



GRASPING THE NETTLE

LATE SUMMER 2018 NEWSLETTER

Gud og Vistskapen! God and Science!

Norway is Grasping the Nettle!



Oslo, the location for the public launch of GTN Norway. Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dalbera/4852349999>

GTN is now international! That's official. Leading with the invitational title 'Gud og Vistskapen' (God and Science), Christian leaders in Norway are launching their own version of Grasping the Nettle with The God Question, in the week commencing 15th October 2018.

The God Question Resources in Norwegian

Just as Exploring the God Question is the central resource of GTN in Scotland, so in Norway. Translator Bjørn-Are Davidsen is presently completing the Norwegian script for programme 1 with the others to follow within weeks. Neil MacLennan, CEO of Sanctus Media, responsible for the subtitling of the Norwegian version of the series, said *"The technical preparation is completed with all sub-files ready to receive the Norwegian text. We are on schedule for the October launch in Oslo"*.

Norwegian Project Chairman, Professor Lars Dahle of NLA University in Oslo said *"My visit to Scotland just over three years ago to learn more about Grasping the Nettle was a watershed moment. Since then we have been increasingly aware of how vitally important this model could be to opening public discussion in Scandinavia."*



Lars Dahle

The Roll Out

The launch of GTN in Norway takes place in a week of intense activities that will involve more than 600 people. A Steering Board comprising representatives of NLA University, Veritas Forum (a student apologetics movement) and Damaris Norway (a public Christian education think tank) will begin with a press conference on Wednesday 17th October. In successive days there will be a GTN dinner (!) and a symposium on Creation with 30 workshops for the 600 attendees. "Tales from the International Arena" - a re-run of the 2018 GTN dinner programme—will take place at NLA University with all staff and students being invited to attend before being restaged during the Veritas conference on Saturday 20th October.

GTN Chairman Very Rev Dr Angus Morrison expressed his delight that work, begun and grown on Scottish soil, is now being rooted in another part of the world. Commenting from the perspective of Search for Truth Charitable Trust, which sustains GTN financially, Chairman Professor John Spence said, *“When we released The God Question as a TV series, Scandinavian countries were among the first to transmit it. How fitting that Grasping the Nettle, another initiative from Scotland, is also finding an effective sphere of operation in Norway”*.



The Norwegian Landscape: a superb example of the work of creation. Source: Petr Šmerkl, Wikipedia

Norwegian broadcaster NRK has transmitted The God Question series several times on its premium channel at prime time. It has also made the series available to Norwegian schools. But now the series



These resources are set to be released in Norwegian by mid October 2018

will be available as a study version both as physical product and in online form. Search for Truth Charitable Trust, through Sanctus Media, operates an online distribution system in which the resources can be purchased in a wide range of currencies. The series is available in both English and Spanish in online form, with Norwegian set to follow within a few weeks.

“With 600 people expected to attend one of our launch events, we believe that Grasping the Nettle with The God Question can spread both quickly and widely in Norway,” added Lars Dahle. A report on the Norwegian launch will be given in the winter newsletter.

Free Church Presbyteries Engaging with GTN



Inverness. Source: Avarim

GTN is carrying out a programme of presentations to Free Church Presbyteries. Next visits are to Inverness and Edinburgh. Chairman of their Board of Trustees, Professor James Fraser said *“We are all keen to engage with GTN's mission to equip Christians to combat the myth that science and Christianity are incompatible. I hope this will stimulate Christians to engage with the barrier beliefs of this age, not just as a way of winning the argument but of winning the person for the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Tales from the International Arena

GTN Dinner 2018



"Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him." And with that courageous pledge a young shepherd boy, David, strode out to face Goliath. Understandably, to some, the rise of Richard Dawkins and the New Atheist movement might have seemed Goliath-esque opposition to Christian faith. Christians widely discuss how to respond to the challenges of atheism, especially when communicated with a measure of aggression but it is a much more onerous task to enter the debating chamber and to do so in a very public manner.



Professor Lennox interviewed about Tales from the Arena

Sometimes described as the 'David' of the contemporary Christian church, Professor John Lennox, more than any other public advocate of Christianity, has engaged with world renowned atheists across the world.

Under the banner of 'Tales from the International Arena' Professor Lennox shared his experiences in the debating arena with a spell-bound audience at the GTN 2018 Dinner.



Moderator Rt Rev Susan Brown and Episcopal Primus Bishop Mark Strange converse over dinner

With Rt Rev Susan Brown, this year's Church of Scotland Moderator, Archbishop Cushley of the Catholic Diocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh and Bishop Mark Strange,



Archbishop Cushley in conversation with Professor John Lennox

Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, among the principal guests, it was clear to all that the explanatory power of the Christian worldview stands tall in the face of opposition to it—one based on the premise that we are the mere products of chance.

GTN promotes respectful dialogue, not conflict, and in that connection the various film clips used to intersperse the interview with Professor Lennox demonstrated that his graciousness, framed by a smile, can be as disarming as a powerful argument.

Photographs courtesy of Stephen Leckie

Science and God in Scotland's Classrooms

Is there any evidence that God exists? The question resonates not only in the minds of the general public but in Scotland's RE classrooms too, as part of Curriculum for Excellence. *"The theme of Science and Religion is a common one for pupils to explore in both Science and RE classes and is a great platform for exploring the false perception that somehow Religion is not reasonable or that Science disproves faith in a Creator God"* commented SCES Director Barbara Coupar.



SCES Director Barbara Coupar opens the National Education Conference for teachers of RE and Science

Little wonder that the opportunity for RE teachers —and science teachers with an interest in the God question—to hear Professor John Lennox on this subject, in Coatbridge, drew an audience of educators from as far away as Aberdeen. Under the joint organisation of the Scottish Catholic Education Service and Christian Values in Education, attendees spent the morning learning from the experience of John Lennox in relation to science and God. In the afternoon session there were workshops on using the Introducing the God Question series in the classroom. *"CVE Scotland and SCES have been looking for opportunities to collaborate practically for some time, and this provided the perfect opportunity"* commented Richard Coton, founder of CVE.

"Whether all this which they call the universe is left to the guidance of unreason and chance medley OR on the contrary - as our fathers have declared - ordered and governed by a marvellous intelligence and wisdom". Introducing his "Science vs God—A False Dichotomy?" lecture with this age old quotation from Socrates, Professor John Lennox began his exposition of how modern atheism has misunderstood and misrepresented the logic that underpins the Christian worldview. Taking evidence from the scientific and academic greats within our heritage—varying from Galileo, Kepler and Newton to Einstein, Hawking, Plantinga and CS Lewis—Professor Lennox built his analysis of the contemporary 'God and science' debate on three crucially important characteristics of modern atheism—misperceptions that result in misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the Christian worldview.

1. Confusion about faith
2. Failure to recognise that science has limits
3. Confusion about the nature of explanation



A relaxed Prof Lennox in teaching mode

Describing the conference as *"an important first step in offering professional learning for Christian teachers in Scotland"*, Barbara Coupar added: *"The combination of Professor Lennox's expert knowledge and explanation in the morning, followed by workshops exploring the 'Introducing The God Question' resource was key to the success of the event, as teachers found that they had expanded their own 'adult' knowledge, while also receiving practical assistance for teaching this complex topic in the classroom."*



See www.thegodquestion.tv/introduce for details on the resource

Summing up the conference, Richard Coton described it as *“A great opportunity to hear one of the UK’s outstanding thinkers on the relationship between science and Christianity, and to learn how an outstanding learning resource (Introducing the God Question) can be used in the classroom.”*

Commenting further on the value of these resources, he said, *“It was striking how many had signed up because they’d heard of Introducing the God Question already being used successfully in a neighbouring school; this applies particularly for RC schools, whereas we still need to do much more work in publicising this amazing resource in the non-denominational sector.”*

The teacher audience was very appreciative with at least one attendee going on record as saying *“it was one of the best professional learning experiences ever attended.”*

Creating opportunities for schools across the country to learn more about Introducing the God Question is part of the recently developed enhanced strategy for Grasping the Nettle in Scotland.

Posing the God Question in Secondary Schools in Borders Council



Walter Baxter / Melrose Town Centre from Quarry Hill / [CC BY-SA 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/)

Melrose Abbey, historical icon on the outskirts of the town, is a timeless reminder of the rich Christian heritage from which Scotland has benefited.

And it is in Borders Council that an important initiative is being planned in connection with the Introducing the God Question resources for schools.

Former Convener of the Education committee of the Church of Scotland, Graeme Donald, has been the prime mover. He described the intention to *“introduce the God Question to teachers of RME as part of their in service day in November”*.

Thereafter the resources will be *“made available to all secondary schools in the region”* with there being *“follow up in schools over the academic year”*. The plan is supported by the Chief Officer for Education. And highlighting a further potential opportunity to raise The God Question outside of the Church, Graeme said *“There is an additional suggestion we are following up at the moment - that is to include the God Question in the Borders Science Festival Programme for May 2019.”*

Describing such initiatives as *“one of the most exciting aspects of GTN”*, its Chairman Very Rev Dr Angus Morrison added that *“giving Scotland’s young people a well balanced opportunity to think through the big questions of existence is crucial to the future of Christianity in Scotland.”*



Very Rev Dr Angus Morrison

Serving as Moderator

Since its launch in 2015 Grasping the Nettle has been privileged to have had regular involvement from Moderators of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland – including Very Rev Dr John Chalmers (now Ambassador at Large for GTN), Very Rev Dr Angus Morrison (current GTN Chairman) and Very Rev Dr Russell Barr who hosted GTN related events and contributed to Presbytery presentations.

Now we are privileged to have the support of the current Moderator Rt Rev Susan Brown. Here she explains why she has given GTN a place within her many priorities during her moderatorial year.

One of my early encounters with GTN was at the day long conference on the theme Grasping the Nettle with The God Question held in Lairg, Sutherland. Clearly both the strategic intention of GTN and The God Question resources are of vital relevance to the church. That is why in the months ahead I will take the opportunity to encourage others to engage with the initiative. This will include presentations within my official visits to Presbyteries – Kirkcaldy, Hamilton, Annandale and the Presbytery of England.



Rt Rev Susan Brown, Moderator of the Church of Scotland

An emerging priority within GTN is achieving an enhanced profile within secular media. With that in mind I will be hosting a dinner event in the autumn with a number of journalists and others involved in media in order to encourage their engagement with GTN themes in the press (Christian and secular) and the associated big questions. I will be making my own contribution through some press articles in the course of the year, highlighting the GTN agenda and its importance for people in a society that is losing confidence in the relevance of the

Christian worldview.

In a 'first' for GTN, I would be delighted to host a nature walk in the company of an expert geologist. We are working towards finding a suitable date. This would be a fascinating



Rural Scotland—an ideal environment for appreciating the wonders of the natural world with GTN

opportunity for all to experience something of the wonders of creation first hand, especially accompanied by some helpful insight from a scientist. We are attempting to put an arrangement in place for a date in spring 2019.

GTN is for everyone and as Moderator I am delighted to be involved.

All Roads Lead to Perth

"You do realise that ninety per cent of Scotland's population can reach Perth in ninety minutes?" quipped Rev Graham Crawford at a recent planning meeting for the Grasping the Nettle What A Wonder-Full World event to be held in Perth Theatre on Saturday 3rd November at 7pm. With the 'fair city' literally being at the heart of Scotland the event being staged, there in association with the Presbytery of Perth, can truly become a national gathering celebrating the wonders of creation in music, film, drama and conversation with scientists.

GTN Chairman Very Rev Dr Angus Morrison is a member of the Perth Presbytery. *"I personally am delighted to be part of the team bringing What A Wonder-Full World 'home' to our wonder-full city! This is one of several country-wide events being arranged as part of our new two-year roll out programme for GTN. What better place to begin!"*



A GTN advance team putting arrangements in place well ahead of the November event.



Alan A Craig's orchestra and vocal ensemble at In Concert with the Cosmos in Glasgow's Clyde Auditorium

GTN is delighted to announce that Scottish composer and arranger Alan A Craig has agreed to be the evening's musical director. Under his baton, the 18 piece orchestra and up to 30 vocalists are sure to thrill the audience as part of the multi-media presentation.



Composer/Arranger Alan A Craig

Also among the evening's principal guests are the internationally renowned Tenors UnLimited, a professional trio almost perpetually on tour. With a repertoire of both popular and classical songs they have the personalities to match the sparkling quality of their music.

The evening is not an end in itself. There will be follow up opportunities for members of the audience to take part on Exploring the God Question sessions in local venues in the weeks beyond.

For booking and venue details see next page.



Tenors UnLimited performing at an earlier event produced by the organisers of Grasping the Nettle

Make it a Date in Perth!

Grasping the Nettle in association with the Presbytery of Perth presents

What a Wonder-Full World!

Saturday 3rd November, 2018 at 7.00pm, Perth Theatre

An entertaining and thought-provoking evening of music, film, drama and conversation about the wonders of life and the big questions.



Alan A Craig
Scottish composer
and arranger with his
orchestral and vocal
ensemble



Tenors UnLimited
a world renowned trio with
their distinctive blend of wit,
charm and musicality

The Tayside Players
With Dramatic tales about a hairdresser and a scientist

The God Question
Excerpts from the international TV series



Tickets: **£13.50 and £10** (includes £1.50 booking fee)
Venue: **Perth Theatre**, Mill Street, Perth PH1 5HZ
Box Office: **01738 621031 / www.horsecross.co.uk**

Grasping the Nettle
an interdenominational and national initiative promoting understanding about science and God



"Let's make this a GTN national event," urged Rev Klaus Buwert, Minister in Perthshire. "GTN offers so many diverse opportunities to learn and discuss and this is no exception but brings the added dimension of celebration of so much of who, what and where we are!"

To acquire tickets for this important event please see the advert above.

A Rocket for Tim Peake



Major Tim Peake. Source: NASA

Major Tim Peake's recently expressed openness to there being a mind behind the universe earned him a ticking off from BBC Radio Four presenter Justin Webb. Talking to a group of school children, and quoted in the Daily Mail, Major Peake said *"Although I say I am not religious it does not mean I don't seriously consider that the universe could have been created. There are many things in science that lead us towards that conclusion."* Rebuking him for what he perceived as "an out of date view", Justin Webb compared Tim Peake's conclusion with the discredited traditional belief that the sun goes round the earth. The journalist went on to describe the God issue as *"pretty closed"*.

For any doubting that the GTN movement faces a major challenge in transforming public understanding in relation to science and faith, this recent episode in the media acts as a wake up call.



GTN in the Media

‘Getting your name in the paper’ has long seemed a mark of prestige – as long as the publicity is for the right reason!

From the outset, GTN has aimed to see its agenda in the public domain and featuring in widespread discussion. In this way the process of ‘transforming public understanding on issues relating to science and God’ can begin to take place.

In the autumn of this year, at an event hosted by Church of Scotland Moderator Rt Rev Susan Brown, a number of journalists will convene to discuss a strategic plan. Already journalist James Farrell of the Catholic Observer has announced the ongoing interest of his newspaper in GTN matters.

“We are happy to promote GTN through the newspaper”, said James. “We will include information about events and resources and highlight their value both in schools and in parishes. We will also feature stories about benefits to local parishes and carry press releases from GTN. In this way we can substantially reach the Catholic community. We are right behind GTN”.

GTN intends to develop a series of articles, which it is hoped will stimulate public interest and discussion in issues related to God and science, through the secular press.

Time to Grasp the Nettle Even More Firmly

In the short time since it began, GTN has drawn considerable attention from outside Scotland. One explanation is the worldwide spread of The God Question resources. Those who use them often discover that in Scotland they are part of a national initiative.



Now the whole process of engaging public interest initiated by Search for Truth Charitable Trust—through The God Question series and GTN—is gaining some welcome external financial support. The USA based John Templeton Foundation has announced a grant award to Search for Truth, with a two year programme of events in Scotland being at the heart of the project. Encouraging other regions/countries to learn from the model developed in Scotland is part of the strategy.

Professor John Spence, Chairman of Search for Truth Charitable Trust commented: *“The planned programme of events will heighten the profile of GTN nationally and publically but also increase its impact. The Charity favours action processes and real identifiable outcomes.”* For that reason, GTN’s **Making An Impact Together** strategy becomes crucially important. GTN Ambassador at Large, Very Rev Dr John Chalmers added, *“For all Christians concerned to address the belief barriers in contemporary society, this surely combines the time with the opportunity to go into action.”*

Making An Impact Together can be viewed online at www.graspingthenettle.org/getting-involved/make-an-impact

It offers opportunities on a one time, regular or ad hoc basis to Christians across the country to make a contribution to this national initiative in a way that suits their abilities and availability. If you feel you can contribute in one of the ways listed you can respond via the online proforma or email office@graspingthenettle.org . Thereafter GTN will be in touch to support you.

Being an Ambassador for GTN

The success of Grasping the Nettle is hugely dependent on the willingness of individuals and churches to be involved. There is a plethora of ways for that to take place, clearly outlined in the Making an Impact Together strategy paper. It can be viewed at www.graspingthenettle.org/getting-involved/make-an-impact.

Below, Council of Advisers member Joanne Kennedy explains why she participates in GTN and in what ways. Please consider if you can assist in similar fashion.

My commitment to Grasping the Nettle has been from its launch, I have a science background and am a committed Christian, I am encouraged and enthused by discussion around faith and science. I feel Grasping the Nettle is working to facilitate this discussion particularly amongst those who have no faith or who are opposed and sighting science as the reason.

In our local church context we have used 'The God Question' series for a variety of purposes. The first was to equip those within our congregation to answer questions relating to faith and science. Thereafter we opened it out to the community and encouraged discussion. I also promote and speak about Grasping the Nettle events, encouraging others in the congregation to be involved and to attend them. As a Church we attend other local events and these present opportunity to promote GTN and talk to others about it.



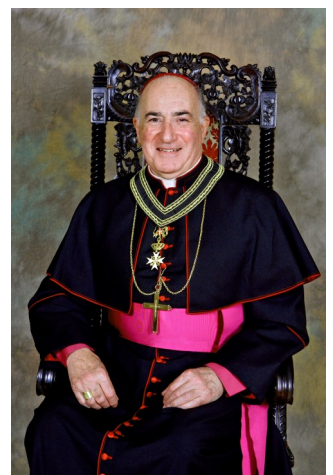
Joanne Kennedy

I would like to see GTN resources and events more widely utilised by churches of all denominations, enabling Christians to debate and speak about the big questions of life, allowing us to engage with those who would not normally have conversations about God. I would hope this would be achievable by promotion and ongoing buy-in from Presbyteries/or their equivalent in denominations across Scotland.

Archbishop Mario Conti Joins the GTN Steering Board

Distinguished churchman Archbishop Conti has joined the GTN Steering Board as a representative of the Catholic Church. *"I am absolutely delighted to be participating in GTN,"* said the Archbishop in accepting the invitation.

"I am totally convinced that this movement is of its time; it is greatly needed and I will do all in my power to support and promote it."



The Most Reverend Mario Conti,
Archbishop Emeritus of Glasgow



The Most Reverend Leo
Cushley, Archbishop of St
Andrews and Edinburgh
Diocese

Spreading the Word in the Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh

"Every blessing in the great work you are doing" wrote Archbishop Leo Cushley subsequent to attending the GTN national dinner. Archbishop Cushley's support has a practical dimension too. Requesting electronic literature on The God Question series he said, *"Be assured, via my communications with them, I will continue to encourage our Priests to participate in Grasping the Nettle and The God Question resources. I will also include schools."*

A full list of members of the GTN Steering Board and its Council of Advisers is available on the GTN website www.graspingthenettle.org.

On The God Question Front...

With a Chinese Audience in Mind...

One of the current major challenges to hand for the production team responsible for The God Question series, is the editing of a series specially formulated for a Chinese audience. Editing is taking place over many months. Programme One is almost complete.



The production team (right) takes a 'camera break' during the editing in Glasgow of Programme One for a Chinese audience.

Hong Kong University Professor Andrew Loke (left) on the edit suite screen. He has an expertise in cosmology.

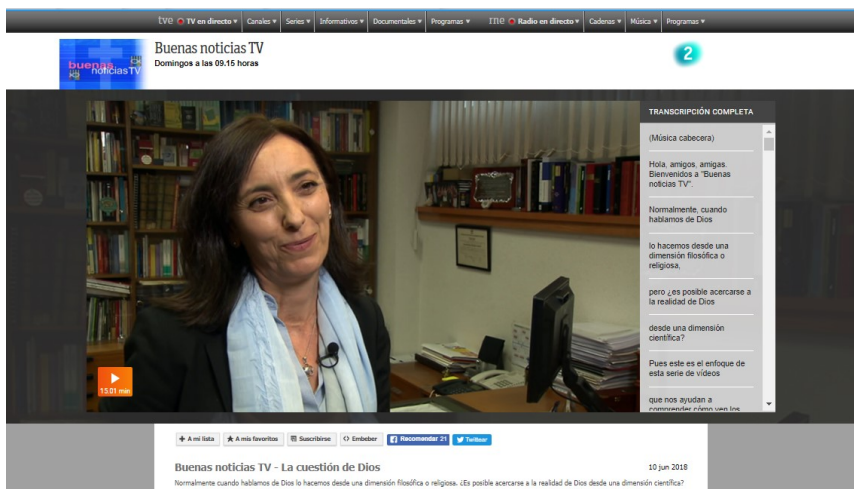


With a Children's Audience in Mind...

It's a clichéd question with enduring relevance: 'what's in a name?' Although the pilot programme—'Blast Off!' - in the new children's animation series about science and God is nearing completion, the production team has had a rethink about the name of the only canine character in the series. Cosmo? Rocket? Orion or even Astro? There's more to making programmes on God and science than you would think! Decision on the name—pending!



With a Spanish Audience in Mind...



rtve.es

Radio Televisión Española (RTVE) is the Spanish national broadcaster.

A viewer of La Cuestion de Dios in interview on the Spanish TV documentary

With La Cuestion de Dios (The God Question) available in Spanish, Madrid based RTVE, the national broadcaster, devoted a complete documentary programme to a discussion—and promotion—of the series to its Spanish speaking audience. Broadcast in June 2018, the Sunday morning programme was also made available via On Demand TV. Subsequent social media rated the viewer interest level as 'very high'.