



GRASPING THE NETTLE

NEWSLETTER

Christmas 2023



When Heaven Touches Earth

“What makes Christian faith distinct from other world religions?” asked a young Chinese student from Hong Kong. The question came to the GTN speaker during a presentation on Science and God to 200 young people gathered in Glasgow in October under the auspices of Scripture Union.

Distinctly Christian

Christianity has several distinctives but high among them is the belief that the child in Bethlehem’s manger was God incarnate. No other religion claims to have encountered God in this way. It is possible only because God revealed himself cloaked in humanity.

Christmas Card Theology

It’s both a complex and a simple idea. Many an artist has attempted to represent its wonder in a traditional Christmas card scene. The presence of one or more angels hovering over the stable might be artistic licence but for sure communicates to us that Bethlehem’s manger is the primary example of where Heaven touches earth and revealed God to humanity.





Also on a typical Christmas card: the shepherds. This associates the Christian message, wrapped in God's love, with folk at the bottom of the social stratum. But the gospel is not a doctrine aimed only at the working class. Enter the kings from the East whose curious understanding of prophetic texts, combined with

astrology, led them too to the manger wherein lay God incarnate.

Revelation and Thought

The message was *directly* delivered to the shepherds in a Bethlehem field by the angel chorus. Mary and Joseph both received angelic revelations and were privy to the message '*Emmanuel: God with us*'. The wise men apparently concluded the circumstances for themselves, based on the evidence they had compiled. Both ways of identifying truth have their own validity: one a form of science; the other was revelation.

Also on the traditional Christmas card: the stable animals. They represent the poverty of the circumstances into which Christ was born. In an imaginative elaboration, the poet Thomas Hardy imagined even the animals knelt in worship.

The Service of Worship

And it is worship that unites parents and visitors, animals and humans, heaven and earth. We tend to think of worship as words, often with music, but in the New Testament the word some translate as worship is *λατρεία*. The word also means '*service offered to God*'. The worship of the wise men was not confined to their words and genuflecting. There was sacrificial giving in the form of treasures offered to the Christ child and the effort needed to sustain the long and arduous journey. Worship is multi-faceted.

"O Worship the King", says the hymn. There are many ways to do so!



Autumn Online with GTN

MSPs Impress with Principled Christian Stands

This GTN Online session, held at the end of October, was about politics but not about party divisions. It was clear from the input of our four guest MSPs that the Christian faith unites them more than politics is likely to divide.



Murdo Fraser

John Mason

Jeremy Balfour

Maurice Golden

One of GTN's high aims from its inception has been *"the transformation of public understanding about issues related to*

science and God". (Now the agenda has been widened to incorporate issues related to the reliability of the gospels and the problem of suffering.) However the transformation of public understanding remains key. But in what kind of society does our public live? Are its values diametrically opposed to the broad range of Christian values or does our Christian heritage still hold sway in the moral intuitions of the population? Living and working in the heat of the political arena, our Christian MSPs are well placed to offer insight.

Thoughtful and measured in their responses to every issue raised, all four politicians emphasised how much they value the prayers of the Christian public in supporting them in their roles. You can experience or re-visit the session 'Living Faith in the Public Arena' at www.graspingthenettle.org/watch.

Brain, Consciousness and Near Death Experiences (NDEs)

With Dr Sharon Dirckx

GTN's last online session of the calendar year took the audience into the exploration of near death experiences—a widely reported and researched phenomenon that potentially contributes to the human consciousness debate. The issue: is consciousness a product of neuronal activity in the brain or might it be a separate entity? If there is no life after death it is impossible to see how consciousness could exist after the brain ceases to function. NDEs (if supported by the evidence) point to the possibility of consciousness being a separate entity. So how strong is the evidence? Why not find out by visiting the Watch section of the website and view what was widely described as *"up there with the best of GTN's onlines!"*.



Against the Tide at a Cinema Near You?



On Saturday 11th November the Arts Picturehouse in the city of Cambridge was the venue for a screening to a full house of the cinematic film *Against the Tide*. It features Oxford University Professor John Lennox and Hollywood star Kevin Sorbo. The film has been shown in many cinemas across the USA and has won several awards.



Part one takes viewers on a journey into the wonders of our existence, asking if this is the result of chance alone or a creator's intention?

Part two travels to Israel in search of Jesus of Nazareth and evidence claimed to support his resurrection from the dead.

Don't miss the opportunity to see this award-winning movie.

Screen in Church or Other Local Venue - or in your own home...

... available on DVD, Blu-ray or to web-stream

www.againstthetidemovie.org

An animated brochure is available [here](#).

Share it with others.



A Local Cinema Experience

Or why not bring this experience to a cinema near you by renting a theatre? Don't worry about the technology required. There is a digital cinema package (DCP) ready for you to hand over to the cinema technical team. Contact: info@kharisproductions.com.

Equipping Young People for the Science/God Debate

A common image of young people in the third decade of the 21st century is of a cohort of social media addicts with heads buried in the latest Smart Phone. It might apply to some but the young audience that met at the end of October in Glasgow for the Scripture Union event, known as Equip West, is a notable exception. Not only did the audience pay rapt attention to the talk



given by the GTN representative on science and God, but the quality of their questions illustrated young minds keenly engaged with big questions:

Can the theory of evolution and Genesis 1 and 2 fit together?

How does the Biblical account of 6 days of creation square with the origins timescale in astronomy?

Why does the Bible make no mention of dinosaurs?"

A memorable aspect of the evening was not only the quality of their questions; it was the concerned look on faces. Many of them expressed genuine concern and perplexity.

In the USA, the organisation BioLogos was set up in response to so many young people abandoning faith because they could not reconcile traditional interpretations of Genesis with the science taught in schools and universities. Its purpose is to help all Christians get to grips with the issues. Grasping the Nettle is also offering various forms of support. This comes chiefly in the offer of presentations to church and youth groups as well as the opportunity to experience *Exploring the God Question* in its full form or its abbreviated version *The God Question for Starters*.

Sadly many churches in our land find it easier to ignore the dilemmas that sometimes cause conflict in young Christians' minds than to address them. As noted, Grasping the Nettle is willing to help but it requires partnership with Church leadership that sees the importance of anticipating the problem and putting measures in place to address it.

For further information on how GTN can help and on the work of its Liaison Officer contact

office@graspingthenettle.org.



A View From The Chair

By Very Rev Dr Martin Fair

When you come to the end of a book or a television drama or movie, there's the possibility that the final words will be either a two or three word construction: 'The End' or 'To Be Continued.'

With the end of 2023 fast approaching, we can assure you that for GTN it's very much the latter; heading into 2024, our work will be continued.

Sometimes a piece of work can be discontinued because the need that inspired it in the first place is no longer there but in the case of GTN, the need for us to continue to present a case for the reasonableness of Christian faith is as paramount as it ever was. When living in an age

when 'post truth' is the name of the game – when what is real is no more than what you want it to be – it's all the more important that we be able to present the faith position as much more than a personal opinion or lifestyle choice.

The existence of the Acts of the Apostles suggests that when Luke was finishing his Gospel, he was very much doing so with 'to be continued' in mind. And in finishing Acts, the same is true; in the promised guidance and power of the Holy Spirit, the work of establishing the Gospel is to be continued.

Nothing has changed. The work of GTN is to be continued just as the call to the Church is to continue to make known the Good News, in word and deed and in the debating places of the public square.

May I take this opportunity to thank you for supporting our work through 2023 and to encourage you to continue to journey with us into the new year.

Finally, may you know the peace and joy of Christmas and the faithful presence of a Loving Lord as we step into the New Year.

Martin



Very Rev Dr Martin Fair

Make a Date with GTN



Rev George Lind

Can you confidently refute the claim that science and God are in conflict? Do you feel comfortable in handling the big existential questions of young people in your family and church?

Are you aware of how GTN can support your church both in equipping the congregation in matters of evidence and faith and also in mission?

Why not arrange a meeting or presentation with GTN's Liaison Officer Rev George Lind? Make initial contact at office@graspingthenettle.org.

Join us for GTN Online in 2024

As I See It

**Theology, Capitalism, Climate and
Mental Health:
*Responding to a God's-Eye View of
Creation Today***

Wednesday 17th January 7.30pm

with

Rev Prof John Swinton FBA, FRSE
Chair in Divinity and Religious Studies
University of Aberdeen

Registration Open Now!

office@graspingthenettle.org

WOW!

**Physiology, Exercise and You!
*The Wonder of Muscle & Sinews***

Tuesday 20th February 7.30pm

with

Prof Chris Packard CBE FRSE

Hon Snr Research Fellow
School of Cardiovascular and
Metabolic Health
University of Glasgow

and

Kevin Lafferty

CEO, Paths for All

Registration opens 17th January

A Happy and Blessed Advent Season from Grasping the Nettle



“She (Mary) gave birth to her first born, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger.”

Luke 2:6

Behind that simple action lies a world of theological wonder concerned with God's plan to redeem his creation.

Supporting GTN

Thanks to all who support GTN with your participation in events, general promotion of its activities, and not least of all, with financial gifts. Donations to GTN can be given at www.graspingthenettle.org/donate.

