



# GRASPING THE NETTLE

NEWSLETTER WINTER 2017

## MAKING AN IMPACT TOGETHER IN SCOTLAND

Lochs, Glens, Whisky, Tartan, Irn Bru, shortbread, bagpipes and don't forget the Tunnock's teacakes! A collection of disparate images that together communicate a popular image of 'Scotland'.

Following the pattern set by its homeland, Grasping the Nettle may claim to be similarly diverse in how it can be represented.

From the large scale *In Concert with the Cosmos* to small conferences in the Scottish Highlands; from a series of University debates, between theists and the Humanist Society, to hundreds of small group studies of Exploring the God Question in churches and homes and from conferences and dinners to countless conversations between friends over a drink in a pub: *all of it is GTN in action*.



In Concert with the Cosmos



GTN with specially written drama



What A Wonder-Full World event with the enigmatically named Brats and Callets

*Action* is the crucial word. Former Moderator Very Rev Dr Angus Morrison commented "*We are familiar with the term 'joined up thinking'. GTN's ambitions must be based on 'joined up action'.*"

Consequently, for the next few months GTN is focusing its development strategy in the concept '**Making an Impact Together**'. Hundreds of GTN supporters have been invited to identify from a wide range of possibilities the specific contribution they will commit to making within the diaspora of GTN activities. GTN Chairman Very Rev Dr John Chalmers said "*The great virtue of this approach is its flexibility. Ambassadors for GTN can opt to contribute on a one time, ad hoc or regular basis. There are opportunities for all and for all kinds of contributions.*"



A local training conference on science and God in the Scottish Highlands

If you would like to know more about how you can contribute to Making an Impact Together please email [office@graspingthenettle.org](mailto:office@graspingthenettle.org)



Sharing the vision with a Presbytery in central Scotland

## Making an Impact Together? What Impact?

*Worst case scenario, some actions may achieve very little. Action needs to be focussed on making an impact. Here Professor John Spence, Chairman of Search for Truth Charitable Trust, suggests how GTN can strategise to make a difference.*



Might the problem be that people have lost belief in belief? Today the concept “post-truth” tells them they cannot know anyway. People no longer believe in politicians’ ability to solve problems, they are deeply sceptical about the trustworthiness of the ‘news’ and are increasingly unlikely to rely on there being a God – a mistrust reinforced by a growing trend in media to represent religion as fantasy.

## Thought for the Day? It's too religious!

Radio 4's presenters of the Today programme have recently joined forces to resist the well established Thought for the Day, mainly because of its religious content. Anchor man John Humphrys described it as “deeply boring” and “inappropriate in an increasingly secular society and only occasionally interesting”. Writing in The Guardian newspaper, he said “It seems to me inappropriate that Today should broadcast nearly three minutes of uninterrupted religion, given that rather more than half our population have no religion at all”. Was it convenient of him to forget that nearly half the population embraces religion in some way, thereby making ‘the religious’ the largest minority in the country?

Clearly we live in a society disillusioned in relation to belief. It seeks material evidence for everything and, where it appears absent, it rejects the proposition.

### GTN: Rehabilitating Belief

Essentially Grasping the Nettle is aimed at rehabilitating belief in a creator. It does so, not based on conjecture or wishful thinking, but on the basis of a thinking journey about the wonders of our existence and on the basis of the *evidence*. Does our ultimate cause appear to be a creator’s intention or just a series of chance events that happen to have consistently arranged themselves in our favour over billions of years? GTN opens an agenda. In summary, it offers ‘reasons to believe’. This agenda is as relevant within the church as it is to wider society.

So what impact can Grasping the Nettle make?

The immediate concern of GTN is for Scotland. Realistically GTN is unlikely to see a sudden reversal of the trend away from belief in a creator. However, one step at a time, one individual at a time, one event at a time, it can begin the process of turning the tide in favour of openly considering the evidence that many of us find inexorably points to the existence of a creator.



A State Senator in the USA has called for the removal of this board from Times Square.

Credit: American Atheists, sourced from CBS Broadcasting Inc.



## Making an Impact with The God Question Series

GTN's core resource is *The God Question*, already making an impact around the world and **now also available online**.

On mainstream broadcast television the series is being aired in dozens of countries including all of those in the former Soviet Union, CBC Canada, two channels in Thailand, two in the Czech Republic as well as Kenya and South Africa, all of Scandinavia and many more.

The DVD programmes have been purchased in more than 60 countries. And now...



## Latest News

Exploring the God Question can now be streamed to your computer, tablet or smartphone. Visit the 'store' at [www.thegodquestion.tv/explore](http://www.thegodquestion.tv/explore) for more details.



## Still Shopping for Christmas?



Give someone a cracker of a Christmas present this year.

Why not give the gift of Exploring the God Question? Use the special GTN discount code **GTNSCO25** to get 25% discount in 'store' on all DVD boxsets and Study Guides.



## Yes. But is it True?

## Answers on a Postcard Christmas Card?



The Christmas story, as told by the writers Matthew and Luke, is infused with the supernatural—just the sort of stuff that modern rational minds instinctively reject as myth and superstition. Of course over two millennia the story in the Gospels has been overlaid by conjecture, much of it found in some carols and

Christmas cards. So in this era of post-truth and fake news what might we accept as justifiably true? The Q&A section of the GTN Forum sounds like just the place to pose the big questions. You ask them; someone from GTN will suggest an answer. [www.graspingthenettle.org/forum](http://www.graspingthenettle.org/forum)

## Bringing The God Question to a Chinese Audience

In the words of film jargon: "It's a wrap". That is to say we are delighted to announce that filming in the Far East for a version of Exploring the God Question for Chinese people is complete.

The months of October and November saw a frantically busy period for the Producers of The God Question as they filmed around 30 interviews in the Far East and all the associated images. To complete the filming task in the necessary timescale, 14 hour days became the norm.



A Chinese junk sails between Hong Kong Island and Kowloon



The Buddhist abbot at the Western Monastery prepares to participate in the oriental version of the series..

Expert contributors from the East addressed the core topics of the series: cosmology, biology and neuroscience. But 'The God Question' series is of course also about the concept 'God' and so theologians, philosophers and a sociologist of religion also have important roles in piecing together the story.

*"Whereas in the Western world we may assume some shared meaning in the understanding of 'God'", said Iain Morris, Producer "people from essentially Buddhist and traditional Chinese religious backgrounds have very different views from our own and so we need to address the question of what we mean by God from a long way back!"*



Cosmologist Yi Wang discusses the birth of the universe

Understanding is often assisted through contrast and so Buddhist and traditional Chinese Taoist worldviews are also adequately represented in the series. *"The God Question is about offering choice to viewers and inviting truth to speak for itself"* said Search for Truth board member Dr Rose Mary Harley. *"It is not about imposing a specific point of view. That is the strength of the series".*

Many interviews were recorded in both English and Mandarin. Search

for Truth Board Chairman Professor John Spence has announced the plan to release the series first in English and then subsequently in Mandarin. *"We have realised the immense interest among the Chinese in learning English. A series which can be accessed in both Mandarin and English might be the God-send required,"* he suggests.



Carmen Bat working at translating an interview from a Professor at Minzu University, Beijing



## Perth Presbytery is Grasping the Nettle



The city of Perth. Image courtesy of Ingo Mehling

After an autumn Saturday morning getting to grips with “Grasping the Nettle with The God Question” the Church of Scotland’s Presbytery of Perth got down to the business of how to use the resources within their churches and also—highly significantly—within the surrounding community.

Meeting in the city’s North Church, the 60 delegates from across the Presbytery took the morning’s topic on board in their subsequent business meeting. The seed sown has now blossomed into a commitment to stage What A Wonder-Full World in the city at the end of summer 2018. Writing to initiate the process with GTN, Rev Klaus Buwert said *“The response to the morning session was incredibly positive. So much so that the Mission and Discipleship Committee, of which I am Convener, was tasked with taking it forward. Now it’s not so much grasping the nettle as striking while the iron’s hot!”*



Presbytery delegates learn about how The God Question series can be used to grasp the nettle.

More details will be given in the next edition of the GTN newsletter.

## When Keswick (and GTN) Came to Motherwell

When, in a previous year, The God Question series was presented over four seminars in the local cinema at the Keswick convention, numbers attending each session exceeded the capacity of the venue. When ‘Keswick came to Motherwell’ this year the town’s largest church, Dalziel St Andrews, easily absorbed the 200 attendees, who on the final evening were given a presentation on Grasping the Nettle with The God Question. Organiser David Simpson of Calvary Church, Motherwell welcomed the opportunity to spread this vision about how church attenders, often accustomed to listening to sermons, were being



Keswick in Motherwell

given a strategy for action. Earlier this year Motherwell was the venue of a regional launch of a Grasping the Nettle strategy to connect with the local community.



Keswick in Keswick

## Save the Date: Grasping the Nettle Dinner 2018



Dinners and conferences have become a part of the Grasping the Nettle brand. In 2018 a national dinner will be part of the GTN spring programme.

The next dinner event not only sees a change of venue but presents a highly varied programme that will both entertain and inspire.

Music, drama and conversation have become major components in the popular Wonder-Full World events and will feature too on the night.

### GRASPING THE NETTLE DINNER 2018

featuring

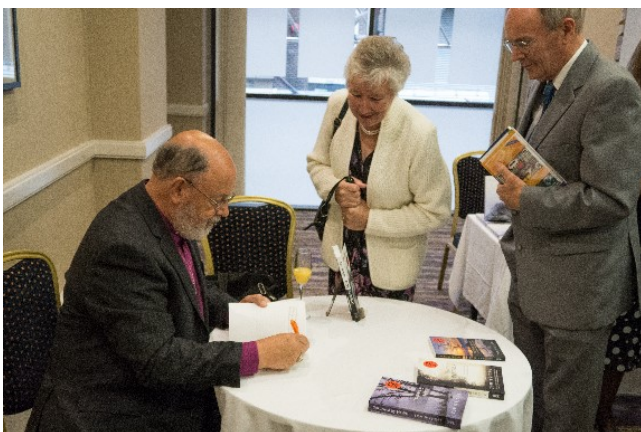
*“Tales from the Global Arena”*

The Alona Hotel, Strathclyde Park, Motherwell

Wednesday 16th May 2018

6.30 for 7pm

The main item *“Tales From The Global Arena”* will feature an interview with Professor John Lennox about his worldwide experiences in the debating chamber with the world’s foremost atheists. In a year when there will be a major documentary film released on the life of Professor Lennox, GTN will pay tribute to this modern day CS Lewis who has championed the Christian worldview across the globe. There will be onscreen illustrations of some of the more dramatic moments of his encounters with Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Peter Singer, Michael Shermer and others. More details and early bird prices available soon.



N T Wright book signing at a previous GTN dinner



The GTN ‘players’ who present the specially written drama ‘Cosmic Cut’ and ‘On Track’



## The Wonder-Full World of Skye and Lochalsh



The Wonder-Full landscape of Skye and Lochalsh

Millions of tourists agree. Skye and Lochalsh—especially without the midges—is a jewel in our **wonder-full world**. However the churches in the area have much more than tourist attractions in mind in staging a GTN event of that name on 10th March 2018. Principal organiser Rev Rory MacLeod said *“Since our day long GTN conference at the end of August 2017 church leaders in the area committed themselves to using the ideas we received as a means of engaging our community with the God question.*

*This area is awash with creative talent and plans*

*are coming together for what we hope will be a spectacular evening of music, drama, film and conversation”.* Participating are: the Astronomer Royal for Scotland Professor John Brown, The Strath Gaelic choir, young local musicians, Dr Antony Latham from Harris and tenor vocalist Alasdair Morris from Glasgow. Professor Brown will give an additional talk on astronomy on the afternoon of the event day in the MacKinnon House Hotel, Kyleakin. *“Everyone is very excited about this event”* added Rev MacLeod, *“and of course we plan to follow up with opportunities for the audience to engage with Exploring the God Question”.*

*If you are interested in hosting a What A Wonder-Full World event in your area please email [office@graspingthenettle.org](mailto:office@graspingthenettle.org).*



Kyleakin's purpose built community centre is the venue for What A Wonder-Full World on 10th March 2018.

## The God Question for Juniors—At Last!

Even since the release of The God Question series parents, school teachers and Sunday school teachers have requested a version for younger viewers. At long last the dream is becoming a reality and a pilot programme has been commissioned. Using a mixed media format—the majority of which will be animation—the story of the cosmos, life of earth and the wonders of the brain will be brought to life on the screen for those aged around 7-13.

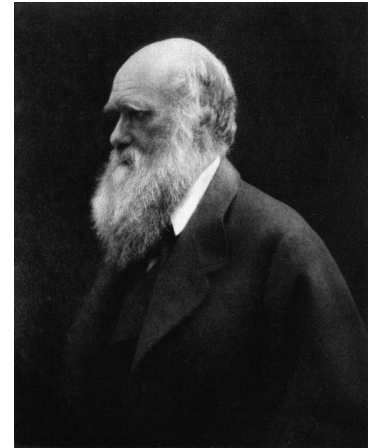


The series is anticipated to comprise 10 programmes of approximately 4 minutes duration each. The production of the pilot programme has been placed in the hands of the highly experienced Cape Town based animation company AnotherLove Productions. Watch this space!

Meantime for more details email [info@kharisproductions.com](mailto:info@kharisproductions.com)

## Darwin Day 12th February 2018—Should We Care?

International Darwin Day presents a worldwide army of devotees with the opportunity to celebrate the ways in which Darwin changed the world. For many, it is a chance not only to marvel at the ‘creativity of evolution through random mutation and natural selection’ but also to rejoice in the ‘put down’ of religion which many followers of Darwin claim he achieved. In the recent movie of Darwin’s life—the film was somewhat ironically entitled ‘Creation’ - one character comments with astonishment “You have killed God Mr Darwin”.



Member of the GTN Council of Advisers Rev Dr Russel Moffat is a strong advocate of the church responding to Darwin Day with a celebration of the wonders of creation as well as acknowledging that Darwin arguably played a part in revealing an important aspect of God’s creatorial process. *“We need to resist Darwin being hijacked as a high priest of atheism,”* said Rev Moffat. *“Darwin Day is an opportunity for all human beings, including Christians, to celebrate the wonders of life—a gift that ultimately comes from God”.*

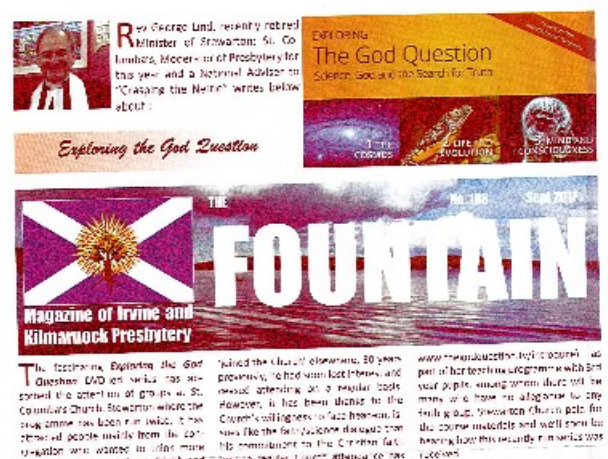
The secular organisers of Darwin Day advocate celebrating “hunger for truth; intellectual bravery; and perpetual curiosity”. Should such appetites not also motivate the church? Anything science can legitimately tell us can only increase our understanding of the wonder of God’s creative power.

Grasping the Nettle through [www.graspingthenettle.org](http://www.graspingthenettle.org) will be providing some ideas about how churches might respond to international Darwin Day. Please check the website for details from early January. If you feel the church should do more than ignore Darwin Day or would even like to contribute some ideas, please get in touch at [office@graspingthenettle.org](mailto:office@graspingthenettle.org).

## Go Forth and Tell

Economies in the Western world may generally be at a standstill but the same cannot be said for communication; it is exploding. Do you find ways of communicating news about GTN within your church community? Are you able to share the vision and spread the impact?

Witness this fine example from Rev George Lind, a member of the GTN Council of Advisers. Taking the whole of the front page (and a little bit more) of ‘Fountain’, the magazine of Irvine and Kilmarnock



Presbytery, he has written an account of his various positive experiences of Exploring the God Question as an important way of Grasping the Nettle. Citing an example of where a young female scientist had previously ‘binned’ religious belief and another in which a church attender for 30 years had lost interest, Rev Lind speaks warmly of how engagement with Exploring the God Question had turned those situations around. Summing up he said *“These testimonies have underlined to me the great need for churches to engage minds as well as hearts”.*