

## LASAR newsletter No. 5 (September 2011)

Dear Reader,

This is our latest termly newsletter about the LASAR, bringing you up to date with how the project has progressed since we last wrote to you. We welcome feedback on anything you read about here or come across when visiting our two websites ([www.faradayschools.com](http://www.faradayschools.com) for resources, [www.lasarproject.com](http://www.lasarproject.com) for research).

We also encourage you to forward this newsletter to any colleagues who may be interested in the project and could email [h.s.newdick@reading.ac.uk](mailto:h.s.newdick@reading.ac.uk) to request future newsletters.

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***Exciting news ... our re-designed website, [www.faradayschools.com](http://www.faradayschools.com) is now 'live' providing fresh and lively resources for instant use in the classroom this autumn!***

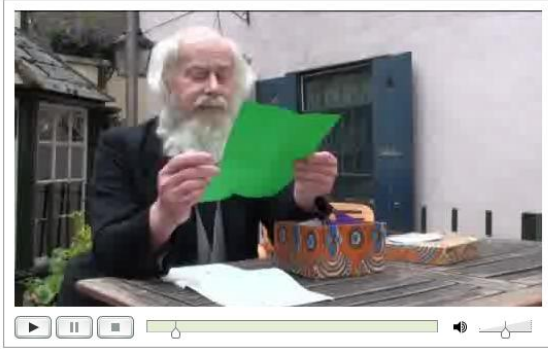
The following stills taken from the videos give a flavour of the topics covered on the website.



Year 8 pupils at Maiden Erlegh School in Reading invite Galileo into their classroom.



A fingerprint expert from Thames Valley Police explains that scientists are confident that fingerprints are unique. Two further stories from the history of science illustrate the ways in which ideas in science are tested and supported by observations.



Year 9 pupils write to Darwin to discover what really happened at the Oxford Museum.



Pupils compare the style of a police report and a poem. Physicist and Christian Dr Ard Louis explains that in his view, the Creation story is not written in a journalistic style.



The Cosmic Calendar - Year 10 pupils attempt to order the major events in the Universe's history, fitting them into the scale of a year.

***With sections ordered by key stage (3, 4 & 5), the videos stand alongside lots of fun web pages for pupils; white-board presentations for whole class teaching; lesson plans with helpful teacher notes, as well as a selection of more probing articles by prominent scientists (religious and atheistic) which we recommend for interest and for extension work.***

***You may recognise some contributors from the following (science) hall of fame!***



He is a well-respected, ‘personality’ physicist and his various contributions to the website include video clips where he discusses whether we should be sceptical or confident that the big bang theory describes what happened, as well as the Muslim perspective on science and religion. Don’t miss his article on time-travel!

His identity is revealed in the video entitled ‘The Big Bang Theory’ just click on the link below

<http://faradayschools.com/how-science-works/science-year-10-11/>



She is an American astronomer working at NASA, but for the website she answers students' questions and explains why she thinks science and religion can both contribute to an understanding of the creation of the universe.

Watch one of her videos, ‘God and the Big Bang’ at

<http://faradayschools.com/how-science-works/science-year-10-11/>



Colin Humphreys is professor of materials science at Cambridge University and talks to students about his belief in miracles.

Watch one of his videos ‘Can a scientist believe in miracles?’ at

<http://faradayschools.com/re-topics/re-year-9/god-and-miracles/>

## ***Workshop news***

Our most recent workshop took place in June at Oldfield School in Bath, where the RSPCA were invited along to discuss with Year 9 students how animal welfare issues affect our lives in many different ways and cause us to consider the value we place on animal and human life.

Here are some of the students' comments from the day:

*...I think that all animals are equal ... that it's impossible to separate them into a hierarchy. All animals are important, if anything humans would be at the bottom as they disrupt the environment*

*...People seem to think that a lot of animals are of a lot lower value than humans. I think it is unfair for people to say this as they have never lived another life but a human's. Therefore it is not fair for them to stereotype animals*

*...I agree that humans are not the most valued animal because there is (sic) some animals living in the wild that are nearly extinct whereas there are billions of humans that reproduce everyday. So we should look after the endangered animals and put them first*

This workshop was filmed and will be incorporated into resource material which is being developed for the website.

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## ***Research progress***

We have had a paper published with the on-line journal, 'Science Education International', Vol. 22, No.2, June 2011, pages 90-118. The paper is entitled 'To what extent do pupils perceive science to be inconsistent with religious faith? An exploratory survey of 13-14 year old English pupils.'

For news of our research visit [www.lasarpj.com](http://www.lasarpj.com) (We post presentations, conference papers and our newsletters there.)

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## ***Background about the project***

The LASAR, Learning about Science and Religion, Project was motivated by a concern that there is a strong public perception (reinforced by some popular media) that science and religion are in some sense opposites, that is that science is an atheistic activity. In particular, we were concerned that school pupils may come to accept this as a normative standard: something

that is both incorrect, and which could deter students who hold religious faith from considering science as a suitable basis of future study and career. Such an effect would not only be unfortunate when there is widespread concern about the limited numbers of young people seriously considering science careers, but in principle could set up a self-fulfilling prophecy. If people of faith are significantly deterred from science, then science could over time become dominated by atheists!

LASAR is looking at this issue from two complementary directions. We are planning research which will help us find out more about exactly what secondary age students do think about science and religion, something of the factors which they feel influence their views, and how their ideas shift over time. We intend to report our findings widely, and when we have results available we will use this newsletter to direct readers to these reports. We are also looking to develop curriculum materials and approaches which can support teachers in engaging secondary age pupils with something of the broad range of opinions and scholarship in the area of science and religion. In this way we hope to make sure that there are sufficient accessible and balanced presentations to help pupils to recognise that this is a nuanced area where there are no simple answers (so scientists hold a wide range of faith positions and views on religious matters), and offer them interesting resources to stimulate their own thinking in this area.

Yours with best wishes

Berry, Keith, Fran and Helen

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