



GRASPING THE NETTLE

NEWSLETTER

Summer 2020

THOSE WERE THE DAYS MY FRIEND?



Confident Christianity Conference

And the song goes on to say 'We thought they'd never end!' But they did!

Pre-lockdown, the scene is very familiar - as well as encouraging. Almost 200 people gather for a Saturday conference at Maxwell Mearns Parish Church in Newton Mearns for a 'Confident Christianity' Conference held prior to the onset in the UK of the current world health crisis.

Organisers SOLAS had invited Grasping the Nettle to contribute two of the six plenary sessions. The topic? *Science and God Under the Microscope*.

Both were delivered by GTN's Director of Programmes.

As the whole country suddenly went into lockdown, GTN - as with every other organisation trying to serve the public interest - needed to find ways of continuing to do so that were creative, safe and effective.

'Necessity often fuels creativity,' said GTN chairman, the Very Rev Dr Angus Morrison *'and we are delighted by how we have been able to rise to the current challenge'*.

This newsletter records how that is being achieved.

Coming out of Lockdown?

The value of humour even in the most taxing circumstances can never be understated. Gus, our resident cartoonist, has his own perspective on the hidden dangers of coming out of lockdown.



"Good news honey. It's safe to leave the house."

VIRTUALLY AND REALLY EXPLORING THE GOD QUESTION

As lockdown tightened its stranglehold on the movement of people, many GTN plans had to be shelved or changed. GTN Liaison Officer Rev George Lind suddenly had cancellation lines through a busy schedule of presentations and meetings. But they were only pencil lines! In 2 Timothy 2:9 St Paul in his own form of imprisonment wrote that 'God's word is not chained'. And neither is GTN.



Online Exploring the God Question in action

Quickly, other ways were found - not only to continue Grasping the Nettle but to take advantage of the expansiveness of online opportunities. Exploring the God Question as a 'virtual community' suddenly took hold of the imagination. In six sessions, held on Tuesdays and Thursdays over a two week period during April and May, the Scottish core participants were joined by others from Spain, Norway and France and even the USA. Zoom technology,

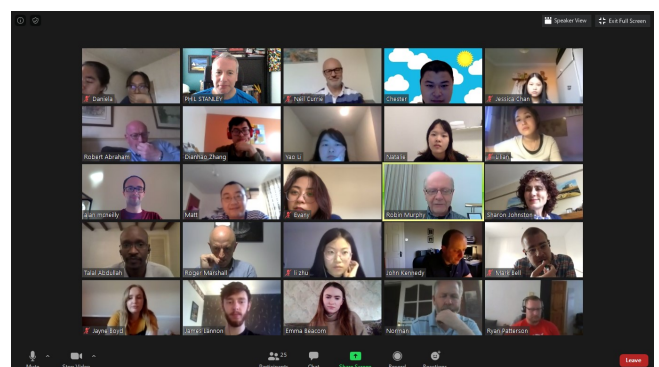
facilitated by Sanctus Media, not only enabled shared viewing of The God Question programmes but also offered chat rooms in which smaller numbers could discuss the issues arising and reflect on the core questions in the study guide, made available to all participants.

Assisted by GTN's Liaison Officer, Rev George Lind, the sessions were led by the then Moderator Designate of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Rev Dr Martin Fair. 'These sessions which I was privileged to lead brought together a community of people who otherwise would never have met each other' he said. 'This was a truly unique and fascinating international forum built around topics that are fundamentally important to us all. Once again, I was impressed by how the programmes can bring together people of different backgrounds and opinions to explore big questions of science and faith.'

If you would like to consider how you could organise Exploring the God Question 'virtually' in your community or friendship group please write to office@graspingthenettle.org and support will be available.

As in Scotland, so in Northern Ireland.

Robin Murphy first encountered Exploring the God Question resources while living in Sunderland. With the permission of the local TOBY restaurant he organised viewing sessions there and raised the audience by leafleting the local community. Robin continued to converse with many sceptics who attended for a long time afterwards. Now living in Ireland, he continues to open up the big questions - including issues about science and God - with members of the community. Responding to current restrictions, the Big Questions has gone online.



A 'Big Questions' online session

MODERATOR PLANS FOR ONLINE ETGQ

Fresh from the experience of leading Exploring the God Question online, the Moderator Designate for the Church of Scotland 20/21 had an idea.

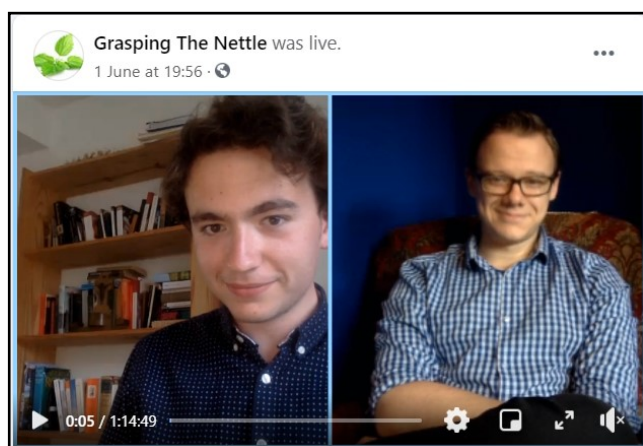
Why not give interested members of the public the opportunity to explore these questions with the Moderator? The plan is afoot, alongside the aspiration that this will become news. Imagine the newspaper headline: 'Church of Scotland Moderator Puts God's Existence To The Test!'



Rt Rev Dr Martin Fair

AS I SEE IT

A new Facebook Chat Programme from GTN



Josep Marti Bouis in conversation with Rev Dr Liam Fraser

June 1st. A new month and a new format for GTN in the form of 'From My Point of View'. Not so much an interview but more like a conversation between two people who are very interested in what each has to say, this was the brainchild of Josep Marti Bouis, the editor of GTN's Facebook page. The first guest to try out the new format was Rev Dr Liam Fraser, GTN Steering Board member and Minister of St Michael's Parish Church Linlithgow. The topic? Science and Faith. Conversation topics ranged from why the conflict model of science and faith in God is so

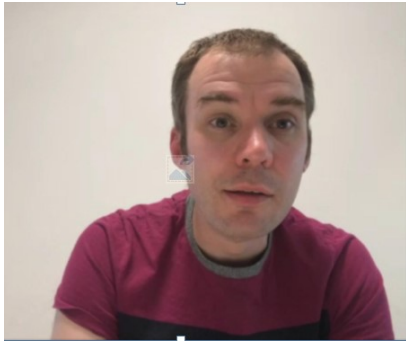
entrenched in society to the question of what can be done about it. The conversation was live on Facebook but it was recorded so you can catch up with the conversation [here](#). Cumulatively, more than 700 people tuned in at some point. *"For a first 'outing', this exceeded all our expectations," said Josep, "and it appears from the encouraging reaction that we can look forward to more live presentations like this."*



KEEP IN DAILY TOUCH WITH GTN VIA FACEBOOK

Follow and 'like' our daily updates on Facebook for thought-provoking ideas, science-latest and intriguing offerings from Gus our resident GTN cartoonist. Visit the WATCH section of our website to read the thought-provoking cartoon booklet 'Do You Believe in Gus?'

ON THE FRONT LINE



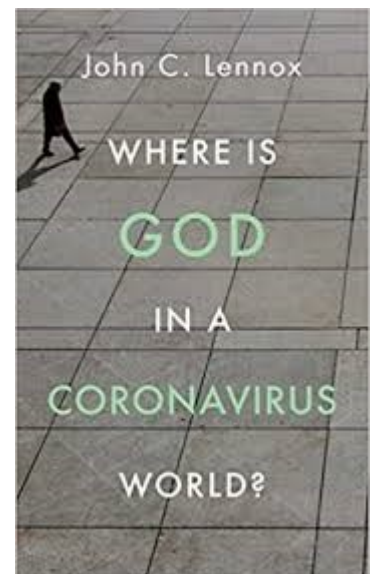
Dr Neil Ritchie

GTN's Council of Advisers comprises people from various sectors of professional life. That includes those who work in our greatly appreciated National Health Service. Dr Neil Ritchie has been working at the heart of the Covid19 crisis for many weeks. In an [interview](#) specially recorded for GTN, he takes us on the inside track with respect to coronavirus, faith and working on the front line.

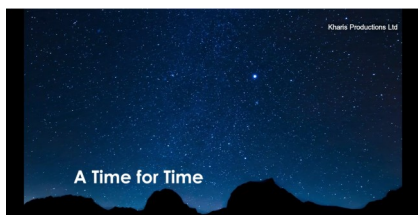
WHERE IS GOD IN A CORONAVIRUS WORLD?

We might - and do - look at the wonders of existence and marvel at the handiwork of the creator. But there is a flip side. Does the suffering in our often tortured world represent the indifference of the creator? With perfect timing, Professor John Lennox has placed that question in the context of the present pandemic in a new publication. Hear his [Interview](#) given specially to GTN.

Professor Lennox is the subject of a new cinematic feature film, Against the Tide, being released this year. More details about how to view available soon.



IT MAKES YOU THINK!



A time for time



GTN Coronavirus Reflection



A Timely Reflection for GTN

To say the world has been given something to think about is the understatement of the century! But what are we thinking? Those who believe that there is a creator who has ultimate plans and purposes for the creation must find a way to respond to the current crisis in a way that is spiritually strengthening. That is the purpose of a series of Reflections on GTN's Facebook page. Some have been in the form of short professionally produced video programmes. You can find each of them on the [website](#).

A PRICKLY ISSUE IN THE SCIENCE AND GOD DEBATE

The late Ravi Zacharias, one of the greatest Christian apologists of our times, took as his mantra 'helping believers think and thinkers believe.' And that is close to the GTN position too. But within the community of believers there are ongoing discussions about God and science that can sometimes become a form of nettle that needs to be grasped.



Take the issue of Intelligent Design Theory (IDT).

What does it stand for? Does the term fairly encompass the standpoint of all believers? If so, why do some Christians reject it? That whole important matter is being debated in the GTN website Forum between IDT advocate Dr Antony Latham and Dr Alan Fraser who embraces a more orthodox scientific position (Evolutionary Creation).

Providing his view of the debate, Professor Chris Packard, a member of the Board of Search for Truth Charitable Trust (the body which sponsors GTN and owns The God Question series) wrote, *"Aware of the caution with which this (debate) was approached, I believe the exchange, which was a robust but respectful dialogue, gave an excellent insight into the topic... Antony and Alan should be congratulated on grappling with this issue which is important in a number of Christian settings."* You can follow the debate - which is nearing its conclusion - [here](#).

HAPPY 5th BIRTHDAY GTN



GTN reached its 5th birthday this month. Its leadership will be taking stock and reflecting on how we can serve the Christian community and wider society as effectively as possible in new circumstances that provide opportunities as well as challenges. At this anniversary moment we would love to hear from you about any way you have valued GTN or benefited from The God Question resources. Please simply email your comments to office@graspingthenettle.org

WHAT A WONDER-FULL WORLD ONLINE PLANS

Despite the need for plans for several Wonder-Full World events having to be postponed, the production of an online version, drawn from 'the best of', is underway. Access details will be announced soon, giving opportunity for many who have not yet attended a What a Wonder-Full World event to experience a truly unique aspect of the GTN brand.



Tenors Un-Limited in concert with GTN in Perth Theatre

GTN NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2020: A RETHINK



Professor Alister McGrath

The GTN autumn conference planned for early October will not take place in the form originally envisaged. Instead we intend to bring content via online from our principal speaker Professor Alister McGrath – and other contributors. Details will be announced soon.

THE GOD QUESTION ANIMATED VERSION FOR JUNIORS CONTINUES ASPACE



Lockdown has not restricted the progress of the animation series for children on science and God. The most recent programme to be completed is Cooking with Gas. If you would like a sneak preview write to office@graspingthenettle.org

TEMPLETON PRIZE AWARDED TO FRANCIS COLLINS

One of the principal interviewees in The God Question series (programme 2) has been awarded the John Templeton prize for contributions to science and faith. Our congratulations go to Dr Francis Collins, distinguished scientist and medical doctor, as well as the founder of BioLogos - an organisation to which GTN has close connections. Dr Collins is currently head of the USA's medical research organisation.

A recent online conversation between Francis Collins and Tim Keller about life, faith the coronavirus and the importance of caring can be accessed [here](#).



Dr Francis Collins

JOIN THE DOTS WITH GTN

It's as simple as this. Under the recent terms of lockdown in Scotland, June was sitting in the garden with two friends, Alison and Martin.

Across the 'social distance' she enthusiastically commented on her recent experience of Exploring the God Question online. Alison immediately asked if she could see the programmes.

"Of course," said June and pointed Alison in the direction of the GTN website. This suddenly connected with a conversation Martin had been having with his (Christian) window cleaner about 'big questions'.

On relating the conversation later to her friend Karen, June became aware of the Facebook 'live' conversation between Liam Fraser and Josep Marti Bouis. She went off to view it. Isn't that how it should work? Let the word spread like a (good) virus even while fighting corona!

