



GRASPING THE NETTLE

NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 2018

ENGAGING, EDUCATING AND ENERGISING

IN RELATION TO SCIENCE AND GOD



ENGAGING interest through What A Wonder-Full World
Perth Theatre, 3rd November 2018

In a society awash with the false choice “Science OR God”, this is self-evidently an important nettle for the church to grasp. But how does it work? In a recent explanation of GTN devised for the John Templeton Foundation in the USA our Scottish interdenominational initiative was summed up in three words: ENGAGING, EDUCATING, ENERGISING.

Welcome to this edition of the newsletter in which we report on how all three aspects of the GTN strategy are progressing in a most encouraging way. We hope you will be motivated to make — or continue to make—your contribution to the whole.

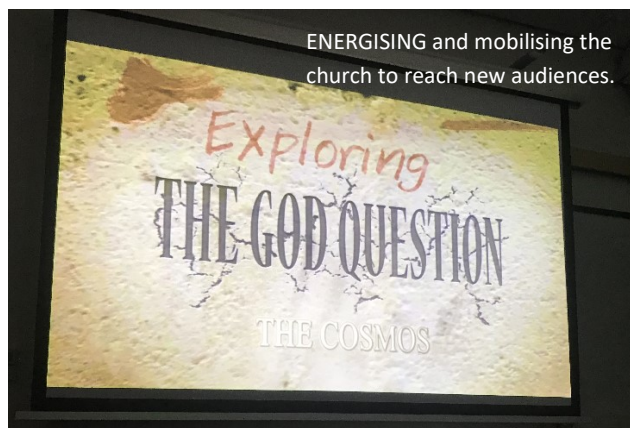


EDUCATING the church in issues
related to science and God



EDUCATING the nation's young
people through the schools
series on science and God

The most high profile **ENGAGING** strategy features the GTN branded What A Wonder-Full World! with its blend of music, film, drama and conversation with scientists. The **EDUCATING** dimension of GTN includes conferences, dinners and online dialogue, developed with a church audience in mind. Exploring the God



ENERGISING and mobilising the
church to reach new audiences.

Question has both an **ENGAGING** and **EDUCATING** purpose. But **EDUCATING** also applies to the secondary school audience in Scotland. The subject of science and God is in the curriculum. Finally comes the process of **ENERGISING**—mobilising—the church to reach new audiences. In this newsletter we report on the recent past and exciting plans for the future—many supported by a grant from the John Templeton Foundation.

ENGAGING INTEREST THROUGH WHAT A WONDER-FULL WORLD!

A Perspective from Perth Theatre

In an atmosphere of anticipation, buoyed up by close to a full house, the Perth Presbytery-sponsored What A Wonder-Full World! event burst into life at 7pm on the 3rd November 2018. With a combination of Tenors Un Limited, a specially assembled group of instrumentalists and vocalists under the leadership of musical director Hilary Brooks, a Glasgow based arranger, composer and conductor, the audience



thoroughly appreciated the carefully structured mix of music (both secular and sacred), film excerpts, drama and conversation with scientists.

"Wonder-Full World events have strong entertaining and informational content and the combination works really well, presented as it is in a range of art forms," said GTN Chairman Very Rev Dr Angus Morrison. *"The audience is voluntarily drawn not only to enjoy the experience but to engage their minds with the big questions. The ultimate question of course is the biggest of all: how can such a complexity of wonder be explained outside of the involvement of a creator?"*



Tenors Un Limited contributing not just through their world renowned music but with sparkling personality.



Drama vignette "On Track" in which a hairstylist has a fascinating conversation with a neuroscientist in a railway carriage during the evening commute.

The programme was structured around six key themes: the wonder of the universe, the wonder of life on earth, the wonder of the human body, the wonder of mind and brain, the wonder of emotion and, finally, the big question—'is there anybody there?'

An entertaining but important way of raising the big questions comes through the two short dramas which are an integral part of every Wonder-Full World programme.

Comrie Drama Club, under the direction of Graham McWilliams, expertly delivered Cosmic Cut and On Track. In the first, a scientist persuades the hairstylist that the idea of God is past its sell-by date and is an explanation for which science has little use. On her homeward journey in 'On Track' the hairstylist meets a neuroscientist who has a different way of interpreting evidence from science.



Cosmic Cut delivers a rather unusual hairstylist/customer conversation

But drama is not the only medium in which the big questions are raised. Specially written music and lyrics are presented by tenor soloist Alasdair Morris.

A crucially important part of proceedings is the conversation with scientists which briefly but poignantly interspersed the majority of items in the programme. Contributing in Perth were NHS Consultant Dr Neil Ritchie and Philosopher in Neuroscience Dr Tillmann Vierkant.



Alasdair Morris raising the Big Questions in music

Commenting, one patron said *"Both conversation guests spoke a language that people could easily understand. Their content was sharp, to the point, and, above all, immensely interesting."* Another added *"The evening was about celebrating wonder and the conversations made it abundantly clear what exactly we are celebrating."*



Dr Neil Ritchie in conversation with Dr Tillmann Vierkant

GTN is immensely grateful to Hilary Brooks for stepping into the MD role to replace Alan A Craig who had to withdraw owing to a serious health issue. We wish him a speedy recovery.

Towards the end of the evening Very Rev Dr Angus Morrison, challenged by some serious questions from the evening's host, gave a robust account of why he was convinced of the creator's existence, not just considering

the evidence from creation itself but also God's revelation of himself in Jesus. Clearly the Perth audience was ENGAGING with the subject and following up by Exploring the God Question was on offer by registering interest at Perth@graspingthenettle.org.



MD Hilary Brooks in full control of the music



The Wonder-Full World House Band in full flow

ENGAGING WITH SCIENCE AND GOD AT EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY

An initiative of GTN Board Member Rev Dr Liam Fraser in association with the Humanist Society and the Science and Religion Society at Edinburgh University



A mixed audience of students in discussion of The God Question at Edinburgh University.

"We can do better than having a group of Christians watching The God Question in a room in the University," said Liam Fraser. *"Our purpose is to engage non Christians in debate, to reflect on the origins of the universe and the rationality of the case for a creator."* To further that ambition Liam *"simply contacted the Humanist Society"*. Having explained what The God Question series is, he posed the question: *"Would you be interested in watching these together and debating?"* The answer was a resounding yes. Hearing of the event, the Catholic Student Union and their Chaplain Fr O'Connor and a group of students came along 'to join the fun'. When members of the University's Science and Religion Society opted to attend too the stage was set for a very lively viewing and post-viewing discussion comprising a 50/50 mix of Christians and non Christians attending.

The Evening's Format

After a brief introduction from Liam and the Convener of the Humanist Society, Adam Frisk, the audience watched the full God Question programme on The Cosmos. Thereafter the discussion was initiated with Liam Fraser and the Adam Frisk posing two questions each to the other.

Liam began by asking: if all physical things require a physical cause how could the physical universe have come from nothing without a creator? The reply was that there is no scientific answer to that question.

Adam's question was: if God is all powerful and if he wants people to worship him why does he not simply reveal himself? Liam's answer was that the creator has done precisely that in Jesus Christ. Perhaps that is why at the end of the evening most present "retreated to the pub and ended up discussing the case for the resurrection".

A Strange Alliance?

"It would be wrong to assume that Humanists are not interested in such issues." said Liam Fraser. *"They are very willing to engage in this dialogue and therefore are natural allies for such an endeavour as this."* Further joint screenings are planned. For advice and assistance from Liam Fraser on how to initiate similar discussion in your area please contact office@graspingthenettle.org.

ENGAGING THE INTEREST OF CHURCHES ACROSS SCOTLAND

A Hebridean Tour

As part of its engagement programme with churches across the country, GTN continues its presentations to Presbyteries and other groups in Scotland. A recent tour took place beginning in Inverness and involving a journey through the Outer Hebrides. During the tour, a presentation was given to the Free Church Presbytery of Inverness, Lochaber and Ross and meetings were held with the Church of Scotland Presbytery Clerks of Lewis and Harris, North Uist and Benbecula. In Stornoway there was a presentation of Introducing the God Question to the staff in the RE department of the town's Nicolson Institute.



Culloden Battlefield near Inverness, famous for its bloody clash of ideologies in the mid eighteenth century. Scotland still experiences a major clash of ideologies represented by theism and atheism. In the battle science is a crucial witness.



Greysfriars Free Church of Scotland, Inverness, the location of a GTN presentation on the need for churches everywhere to engage with the science/God debate.



The famous five thousand year old Callanish Stones on the Island of Lewis are a reminder of primitive religious expression in pre-Christian Scotland. Fears have been expressed that Scotland is now in a post-Christian era. A nettle to be grasped.



The Nicolson Institute Secondary School in Stornoway where a presentation was given on the curricular relevance of the Introducing the God Question series for schools. Teachers were very enthusiastic about what this resource can contribute to the educational experience of young people in the classroom .



The town of Stornoway where Grasping the Nettle with The God Question was discussed in detail with Presbytery Clerk John Cunningham.

Photo credit [Wmck](#) at English Wikipedia.

EDUCATING YOUNG PEOPLE IN SCOTLAND'S SCHOOLS THROUGH INTRODUCING THE GOD QUESTION

On Friday 2nd November, RE departments in every school in Borders Council were presented with a set of resources comprising *Introducing the God Question DVD boxset*, *8 Study Guides* and a *Teacher's Guide*. Graeme Donald, former Chair of the Church of Scotland's Education Committee has been the prime mover in this very successful initiative, along with Melrose and Peebles Presbytery which funded the resources. With school budgets being extremely restricted this was one way of ensuring that



The Introducing the God Question resources.

teachers and pupils received resources which they greatly appreciate. Speaking of teachers' reactions Graeme Donald said *"all teachers were very interested in the series especially in relation to senior school (S5 and S6) but also for some S4 students studying for certificated RMPS. They commented too on the need for something similar for P7 to S3."* Graeme further reported that some of the schools wished to use the material with groups of 30-50 students. *"We are now approaching local churches to see if they could help fund the additional copies required locally."*

Further Plans

And Graeme Donald has further plans. *"Borders has an annual 'Big Issues Day' so we are suggesting that the God question might be the Big Issue for 2019. In addition we will try to include The God Question in the Borders Science Festival in May 2019."*

Berwickshire High School, Earlston High School, Eyemouth High School, Galashiels Academy, Hawick High School, Jedburgh Grammar School, Kelso High School, Peebles High School, Selkirk High School. All of these schools are now ready to use Introducing the God Question in the curriculum.

DONATIONS FACILITY FOR GTN

As GTN activities expand and spread more widely, so does the need to support the initiative financially. Many have requested a donations facility on the website and we are delighted to say it is now available. It can be accessed via the donations button which appears at the bottom of each page of the website. One of the most important financial requirements is to subsidise – or even pay for – schools acquiring the Introducing the God Question series for use within the curriculum. School budgets are under serious pressure and often RE departments are among the most restricted in terms of expenditure. A group study pack, comprising the 6 episode series on DVD, 8 study guides and one teachers guide costs £72.00 (Ex VAT). A pack of 10 additional study guides costs £36.00. Alternatively, 30 digital study guides can be licensed for download at a cost of £48.00 (ex VAT). The donations page on the website allows you to specify how you would like your gift to be used. See www.graspingthenettle.org/donate

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE MODERATOR



Church of Scotland Moderator,
Rt Rev Susan Brown

GTN is delighted to have the involvement of Church of Scotland Moderator Rt Rev Susan Brown. Subsequent to a meeting over lunch with representatives of GTN, Rev Brown proposed a number of ways in which she could support the Grasping the Nettle Initiative. During her year in office, she is scheduled to visit a number of presbyteries – including the Presbytery of England! On each of these visits, the Moderator offered to promote the vision and strategy of GTN and invite involvement. A special PowerPoint was made for the purpose and can be made available for any willing to share information about GTN. Contact office@graspingthenettle.org. In addition, Rev Brown, in her regular opportunities to write in magazines and newspapers, refers as relevant to GTN and The God Question series.

Media and Communications on the Menu

Of considerable help to GTN was a recent dinner hosted by the Moderator for professionals involved in Media, Communication and Journalism. This was a very valuable opportunity to talk strategically about how to build the GTN profile in public consciousness. Among the guests was former Daily Record Assistant Editor, Tom Hamilton. He is now Director of Tom Hamilton Communications. His experience and expertise will be of great value to GTN in achieving newspaper exposure for our agenda.



Dinner guests, in the Moderator's apartment, meeting to discuss GTN media and communication.

Feet on the Ground with GTN



There is much to appreciate in the glories of Scottish landscape

And in a first for GTN, the Moderator has proposed hosting a nature walk in the company of an expert geologist with the purpose of appreciating wonders of the natural world – but not forgetting the importance of the fellowship dimension too. The proposed date is Saturday 23rd March. Venue: TBA. If you are interested to be kept in touch with plans for this excursion as they emerge, we would be grateful if you would note that interest to office@graspingthenettle.org

GTN WELCOMES ITS NEW SEC REPRESENTATIVE

Subsequent to the retirement of Bishop Gregor Duncan, GTN is delighted to welcome Bishop Anne Dyer to membership of the Steering Board. The newly appointed Bishop of Aberdeen and Orkney brings significant ecclesiastical experience, having been Warden of Cranmer Hall, Durham, a theological college of the Church of England before taking up office as Rector of Holy Trinity Church, Haddington. Bishop Dyer is 'greatly looking forward' to her involvement with GTN.



Bishop Anne Dyer

ENERGISING AND MOBILISING THE CHURCH IN NORWAY...

...TO GRASP THE NETTLE WITH THE GOD QUESTION



Finnes Gud? promotional flyer

Having been in operation officially for just three years, it is gratifying that GTN is drawing some international attention and being invited to contribute beyond Scottish shores.

In a six day period in mid-October, a combination of NLA University, the Norwegian Bible Society, the Veritas Forum and a Christian think tank called Damaris Norway arranged a series of events in Oslo, in Kristiansand and Grimstad addressing issues related to science and God. Professor John Lennox of Oxford University was the main guest lecturer. However GTN was represented too by TV producer Iain Morris whose series The God Question is now available online in Norwegian. During the six day period of events 'Finnes Gud?' was launched in several key locations including the University of Agder.

But the central launch took place at the 3 day Veritas Conference, attended by 700 people the vast majority of whom were under 35 years of age. Many were students. Meetings were held, first in Kristiansand and then in Grimstad, with groups of church leaders who were eager to learn from the strategic approach of Grasping the Nettle and adopt some of its key principles. In addition to being available in Norway, Finnes Gud? can be accessed via

www.thegodquestion.tv/no/explore/buy



The Veritas Conference attendees being introduced to Finnes Gud?



John Lennox with Jon Haversen

How The God Question on NRK 1 (Norway) Had Impact

Jon Haversen of Stavanger is a grade 1 Norwegian football referee but he is also now one of 5 key youth leaders of the Veritas Forum and the Veritas Conference which together make a very significant contribution to the science/God dialogue in Norway. But before The God Question was broadcast on Norwegian TV, Jon Haversen was deeply sceptical about God's existence. However, he was attracted to a forthcoming TV series that offered the prospect of thinking the question through from both sides. "I recorded the series and over several nights I viewed a studied it in my room, notebook in hand," Jon told producer Iain Morris.

"I became absolutely convinced of the strength of the case for a creator," said Jon. 'I am now confident in the truth of the Christian faith.'

Jon is one of a potential audience of 830 million people who have had the opportunity to view the God Question on television, in their own language, in their own homes.

Developments in the God Question Series

The God Question series continues to be developed in a variety of ways. As well as new programmes being produced for the existing series, a new global version is being produced with a Far Eastern audience in mind. The first of the three programmes in the series is nearing completion.

NEW JOB OPPORTUNITY WITH GTN

As a movement with ever expanding activities and plans, GTN is now advertising the part time post of GTN Liaison Officer. For details, see the final page of the Newsletter. A full job specification can be acquired by requesting it at office@graspingthenettle.org

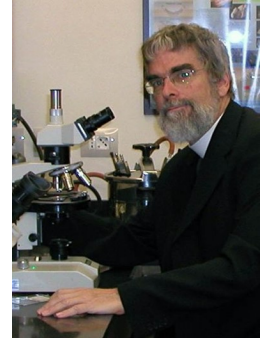
INTERNATIONAL GUESTS FOR GTN



Deborah Haarsma

Grasping the Nettle is set to benefit from financial support given by the John Templeton Foundation as we ENGAGE, EDUCATE AND ENERGISE Scottish Churches as part of the overall strategy. Consequently, GTN is able to fund the visit to Scotland of a range of high profile scientists who are also people of Christian faith.

In 2019, between 6th and 10th June, we look forward to welcoming Deborah Haarsma, President of BioLogos in the USA, while in the period 31st October to 3rd November, we have the privilege of hosting Bro Guy Consolmagno, the Vatican's Astronomer. Please note the dates and plan to join us for significant GTN activities.



Bro Guy Consolmagno

GTN BIDS SAD FAREWELL TO PROFESSOR JAMES NEIL OBE



"I am writing to inform you of the sudden death of my father, Professor James Neil. He died on Monday after an emergency admission to hospital following a stroke on Sunday."

The unexpected arrival of this news in the GTN 'Inbox' spread a palpable sadness across the Grasping the Nettle family. One of its staunchest supporters, James was a very active member of the Council of Advisers and a regular participant in GTN events. At his funeral, GTN, alongside Christians in Science, was mentioned as one of his many interests. Professor John Spence, Chairman of Search for Truth Charitable Trust, reflected appreciatively on the fact that James Neil had been one of the first to accept a role on the Council of Advisers.

As a medical scientist, James was a wonderful asset in GTN. Professionally, he was Professor of Virology and Molecular Oncology at the Glasgow Centre for Virus Research Institute of Infection, Immunity and Inflammation. In addition to his OBE, he was Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh (FRSE) and Fellow of the Royal Society of Biology (FRSB). A man of profound faith and an active church member, he had participated in science/God debates, most recently opposing the motion that Darwin Dispensed with God.

James Neil will be greatly missed and the GTN initiative is depleted by his death. Our condolences are extended to his wife, children, grandchildren and wider family.

GRASPING THE NETTLE

Project Liaison Officer (part time)



Grasping the Nettle (GTN) is seeking to appoint a **PROJECT LIAISON OFFICER** on a Contract for Services basis.

This is an exciting new opportunity to help raise the ecumenical profile and activity level of GTN across Scotland.

THE CONTRACT will operate for 24 months for a number of days per year to be negotiated (potentially up to 87 per year) and at the rate of £120 per day plus expenses. The role will involve a level of travel within Scotland. Some evenings and weekends will be involved.

Please note: the eventual arrangement could operate on the basis of job share.

THE IDEAL CANDIDATE will have sufficient understanding of issues related to science and God to enable them confidently to promote the GTN agenda – and engagement in it – to presbyteries/dioceses, churches and individuals across Scotland.

Suitable candidates will:

- have good public communication and interpersonal skills
- be able to inspire others to action
- own the GTN vision and be an effective team member as well as being able to work on his/her own initiative
- have access to, or own, a vehicle and possess a valid UK driving licence

Good administrative and IT skills are clearly advantageous.

If you are attracted to this role, please register your interest at:

office@graspingthenettle.org, attaching a CV with information relevant to the advertised post and including a statement of why this position is of interest.

For further information, including the job specification, please contact the Grasping the Nettle office via the email address above.

Closing date for applications: 10 December 2018

Funding for this post is provided by ACTS (Association of Churches Together in Scotland).

Grasping the Nettle (GTN) is a national and interdenominational initiative by church leaders in Scotland and administered by Search for Truth Charitable Trust.