



GRASPING THE NETTLE

NEWSLETTER

Autumn / Winter 2023



With the study of classical languages becoming all but extinct in our schools, many young people would struggle to translate 'quo vadis?' into English. Famously associated with a legendary episode in the life of St Peter, the question—where are you going? —was posed to a vision of Jesus that Peter encountered when fleeing persecution in Rome. The incident is captured in a painting in 1602 by the Italian artist Carracci located in the National Gallery.

The Missing Generation

As the pace of change quickens inexorably in contemporary society, the question 'Quo Vadis?' takes on ever greater significance. It is a particularly poignant question in respect of young people and Church. In a church context young people are sometimes referred to as the missing generation. Where are they spiritually? And where are they going? Does anyone know the answer?

Finding Signposts Along The Way

In terms of reaching out and finding them, Scripture Union appears more successful than most. Take for example their Equip programmes. Offered as Equip East and Equip West across Scotland's central belt they provide once a month opportunities for young people to come together, mainly from Christian backgrounds, and address the big questions. SU's Regional Worker for Glasgow, Craig Morris, commented "*The young people enjoy meeting up in their youth groups and appreciate hearing from first class speakers and finding opportunities to pose their questions*".



A recent meeting of Equip West in Glasgow

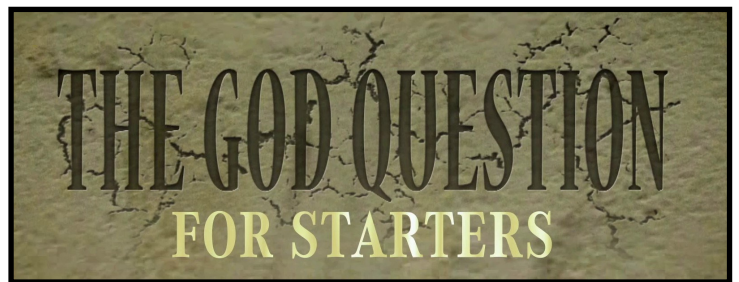
Some of their big questions are about God and science, a crucially important issue for young people, especially when in education. This month Grasping the Nettle/Search for Truth has the opportunity to address the question with them.

Perplexities about God and science can become critical for young people trying to reconcile their faith with the world of their academic studies.

“One of the obvious problems with which Christian young people can be presented is the apparent clash between science and the Bible. This is partly due to the influence of aggressive atheists and partly due to simplistic interpretations of the Bible, particularly in the case of the early chapters of Genesis,” comments former Vice Principal of Strathclyde University, Emeritus Professor John Spence. *“A more helpful starting point is to expose young people to the sheer wonders of our existence and to ask how likely it is that they are self explanatory or are we are just winners in a lottery? That’s the approach we will be taking when addressing the young people at Equip at the end of October”.*

The God Question

The God Question series was produced precisely to address the big questions about God and science. *“For anyone interested to grapple with the issues there is no substitute for viewing the whole series,”* says Producer Iain Morris. *“But we find our ‘Starters’ version of the programmes particularly apt for young people.”* There are three programmes each containing ten short excerpts. Each brings sharp focus to the big issues related to *The Cosmos, Life and Evolution* and *Mind and Consciousness*. Both full and Starters versions are available at www.thegodquestion.tv/explore.



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Introducing the God Question for Schools

The topic of the existence of God features in school curricula in Scotland and beyond. Our Introducing the God Question series has been designed especially for teachers and pupils exploring the subject.

For more information visit

www.thegodquestion.tv/introduce.



A View From The Chair

By Very Rev Dr Martin Fair

When Jesus took Peter, James and John to the mountain top, it turned into a genuinely 'mountain top' experience, with Jesus transfigured in dazzling light before them and Moses and Elijah (representing the Law and the Prophets) appearing beside him.

Not surprisingly, the three disciples wanted the moment to last, with Peter proposing the erecting of three tents that together they might linger there, soaking up more of what was an ecstatic experience far beyond the ordinary and everyday (Mark 9:2-2-7).

But the bottom line is that, despite the genuineness and desirability of such mountain-top moments, most of life is lived in the humdrum ordinariness of the valley floor. That holds true for Christians as for anyone else.

Grasping the Nettle understands that and so while we greatly enjoy hosting 'special' events, we remain centred on providing 'everyday' resources for use in the ordinary and everyday routine of life. That's where, we might say, the rubber hits the road - when small groups gather to engage with *Scripture, Science and the God Question* or when a congregation hosts a screening of *Against the Tide* or when a student group invites friends to an *Exploring the God Question* series.

How might you use GTN resources to light up the ordinary in this season?

With warmest blessings,
Martin



GTN ONLINE

Living Faith in the Public Arena

An Insight into the Experience of Christian MSPs

Wednesday 25th October 7.30pm

To register email office@graspingthenettle.org

GTN Online: Living Faith in Public

As a submersible vessel descends into deep water, the pressure on it intensifies. Were it not for the robustness of the design, at certain depths it would be crushed without mercy.

Being a Christian in contemporary society may sometimes feel analogous to being that submersible in deep water.



A submersible in the depth of the sea

There is no doubt that in many areas of society, Christians are perceived to be ultra conservative and stuck in the past—to the point of being dangerously out of touch. It is a ‘crushing’ stereotype that creates a natural hostility to Christianity.

Why might this be of particular relevance to Grasping the Nettle?

GTN focuses on evaluating the evidence for the Christian worldview and tries to impact public understanding of it but, if there is a natural hostility to it, the attempt to engage public interest will be so much harder.

The psychologist Edward de Bono famously wrote that “perception precedes processing”. Everything is interpreted in the light of preconceptions.

Many Christians sense the hostility from a distance. By contrast, Christians in forms of public service—such as politics—have personal experience of the challenges of somehow being loyal to their own values and views while being aware that they are elected representatives of the whole of their constituency. It is a vulnerable place to be!



The Scottish Parliament

Wouldn't it be helpful to hear from Christians on the front line about the practice of living faith in the public arena and learn from their experience about the flash points that arise in our increasingly woke society? Well, we can!



Murdo Fraser MSP

Jeremy Balfour MSP



Maurice Golden MSP

John Mason MSP



Our October GTN online will welcome as guests four members of the Scottish Parliament: Murdo Fraser, Jeremy Balfour, John Mason and Maurice Golden. They regularly have to speak and vote on issues with significant moral and ethical dimensions. Their cherished principles require to be on the surface, not hidden in the depths of privacy.

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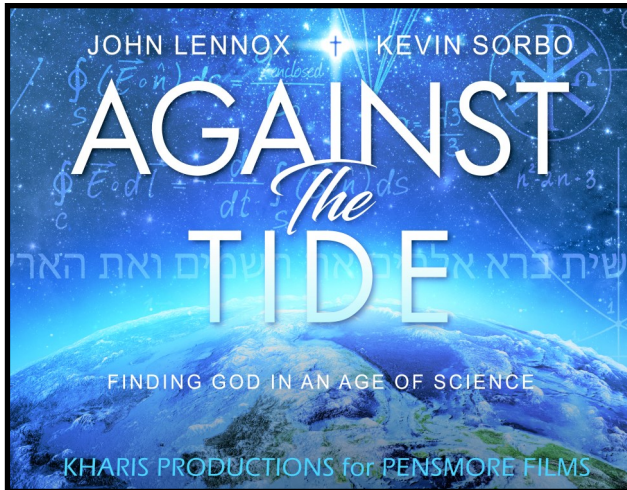
Join us to learn from a quartet of Christian MSPs as we discuss their views on how Christianity is perceived, how we can best understand and attempt to impact contemporary culture without seeking to impose and therefore how we can intelligently introduce aspects of the Christian worldview to a society that might be increasingly biased against religious influence.

To register for this GTN Online event on **Wednesday 25th October**, simply make your request for an online link to office@graspingthenettle.org



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of Christians in public
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'Against the Tide' Movie on a Cinematic Journey



The title of the cinematic documentary 'Against the Tide' was chosen to reflect the stand taken by Professor John Lennox against the increasing pressure in modern society to view Christianity as outdated and even anti-science. It's an attitude that, in part, finds its expression in emptying pews, closing churches and making members disconsolate.

In society a common reason for the abandonment of belief is the assumption that science easily dismisses the need for a Creator.

"Nothing could be further from the truth," says John Lennox. "The more science discovers the wonders of our existence, the more the evidence points to the mind of the Creator behind it all."

The Evidence Points to God

Producer/Director of the film, Iain Morris believes *"Much of the attempted 'put down' of Christianity can be based on ignorance of the facts,"* he said. *"We need to do everything we can to make sure people are better informed. That's why the film was produced"*. It not only explores scientific pointers to the creator but also the basis of the claims that Jesus was the son of God and was resurrected from the dead.



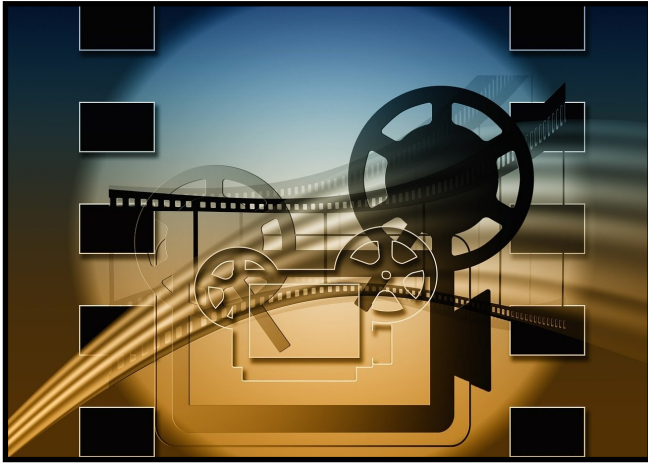
Jerusalem is high profile in the second part of the film

The film is available on DVD, Blu Ray and to web stream from www.againstthetidemovie.org

Now attention is turning to opportunities to screen the film in cinemas in local communities.

Piyush Jani, a consultant surgeon in Cambridge, is planning just such an event to take place in the Arts Picturehouse in the city on Saturday 11th November. *"I am always on the lookout for interesting and new ways to share the Christian message,"* he said. *"This excellent film achieves that."*

"We understand that potential organisers might find it daunting to negotiate their way through the cinematic requirements for a screening in theatres that might are more used to screening Hollywood movies," said Iain Morris. *"Rest assured that the technical side is taken care of."* Cinemas today require a Digital Cinema Package (DCP). Kharis Productions can simply provide it on a drive and there you have all you need. Organisers can therefore focus on encouraging audiences to fill the seats.



Helensburgh resident Alex McIlhinney commented, *"Hearing about the availability of the Digital Cinema Package from Kharis Productions inspired us to see that we could easily hire the local cinema (now in the premises of a disused church) and organise a screening of Against the Tide in the town. There is real enthusiasm in my church for doing so."*

To discuss screening the film in a cinema in your locality write to office@graspingthenettle.org or info@kharisproductions.com.

Here's how to arrange a cinematic screening:

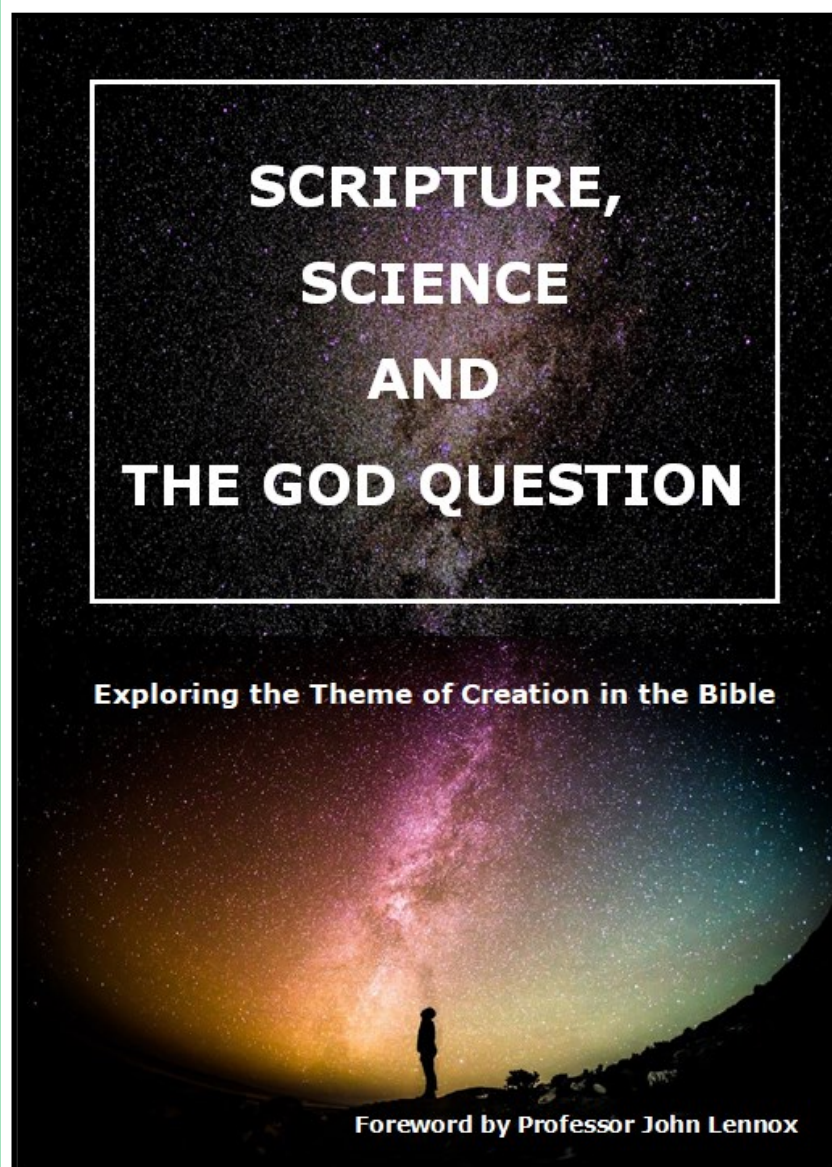
1. Check with your preferred cinema if you can rent a screen and what the cost would be. Assess the viability of covering costs via an attractive ticket price (though the licence requires that it is a not-for-financial-profit event).
2. Consult other leaders in your locality about their possible interest in helping promote the film. Share with them the film's [trailer](#) and the sample publicity [leaflet](#) which can be adapted for your use.
3. Having secured the necessary support, book the cinema screen. (This probably involves signing a simple agreement.)
4. To acquire the low cost licence (which the cinema will likely want to see) request it from filmlicensing@equippingthechurch.com
5. Contact info@kharisproductions.org.uk or office@graspingthenettle.org to request that the producers communicate with the cinema's technical staff and arrange to supply the digital cinema package needed for screening.
6. Consider whether you will offer any form of Q&A and arrange for there to be respondents, either at the venue or via an online channel.
7. Publicise and sell tickets.
8. Hold your event.



Scripture, Science and The God Question

with Foreword by Professor John Lennox

Grasp the Nettle with this New Online Bible Study Resource



How often do you hear this claim?

"There is no conflict between science and belief in a creator."

What is often meant is that science is revealing God's method of creation. Simply that. No issue. Really?

So how does the scientific account of creation square with the six days of Genesis? Was there death before the event theologians have labelled 'The Fall'? Who was Adam? Etc!

Aware of the interest many have in exploring such questions further, Search for Truth has produced **Scripture, Science and the God Question**: eight Bible studies on the theme of **Creation**.

Professor Chris Packard, a contributor to the publication, said, *"We cannot treat the Bible in a wholly detached way from modern academic scholarship.*

Scripture deals with origins; so does science. We need to be clear about what meaning and information we derive from each and be able to assess if there is a helpful and informative connection. Scripture, Science and the God Question facilitates that exploration"...

Although the studies introduce issues bristling with theological questions, an even more important purpose of this new resource is to encourage direct engagement with the Scripture text itself.

Rev Dr Fergus Macdonald, one of the authors of the new material said, *"Primarily we want to encourage participants to experience Scripture in two complementary ways: firstly by meditating on it in order to listen what it is saying to us and secondly by studying it to explore the implications for today of its original context and meaning"*. To focus discussion the publication has a range of short but enlightening statements from respected theologians on the passages of Scripture as well as a number of questions (or prompts for discussion as we prefer to call them).

From Genesis to Revelation, Creation is one of the unifying themes of the Bible and so the studies as a whole provide the opportunity to engage with God's creative intentions, the sin problem, God's revealed plan for the rescue of his creation after 'the fall' and his ultimate purposes for the world. It is God's big picture in eight studies.

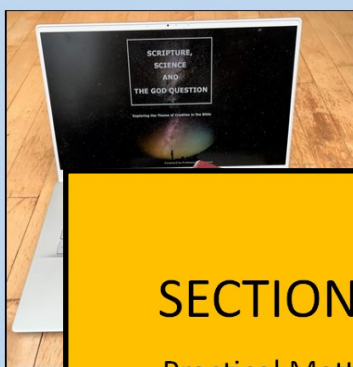
"The whole publication, in some ways, is an answer to issues at least implied in The God Question series," added Professor John Spence, Chairman of Search for Truth Charitable Trust. "The title of the new resource reflects that connection. Like The God Question itself the publication is unique bringing together two topics which are usually kept separate. We realise that many viewers of the documentary series conclude that the evidence for the existence of an intentional creator is convincing. But the question remains: what is this creator like? We believe the Bible studies on creation go some way to answering that question."

It is God's big picture in eight studies

Although it is anticipated that Scripture, Science and The God Question will be used mainly by groups it can readily be used for personal enrichment and reflection by individuals.

Currently the new resource can be accessed by writing to office@graspingthenettle.org. Discussions with publishers about a possible book version of the resource are ongoing.

SECTION 1 Preparing to Engage...



SECTION 2 SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENTS



Scripture, Science and The God Question has four main sections of which the most important is **Scripture Engagements**.

SECTION 3 Practical Matters



SECTION 4 Deepening Understanding



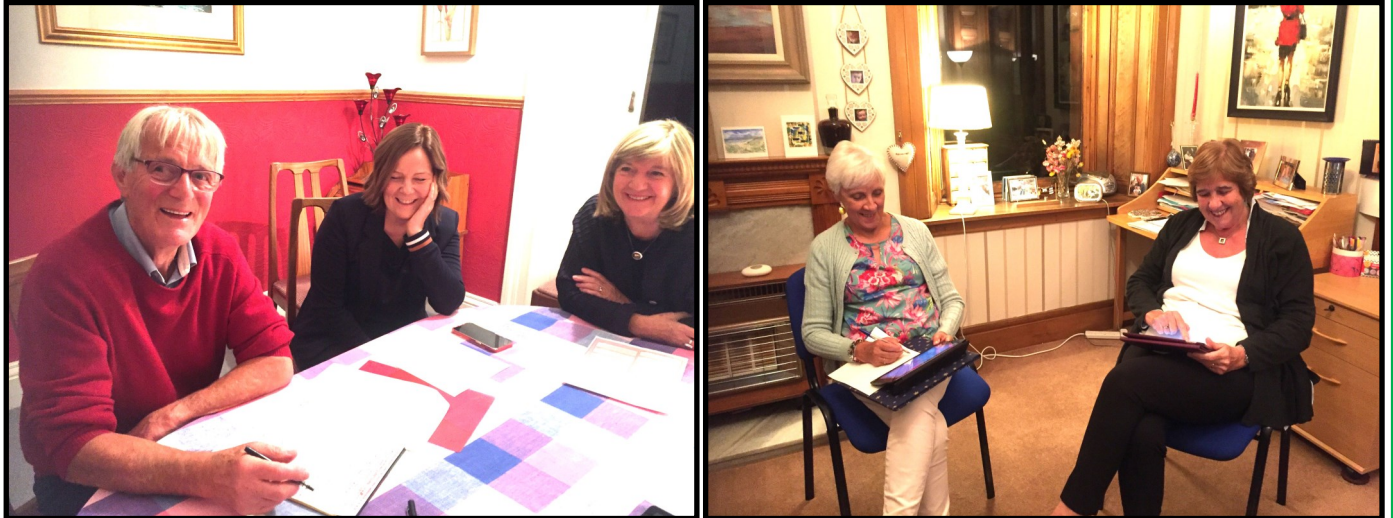
Click through the content of a short PowerPoint with sample pages [here](#)

Why not schedule this material as part of your group Bible Study curriculum?

Scripture Science and The God Question—In Practice

At the point where the new Bible study material was set to be released, Moira and Ian Robertson, loyal supporters of GTN, volunteered to test the material with some members of their church and other friends. Moira writes...

Neither of us has any scientific expertise, but we were confident in the resources which were detailed, challenging and inspiring. Even if we did not know the answers, the questioning would be valuable. The questions do not have simple one-size-fits-all answers. Anyone looking for a 'painting by numbers' approach is doomed to disappointment!



Co-leader Ian Robertson with members of the 16 person study group which met for session 1

Initially we advertised in our church newsletter and then invited some friends. **We represent a broad range of theological viewpoints and a rich variety of interests, skills and experience.** 16 out of 20 who expressed interest came and we plan to meet in our home monthly. The social aspect of the evening is an important component.

As preparation, we sent out emails which contained the study material for the first session and suggested participants look at the Biblical passage and questions in advance. After the initial welcome and introduction we divided into 3 groups to encourage maximum participation...and indeed most contributed something. We did not all agree! We then re-formed as a large group and examined some issues which had puzzled or aroused disagreement. **Over supper some continued the discussion suggesting the depth of interest provoked.**

There is so much material, and different approaches available that it is hard to imagine any group would not find interesting and worthwhile questions to pursue.

We welcome the opportunity to lift our eyes from the mundane and the routine to the big questions we all have to face and feel excited at the prospect of discussing them further.

Making Connections

A compelling offer from GTN Liaison Officer Rev George Lind



Friends, I'm here to help you. I want to help you 'roll out' our (terrific) GTN resources among your congregations, house groups, community groups, schools, colleges etc. Missional opportunities abound in settings where we can share the news that faith and science are friends. Not simply 'nodding acquaintance' friends, but friends who really *need* each other. You might not have a scientific background (I don't!), but each of us has an enquiring mind and so do the folk with whom we mix. We can encourage them to follow the evidence that we have a truly amazing God who has revealed Himself in the wonders of the universe and who reaches out to us personally in the person of His Son Jesus Christ. Our resources are deliberately designed as bases for respectful dialogue. I have seen minds opened, lives truly changed and congregational groups recalibrated through encounters with the resources we offer. You'll see these choices featured in this newsletter. I'd be glad to come and talk with you and to 'kick-start' a series of, for example, *Exploring the God Question*. I can do this 'live' or via Zoom. Please get in touch with me and let's start a conversation.

George can be contacted via office@graspingthenettle.org.

GTN ONLINE: Final Pre-Christmas Event Brain, Consciousness and Near Death Experiences

With Dr Sharon Dirckx

Wednesday 29th November 7.30pm

Registration opens after the GTN Online event on 25th October

Supporting GTN Financially

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

