



GRASPING THE NETTLE

SPRING NEWSLETTER 2017

GTN REACHES THE 'HIGH ALTARS' OF SCIENCE AND RELIGION

What does the World Council of Churches, the most famous scientific research centre in the world and a Scots Kirk have in common? Aside



from the fact that they are all based in Geneva, Switzerland, they have each opened their doors to

Exploring the God Question (ETGQ) and have been learning about the strategic importance of Grasping the Nettle (GTN). With Professor John Spence as the ambassador, presentations on both ETGQ and GTN have been made to Christians at CERN, to representatives at the World Council of Churches and to the President of the Protestant Churches in Geneva (44 Churches). Copies of Exploring the God Question programmes are now in these centres. "It seems highly appropriate that a Scottish initiative with a focus on science and theology should have been received in two of the most relevant prestigious arenas in the world," said Professor Spence.

These visits and presentations emerged after an invitation came to Professor Spence from Rev David McLeod, at the Auditoire de Calvin - better known as the Scots Kirk in Geneva.



CERN or *Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire* is famous for the Large Haldron Collider where

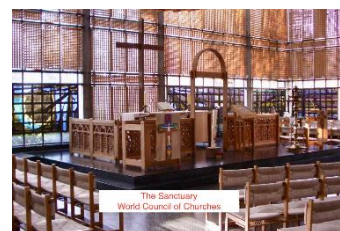
particles are accelerated to close to the speed of light before colliding. Out of such experiments came the discovery of the elusive Higgs Boson. CERN is also where Tim Berners Lee generated the World Wide Web.



The fact that there are Christian scientists working at CERN provides further evidence, if

any were needed, that faith in God and science are wholly compatible.

The World Council of Churches comprises 349 church organisations representing 500 million individuals. It has as its **Statement of intent:** *A community of churches on the way to visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and in common life in Christ, so that the world may believe.*



ADVANCING GTN IN LOCHABER

Although GTN is drawing some international interest, it is in Scotland where the pioneering work is being done. In February 2017 the Presbytery of Lochaber held its second Grasping the Nettle conference in a period of 18 months. Held in Duncansburgh Macintosh Parish Church in the centre of the town, the



event drew representatives of Parishes across the Presbytery, many of them making long journeys to attend. Drawing illustrations from Exploring the God Question, the morning

session focussed on how the case for God can be built on scientific evidence. In the afternoon the central topic was how the Grasping the Nettle strategy might be applied in this area of the Highlands. Presbytery Clerk Rev Donald McCorkindale described the conference as “*inspiring*”. If you would like to hold such an event in your area please contact office@graspingthenettle.org.



PLAN TO JOIN US AT THIS YEAR'S ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Grasping the Nettle Weekend Conference Event

The Soul of Science & The Heart of Religion

Friday 17th March: 7.00 pm - 9.30 pm
Saturday 18th March: 9.30 am - 4.30 pm



Dr Bethany Sollereder
Scientist & Theologian
University of Oxford



Woodhill Evangelical Church
Wester Cleddens Road
Bishopbriggs
Glasgow
G64 2NH



Sarah Lane Ritchie
Researcher in Science & Religion
University of St Andrews

Also, opportunities for discussion and developing confidence to engage others in conversations about God.

For more information, visit
www.graspingthenettle.org/conference



NEW ONLINE FORUMS FOR GTN

Please visit the website and sample the online discussions taking place at two ‘round tables’ with the themes **Darwin, DNA and Divinity** and **Brain, Mind and Matters of the Soul**. This new LEARN section of the website also now hosts a Q&A component where questions addressed to GTN are answered by experts in the related topics.

GTN is delighted to announce the online contributions now being given by the American organisation for science and faith BioLogos.

ACTING TOGETHER

Grasping the Nettle is developing a new constructive partnership emerging with ACTS (Action of Churches Together in Scotland). Its General Secretary, Rev Matthew Ross, described GTN as “*just the sort of initiative ACTS wants to support*”. In welcoming the partnership, GTN chairman Rev Dr John Chalmers said “*in Grasping the Nettle the word ‘together’ is key and we look forward to this relationship being an important catalyst as the church in Scotland moves forward to impact our society*”.

GLENROTHES ACTS TOO

More and more, Christians are recognising the need to work together across denominations. **Churches Together in Glenrothes** held a GTN familiarisation meeting in February as a prelude to a much larger event under consideration for October.

INTERDENOMINATIONAL LANARKSHIRE EVENT

Grasping the Nettle has brought together church leaders from across Lanarkshire to plan a major Grasping the Nettle event “*What a Wonder-Full World*” on Friday 16 June 2017 in Dalziel St Andrews Church, Motherwell, one of the largest in the area.



Dalziel St Andrew: The aim is to fill every seat!

For event details contact
office@graspingthenettle.org

GTN: THE TIME HAS COME

CHAIRMAN, VERY REV DR JOHN CHALMERS, EXPLAINS WHY



The Prime Minister's office in Downing Street has a new member of staff – he is Jonathan Hellewell and he is a Special Adviser on Faith Communities. Behind his appointment is an admission that the world of our senior politicians and civil servants is one which is largely unfamiliar with the world of church or the practice of faith. They, like so many others of the last two or three generations, are products of a secular/humanist culture which now dominates the landscape of our institutions of higher education. So, when these very clever people come to interact with the leaders of our faith communities they bring with them a religious illiteracy which this new adviser is seeking to address.

The Redundancy of God

This little story is important because behind it is the big story of the way in which the idea of God or the relevance of a living faith has disappeared from the horizon over the last three or four decades. In this time assumptions about the ascendancy of science and claims that mathematicians and cosmologists would break all the codes have become dominant. Somehow good people have bought into the idea that *the theory of everything* doesn't need God and at one and the same time they have adopted, without analysis, the idea that that you can't believe in both science and God.

In a nutshell - that is the nettle which has to be grasped, not least, because there is significant evidence that, as the Canadian Philosopher Charles Taylor has said, "*our age is very far from settling in to a comfortable unbelief.*" And science, far from disproving the nature or the presence of God, is one of the most powerful tools for introducing us to a real sense of the **Immanent** and the **Preeminent**.

In a recent lecture Dr Doug Gay, the Principal of Trinity College remarked that, "*the people of Scotland today have embarked, in increasing numbers, upon an unprecedented cultural experiment - the attempt to make sense of their lives without religion*". He went on to describe secularisation as being "*built on the promise that we will find other ways to celebrate, to cope with suffering and death, to confront evil and to find meaning in the daily rhythms of life - other ways apart from religion, which will bring us greater fullness of life.*" He then added, "*I am personally very doubtful about secularisation's ability to make good on that promise*". So am I, and I am worried for a generation of people who have been persuaded that they can live their lives without a spiritual dimension.

God Shaped Humanity

This is why I believe *Grasping the Nettle* is so important, so that from Downing Street to your street and mine, people may find a living faith which is not only compatible with their scientific outlook but which is essential to the deepest needs of their God-shaped humanity.



GTN EXPANDING COUNCIL OF ADVISERS

GTN is delighted to welcome to its Advisory Council new colleagues from the worlds of politics, science, education and the church.

Jeremy Balfour, MSP
Barbara Coupar, Educationist
Ella Gill, Moderator, Presbytery of Lochaber
Dr Rachel Gilmour, Scientist
Joanne Kennedy, Scientist
Rev Donald Lawrie, Minister
Dr Morven Shearer, Scientist

GTN ON FACEBOOK

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LEARNING TO LEAD: EXPLORING THE GOD QUESTION

Are you planning to lead Exploring the God Question sessions? Are you aware of the FREE online webinar for leaders? Presented by the Producer of the series, it is full of advice about how to get the best from your explorations of the God question. Visit www.thegodquestion.tv/explore and sign in at Organisational Support.



LIVE TRAINING EVENT EAST KILBRIDE 9 MARCH 2017 7.30pm

All are invited to a FREE training event on leading Exploring the God Question at Hunter House, **Calderwood Baptist Church**, East Kilbride, G74 3LW. Unlike the webinar there is free coffee and cake! If you would like to attend please contact us at office@graspingthenettle.org.

SPECIAL ETGQ DISCOUNTS FOR GTN

Users of Exploring the God Question in Scotland and associated with the Grasping the Nettle initiative can benefit from an automatic 25% discount by using the code GTNSCO25. To purchase the resources, visit www.thegodquestion.tv/explore and select 'Store'.



GTN GOES TO HOLYROOD

Making an impact on the culture around has been on the Grasping the Nettle agenda from the start. GTN has accepted an offer from Council of Advisers member Murdo Fraser, MSP, to host an event in the seat of government on **Tuesday 19 September** between 6pm and 8pm. This invitation-only occasion will bring together representatives of media, politics, academia, the church, and of course science.

GTN chairman John Chalmers said *"This will be an iconic moment in the life of GTN as we carry its message and ambition right to the symbolic heart of the nation"*.

Speakers will emphasise the importance of the public discourse which Grasping the Nettle is hosting – all in the context of celebrating the achievements of Scottish scientists over the years, many of whom were people of Christian faith.

INTRODUCE THE GOD QUESTION – TO A SCHOOL NEAR YOU



The series comprises a boxset of DVD programmes, a student Study Guide (booklet form or electronic) and Teacher's Guide (on pdf). The material connects with the Curriculum for Excellence - Religious Education in both denominational and non-denominational schools, as well as Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies.

See www.thegodquestion.tv/introduce

If you would like to introduce your local school to this material, please request a copy of our FAQ sheet written by Educationist and GTN Advisor Barbara Coupar.

Email info@kharisproductions.com.