Please join the Science, Religion, and Lunch Seminars (SRLS) hosted by the Northern Plains Ethics Institute for:

John Helgeland, PhD
Professor Emeritus and Board Director, Northern Plains Ethics Institute

Inspiration

12-1 pm, March 10, 2020
Room of Nations, Memorial Union

Abstract: Perhaps no word in the theological vocabulary is more misunderstood than inspiration. Once the fundamentalist crowd laid hands on it, it was done for. Often, for this crowd, it refers to little else than magic. Its basic sense is that it is about an idea, speech or event which is brought to light through some writing or several individuals who or which is witness to an unusual vision. Such is not necessarily the gift of an otherworldly intermediary but can originate in response to human or earthly oratory. For many, Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream speech” was inspired and accordingly opened a vision to a world of possibility. The speech opened the vision of a new world for a great number of his followers. The origins of most of his comments can be traced back to the history of the people of Israel. He was not overpowered by some divine presence to speak as he did, yet that speech is taken by many to begin a new direction in American history.

While it had the power to set the nation on a new way of life, it would detract from it to call it magic, as if MLK were pulling a “fast one” or in some way taking advantage of an unsuspecting public.

Likewise one cannot claim that the inspiration of scripture is a series of tricks and slight of hand. Often, however, scripture is employed in just that way. Many take the words of scripture to become a club or mace to control the thoughts or actions of others. Inspiration is not about control or coercion but it is about leadership.

Bio: John Helgeland is the board director and founding NPEI director. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago and specializes in The Early Christian Church in the Roman Empire, History of Christianity, History of Culture, and the Philosophy of History. Dr. Helgeland was instrumental in the formation of the Northern Plains Ethics Institute (NPEI), as well as the Group Decision Center (GDC) an electronic consensus-forming laboratory at NDSU. His key area of interest is “Religion and Violence.”

If you are interested in giving a seminar, then please contact Syed Ahmed at syed.ahmed@ndsu.edu or Dennis Cooley at dennis.cooley@ndsu.edu.