008); *Christianity and Science: Toward a Theology of Nature* (2007); *Is Nature Enough? Meaning and Truth in the Age of Science* (2006); *Purpose, Evolution and the Meaning of Life* (2004); and *God After Darwin: A Theology of Evolution* (2000; 2nd Ed 2007). He has authored numerous articles and reviews, and lectures internationally on many issues related to science and religion. In 2002 he won the Owen Garrigan Award in Science and Religion, and in 2004 the Sophia Award for Theological Excellence. In 2008 he received a "Friend of Darwin Award" from the National Center for Science Education.

Appendix IV: Publicity postcard for 2017 Summer Series

