



# GRASPING THE NETTLE

## NEWSLETTER SPRING 2018

### The Regenerating Power of 'The Nettle'

*"Grasping the Nettle could be the timely catalyst needed to encourage and develop society's interest in the reality of a creator"*. So said the initiative's new Chairman Very Rev Dr Angus Morrison, a former Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. At the helm of a Steering Board meeting for the first time as Chairman, Dr Morrison emphasised that the church is facing an uphill battle which could easily be fatally lost if strategies are not put in place to address the issues. Former Chairman Very Rev Dr John Chalmers now has the role 'Ambassador at Large'.



One of many For Sale signs on religious buildings

#### Down But Not Out

The general picture of decline is well known. Those occupied with statistics identify a collapse in religious belief since the 1980s when more than two-thirds of people in the UK said they were members of a major religion. Now 70% of people between 18 and 24 have no religious allegiance. "Step by step, our culture seems to be disengaging

from its religious roots," said Dr Morrison.

Among the more staggering examples is a decision taken by the supermarket chain Lidl, later reversed, to airbrush crosses on churches from an image used on the packaging of Greek food. Whereas on picture postcards of iconic Santorini the crosses on the church domes are fully apparent, on the food packaging they have been removed "for fear of offending non-Christian shoppers". Lidl's

Facebook page was swamped by complaints of discrimination against

Christians, some evidence that the fight for survival goes on. But is elbowing for space what it is really about? Is there a more effective and positive way to engage interest in God and related issues?



The iconic Greek churches of Santorini.

#### Science: A Doorway to Engagement

Whereas religious themes may be greeted by apathy, and sometimes even hostility, it appears that there is nothing quite like science to rouse public interest. From the national outpouring of grief at the death of Stephen Hawking to the high profile given to science in news media, it is clear that science connects! And connecting is precisely the aim of Grasping the Nettle.

In this edition of the newsletter we feature a variety of ways in which science becomes the doorway to discussion about religion—for diverse audiences. Just as science is evidence based, so religion should be too!

Please consider what among the featured strategies you can use and/or support as we try to *make an impact together* across the country.

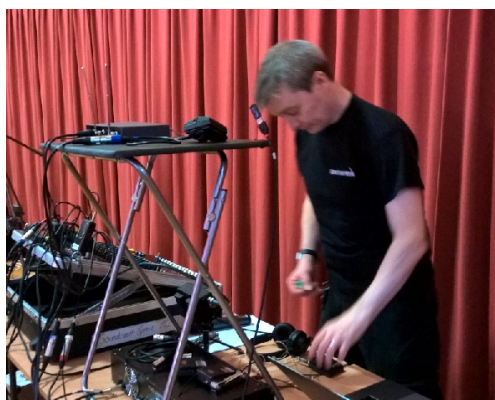


The late Professor Hawking who made theoretical physics a popular subject.

# What A Wonder-Full World In Skye and Lochalsh



On Saturday 10th March 2018, churches in Skye and Lochalsh held their first **What A Wonder-Full World** event. Rev Rory McLeod (Church of Scotland) and Rev Roddie Rankin (Free Church of Scotland) were among the local leaders who, along with the GTN team, organised the highly successful evening. The idea was born in August 2017 subsequent to a “Grasping the Nettle with The God Question” day conference in Kyleakin.



A one-man band? Sanctus Media's Neil MacLennan was responsible for PA, lighting, recording and projection!

*“Last year’s conference presented us with a vision of challenging our community to see through the ‘God is dead, and science buried Him’ rhetoric of the New Atheism” explains Rory.*

*“In churches of various denominations the Exploring the God Question series was used with midweek house groups. Our hope was that Christians would be enthused with confidence and concern to bring the wider community to an event which would stimulate fresh discussion.”*

Roddie Rankin was equally enthusiastic about the prospect of bringing church and community together, *“What attracted me about the WAWW format and aim was its aspiration to create common ground for believers and sceptics to meet on. Too often we go in too hard and put people off, or hang back and never get started. Neither extreme is constructive but as soon as I heard about WAWW I thought, here's an approach which might just work. My hope was that this event would strengthen the bond between local churches and Christians, through a creative response to aggressive secularism”.*



Local actors in a performance of Comic Cut, a drama vignette especially written for Wonder-Full World events.



Dr Antony Latham from Tarbet and Astronomer Royal Prof. John Brown share diverse opinions on the God question as part of ‘Conversation with Scientists’.



Vocalist Alasdair Morris with a specially arranged version of What A Wonderful World, the song made famous by Louis Armstrong.



The programme drew heavily on local talent with some poetry and music being presented in Gaelic. As with all WAWW events the programme blended music, drama, film excerpts, poetry and conversation with scientists. In this case they were Dr Antony Latham MD and Professor John Brown, Astronomer Royal for Scotland. *“When it comes to artistic talent, particularly of the musical and literary variety, we are spoiled for choice here. The challenge was deciding what to omit!”*, said Rev McLeod, who is responsible for four churches - from Broadford to Elgol.



All roads led to Kyleakin on 10th March.

*“We made sure that the event was widely advertised, which involved, among other approaches, a large team of local Christians posting a flyer to almost every home in the area. We also organised for the Astronomer Royal for Scotland to do an afternoon ‘Magical Mystery Tour of the Cosmos’ ahead of the evening event”*, added Roddie.

*“Attendance at the WAWW event was good. Most of those present had a local church connection, but there were several people who were not in this category, who had come out of an interest in the theme. They are being followed up on a one to one basis”*, he said.

Rev McLeod emphasised that *“From the beginning, this was an interdenominational initiative. On one level it seems ludicrous that such a small Christian community as ours is divided into so many denominations. We can work towards reconciliation now and into the future. Sharing projects like WAWW is a significant part of that process.*

*I hope that our willingness to engage with people of deep faith and none will have earned credibility for our churches. Ultimately we are motivated by the love of God and our desire to respond faithfully to Jesus' command to go into all the world and make disciples...”*



The mist rises from Kyleakin shores on the morning of the event.



Kyleakin Community Hall: the event venue.

Grasping the Nettle is grateful to the church community in Skye and Lochalsh for their vision, drive and commitment as well as the way they sourced such excellent content for the programme. Summing up, one of the GTN team members commented *“Can there be a better place on earth to celebrate our wonderful world than the island of Skye and the west coast of Scotland?”*

# GRASPING THE NETTLE DINNER 2018

featuring

*"Tales from the Global Arena"*

The Alona Hotel, Strathclyde Park, Motherwell

Wednesday 16th May 2018

6.30 for 7pm

£35 per person

Includes drinks reception, three course dinner & tea/coffee

Don't miss the opportunity to hear *and see* what it's like to be 'in the ring' with some of the world's foremost atheists. Hear from John Lennox on...

What does it feel like just moments before going on stage to debate an atheist who is committed to the intellectual destruction of the Christian worldview?

How do you prepare for such a debate?

Who has been your most formidable opponent and why?

What aspects of the Christian worldview have your atheist opponents found most difficult to handle?

What aspects of the atheist worldview have *you* found most difficult to handle?

What personal impact have these encounters had on you?

How did you get into this and why do you do it?



Dawkins claiming Lennox's belief in the resurrection removes his right to be considered a scientist.

In a year when a major documentary film is being undertaken on the life of Professor Lennox, GTN is privileged to feature this modern day CS Lewis who has championed the Christian worldview across the globe. There will be film illustrations of some of the more dramatic moments of his encounters with Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Peter Singer, Michael Shermer and others.



Lennox challenging Dawkins' unconvincing reliance on science as the gateway to all truth.

Visit [www.graspingthenettle.org/dinner](http://www.graspingthenettle.org/dinner) to book your place!



## GTN Blog on Science and Faith

### A New Online Feature

All things bright and beautiful; in this case, Loch Earn

*GTN aims to engage every category of people in its broad constituency . The new Blog feature on the website is **intended for all who want to engage in conversation about how the church can strategise to increase its impact among its members and their wider communities**. All are invited to read and participate, even briefly. Here blog author Rev Dr Russel Moffat of Killin and Balquhider explains more.*

#### **What motivated you to initiate the GTN blog?**

I offered my services to promote interest in the broad range of topics which come under the GTN umbrella. We want to keep this fresh and regularly updated.

#### **What audience/readership do you envisage?**

Everybody! Realistically we expect to engage people who are associated with GTN in some capacity. It would be great if other folks among the rank and file of our churches who are interested in these matters became involved in due course. If those outside the Christian community are browsing the website then the Blog should give an indication of the vibrant, interesting, and relevant conversations and discussions taking place within the contemporary church on important matters.

#### **What do you hope it will achieve?**

I would like it to be a stimulus to engagement with important issues facing the church today. I would also hope it would inform, encourage, challenge and rally the troops for the task facing us in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. A huge issue here is Christian unity and promoting that is essential for the future.

#### **What subjects do you have in mind to discuss?**

Currently the science/religion debate gets priority. But we must move beyond that as the Church seeks to construct an appropriate intellectual response to the many and varied issues that require a Christian response.

#### **Do you expect that responses should be long and/or erudite?**

No! If they are too long and erudite other visitors to the site might not read them and I might not understand and respond to them! Seriously though, sometimes issues require more comment than others and we can't always dumb everything down. That said we do need to be mindful of how other readers perhaps not as well informed on a particular topic might react. We want to attract interest and educate as well as have discussion with likeminded people. There has to be room for simple Q/A; short comments, and light conversations too.

#### **Why do you think GTN is important for the church in our time?**

Three words: Education, Unity, Mission. GTN is an excellent springboard for the promotion of these three essential ingredients for today's church as together we construct a way forward for the Church of Jesus Christ in interesting and challenging times.

***To read the Blog, visit the GTN Home Page. To make a comment simply do so under 'Leave A Response'.***



# Weekly Worship x 2 With GTN

## On 3rd and 10th June

*A worship-inspiring landscape across Portree Bay in early Spring 2018*

**While GTN attempts to provide multiple sign posts on the journey of discovery about science and God, its supporters would agree that personal engagement with God is supremely the most important aspect of all.** Worship of the creator is the central focus of church services across the country. Bringing a scientific perspective can of course add meaning to our appreciation of the wonders of the natural world.

*GTN is delighted, therefore, to have been invited to contribute to the Church of Scotland's very popular Weekly Worship resources.* Known to be accessed by around ten thousand visitors per week, the material is valued not only by ministers and worship leaders in Scotland but by others across the world.

### Supporting Structured Worship

Each week a well informed contributor takes the passages designated by the lectionary and builds around them sermon notes, suggested hymns, a children's talk, prayers and any other resources relevant to the day's theme.

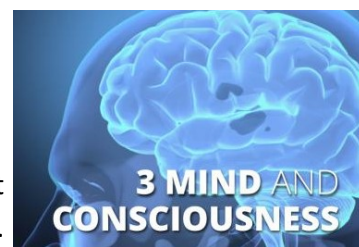
*Grasping the Nettle has been given responsibility for the content for Sundays 3 and 10 June this year* which coincide with the beginning and the end of science and technology week. Contributing for GTN are Rev George Lind and Rev Dr Liam Fraser.

Writing in the introduction to the materials Rev Lind refers to relevant Exploring the God Question resources. *"Engagement with these resources has deepened my sense of awe at the God who creates and sustains life in all its forms."*

### Incorporating The God Question Series



On both weeks, users of the material will have access to a relevant clip from The God Question series. Rev Lind's content references some key ideas from *Mind and Consciousness*, Programme Three in the series. Rev Fraser's content in week 2 makes use of an excerpt from *Life and Evolution*, Programme Two in the series. Links are provided to The God Question extracts via the Weekly Worship website.



To access the GTN related content for these Weekly Worship sessions, click [here](#) and select 'June'!

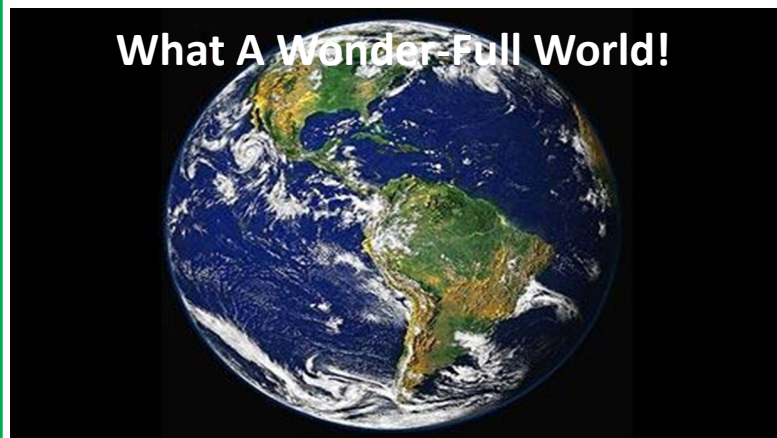
Friends of GTN can also access these clips *now* via [www.graspingthenettle.org/watch/weekly-worship](http://www.graspingthenettle.org/watch/weekly-worship).

The Exploring the God Question series is available with Study Guide, both as DVD with booklet or as an online resource. Visit [www.thegodquestion.tv/explore](http://www.thegodquestion.tv/explore).

## Perth Presbytery Is Grasping the Nettle

***The presbytery of Perth has made a significant strategic decision to try to engage with its community and to use a Wonder-Full World event in the city as the starting point.***

*Here Rev Klaus Buwert, Chair of the Presbytery's Mission and Discipleship Committee, explains the thinking behind the plan.*



**What attracted you to the WAWW format and aim?**

- The mix of elements, celebrating our Wonderful World.
- For Christians—a confirmation that ultimately it is God's handiwork.
- For those not so sure—enough food for thought for them not to take for granted the rationalist explanation
- The chance to raise questions that need further investigation.

**Why did it seem relevant in your situation in Perthshire?**

It is relevant in every situation. There is an interest in The God Question series which has alerted church people to the reality that a purely materialist worldview, based on a belief that science provides all the answers, is highly dubious. There is still a debate to be had, and a faith to be confident in because Christianity provides a more convincing explanation of who, where and what we are.

**What do you hope the event might achieve?**

We aim to build on the interest that a significant number of the clergy and “in the know” people have, but also to involve more people and get a wider interest in the discussion. The militant atheists, and the public media have had it all one way, and the church has been very slow to respond with intellectual integrity and authority. This debate has been rumbling on ever since Darwin and my personal take is that if they haven't proved their point yet, and eliminated the religious element in society already, then it is time for religious people to start taking a more confident stand, and be more proactive rather than defensive, always speaking the truth in love.

**How significant is it that the decision to hold the event was taken at a presbytery level (rather than a few enthusiasts)?**

After an eloquent presentation of the Grasping the Nettle project in Perth last year the Presbytery enthusiastically and overwhelmingly wanted us to do something. Very Rev Dr Angus Morrison (now Chair of GTN) is a member of the Presbytery and The God Question series had already been promoted. Both factors give the whole event a greater momentum. For the Mission and Discipleship Committee, tasked with taking this event forward, it is encouraging to know the Presbytery is supportive. For one thing it releases, in our case, finances to support quite ambitious plans.

*The Wonder-Full World event in Perth is scheduled to take place on Saturday 3rd November in Perth Theatre. Enquiries for further information can be made via [office@graspingthenettle.org](mailto:office@graspingthenettle.org).*



The interest of Presbytery was kindled at a Saturday morning event entitled Grasping the Nettle with The God Question.



With the Perth What A Wonder-Full World event at the planning stage, this wayside pulpit of Crieff Parish Church seems particularly poignant.

Crieff is within the Presbytery of Perth



Crieff Parish Church

## GTN and The General Data Protection Regulation

Grasping the Nettle is aware of - and is taking all reasonable steps to comply with - the new General Data Protection Regulation which soon comes into force in the UK.

Having studied the new legislation and taken advice, we believe the requirements in relation to GTN are the following.



### 1. We need to have a legitimate reason for contacting you

You receive communications from Grasping the Nettle because you are known to us to have an interest in its activities. In the majority of cases our contacts have specifically registered to be kept in touch. For that reason, coupled with the clear opportunity to unsubscribe, we do not consider it necessary to ask you to take the separate step of opting in to receive future communication.

### 2. We need to have a legitimate reason for processing data

To communicate with the GTN constituency—including via this electronic Newsletter—Grasping the Nettle requires to hold some personal information about you (including, but not limited to, your name and email address). For this reason, processing of personal information is required.

### 3. We need to be transparent about our use of personal information

This (and other relevant information) is outlined in detail in our [Privacy Policy](#), on the GTN website.

### 4. We need to provide the opportunity for 'data subjects' (you) to unsubscribe from our communications service

There is an 'unsubscribe' button in the footer of our network-wide emails, which you can use at any time. Alternatively you can email [office@graspingthenettle.org](mailto:office@graspingthenettle.org) with your request to be removed from our distribution list, in which case your details will be permanently deleted from our database.



We very much hope you find our communications informative and that you wish to continue to be involved in the Grasping the Nettle initiative.



# God and Science for Kids

## A New Animation Series Connecting Children with the Big Questions

***"This may be hugely important in the sense that by the time many people are mid way through their teens, they're already 'locked into' a world view though, in fact, having thought little about it."*** wrote **Rev Dr Martin Fair**, St Andrews Parish Church, Arbroath on hearing for the first time about a new animated film series on science and God for 8-12 year olds.

Richard Dawkins frequently rails against what he claims is indoctrination of children into the religion of their parents. No one ought to subscribe to the methodology he opposes! On the other hand, children should be given the opportunity to think through the big questions in a way that is informative and balanced.

*"Never underestimate a child's ability to grapple with and interrogate complex ideas ,"* says Janet McKeran, with more than 30 years experience in the teaching profession. Surely Prof Dawkins would not disagree.



Extract from the storyboard of The God Question Junior (working title)

Search for Truth Charitable Trust, sponsors of The God Question and GTN, have commissioned a pilot programme for children in the 8-12 age group. It is intended to be the first of ten short animated films posing the same underlying question as the adult series: *is the human race here because we had a few lucky breaks in our history or were we intended by God?* Do we exist in a non-descript arm of the Milky Way simply because, as one of the characters suggests, *"stuff happens"*?

The scripts, written and devised by Kharis Productions, will be animated by Cape Town based media company Another Love Productions. Managing Director Bart Love said *"We are enormously excited and privileged to be part of this highly significant project, designed to be viewed by children worldwide. Our staff are excited to be rising to the challenge."*

The pilot script was sent out for consultation to a wide range of people with experience of working with children. The reaction was overwhelmingly positive but also resulted in very important fine tuning of both script and story board. A head teacher from Manchester commented *"This is perfect for your target audience. Animation is part of their everyday world so immediately taps into their comfort zone and sphere of interest. The script is snappy and will capture their imagination"*. From the Faraday Institute in Cambridge, *"...the script flows well and explores tricky aspects of this topic in an interesting and stimulating way that will appeal to children"*.

More details about this project will be available at the GTN Dinner on 16th May.



Extract from the storyboard of The God Question Junior (working title)

If you would like further information please email your request via [office@graspingthenettle.org](mailto:office@graspingthenettle.org).

**Grasping the Nettle.....**

## **With the Crown of Thorns**

### **Churches in Hamilton take the message of Easter to the streets**

It was not only the hostility of the Jewish authorities that was featured during Hamilton's Passion Play on the Saturday of Easter weekend. The Scottish weather also wore a most aggressive frown.

Although this major event has no official connection with GTN, the principle of taking church into the streets and raising a distinctly Christian agenda within and for the community is precisely what GTN aspires to do, and wants to support. The organisers are congratulated on the quality of their vision and for the way in which it was implemented so publicly and effectively.

In temperatures that were only a little above zero, and with the rain at times horizontal, a resolute cast and a determined audience witnessed the reality, the pain and the victory of the events we commemorate at Easter. There were clearly identifiable gasps of horror within the crowd when faced with the facts of crucifixion.



Such events not only declare the Christian message within the local community but act as a major encouragement to members of the church for whom the sharing of the experience with one another is deeply reinforcing of the basics of the faith.



The organisers estimated attendance to be 1000 people, whose engagement with the story helped freeze out the weather!



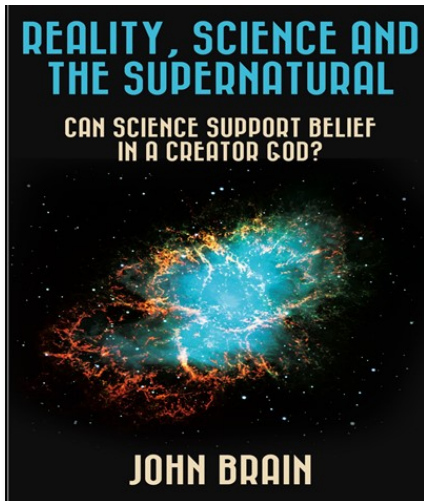
Jesus and the disciples brace themselves for a clash with the religious authorities during 'passion week'.

A local church leader commented: *"At a time in history when there is a forceful movement within society to disassociate it from its Christian roots, whole generations can grow up with little or no knowledge of what lies at the heart of Christian faith. In public events, such as this, the church conspicuously communicates the narrative that lies at the heart of the faith".*



## Not Only to be Engaged but to Engage

GTN engages interest across a wide constituency in issues related to science and God but if the process is to be truly dynamic and as effective as possible those who become engaged should subsequently try to engage others. That principle has been well demonstrated by Dr John Brain, who, along with his wife, is a committed supporter of Grasping the Nettle. Here he briefly recounts his journey from scepticism to greater certainty about the Christian worldview and his effort, through his book, to invite others to take the same journey.



### How did you become attracted to engage with science and God issues?

For most of my adult life I have been involved in undertaking, leading and eventually overall management of research and development programmes at the United Kingdom's National Engineering Laboratory. When I retired I took time to make an assessment of my faith. I found that I needed to strengthen my belief and wanted to discover if factual evidence arising from recent scientific developments could help.

### How did you build up experience of the subject matter?

Typical of a research engineer I planned and undertook a project—described in my book. It provided me with a glimpse into the world of *theoretical physics, quantum mechanics, dark matter, dark energy, chaos*

*theory and the holographic universe*. The aim was to strengthen my faith in a creator God by employing science to answer the following questions:

- How credible is the atheist philosophy of materialism?
- Does acceptance of the theory of evolution negate belief in God?
- Is science fully equipped to answer *the God Question*?
- Can science produce evidence to support belief in the supernatural?

### What motivated you to write the book?

I was irked by the arrogance of the writings of the *New Atheists*. In particular, the eminent ethologist, Richard Dawkins, worried me by the claims in his book *The God Delusion*. Professor Dawkins is an exceptionally talented scientist. However when he turns to religion his arguments prove much less convincing particularly when he decides to adopt what Alister McGrath, Professor of Theology at King's College London, refers to as “turbocharged rhetoric and highly selective manipulation of the facts”.

Several works (listed in my book) have given excellent responses to Dawkins but the book which most motivated me in my efforts is titled *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* by John Lennox. This really is an outstanding work which grabbed my attention and spurred me on to further effort.

I felt that an engineer could provide a fresh approach for those involved in the science and religion topic.

### What subject matter does it cover?

The main topics are:-

- Materialism and Reality – Quantum physics undermines materialism
- Evolution and Reality – Theistic Evolution provides the best explanation of the evolution process.
- Science and Reality – Science has undergone tremendous change over the past century and recent developments are helping to describe a reality which is compatible with the existence of a creator God.
- Signposts from Science to Reality – Signposts pointing evidence of a mind at work are:-  
*The Goldilocks Effect, The Human Genome, The Intelligibility of the Universe*

**The book can be purchased on Amazon, and will also be available to buy at the GTN Dinner on 16 May. Author Dr John Brain can be contacted by email at [johnbrain2001@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:johnbrain2001@yahoo.co.uk)**