



Four-monthly notes from **John Blanchard**, with news of his ministry

No.3

January 2004

## *Guilty silence*

Nearly forty years ago John Stott wrote a book called '*Our Guilty Silence*'. Then rector of All Souls, Langham Place, he challenged Christians to take evangelism seriously, before setting out biblical guidelines for parochial, local and personal evangelism.

Everything Stott wrote is valid now, but the words of his excellent title can be written over one particular aspect of today's evangelism — the appalling reality of hell. One highly-respected evangelical volume of Christian doctrine has just eight lines on the subject in nearly 800 pages! Ten years ago I tried to address this serious omission in '*Whatever happened to Hell?*' in which I sought to tackle major questions the subject raises: Is hell fact or fantasy? Who goes there? What happens to those dying in infancy? What does the 'fire' of hell mean? Is hell too terrible to be true? Are there degrees of punishment in hell? Can Christians be happy in heaven while people they knew are in hell? What about purgatory? Years of research and writing on issues like these made a lasting impression on me and have deeply affected my own evangelism ever since.

Dr J. I. Packer wrote a very gracious Foreword and the book went through three printings in its first year. Now, the book having been unavailable for some time, Evangelical Press has produced a brilliantly presented reprint. One of the reviewers has called it 'as exhaustive a treatment of the biblical doctrine of hell as is ever likely to be written in our contemporary culture'. I can hardly endorse that — but as a clear understanding of what the Bible says about hell is a vital factor in truly biblical evangelism I pray that '*Whatever happened to Hell?*' will make a significant contribution to that end.



# MEET HG

I first met Howard Williams in Spain five years ago and soon afterwards he offered to help me on my Popular Christian Apologetics tours. I now wonder how I could manage without him! HG (we always use each other's initials)

insists on doing all the driving and handles nearly all of the practical arrangements on site. In particular, he takes complete charge of the materials that play a significant part in extending the ministry far beyond the meetings themselves — and woe betide me if I try to get involved!



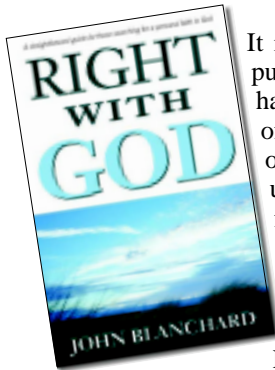
The white van man!

Many hundreds of miles on the road, hours of packing and unpacking and time spent answering questions — to say nothing of a wearying succession of late nights — all add up to a lot of hard work, all of which he does cheerfully and efficiently. He has become a very close friend and a valuable part of the project. Best of all he shares my joy in hearing of those who come to faith in Christ.

With five tours planned for this year, HG will have his hands full. If you do get to one of the events, please try to meet him — and to thank him for his sacrificial service.

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## *The old, old story ...*



It is now thirty-two years since The Banner of Truth Trust published *Right with God*, my first evangelistic book, but it has been reprinted many times since. I have long ago lost count of the many people, here in the United Kingdom and in many other countries, who have told me that the Lord graciously used this little book as a means of bringing them to saving faith in Christ — though I will never forget being told of an entire family of five converted in this way, and of a car thief who found a copy in the vehicle's back window, read it, was converted on the spot, and promptly returned the car!

Recent demand has meant the need for yet another reprint and this has just been released, once again at a remarkably low price and with its best-ever cover. Please pray that God will continue to use this simple, straightforward book to his glory in the lives of many people.

# Man with a mission

Bob Clapham was in his thirties when he took over the Arbroath Town Mission in 1950. Now eighty-four years young he is still there, and as enthusiastic as ever!

I had not spoken at the mission's annual Bible Convention for twenty-six years and in those days it was in decline. However, there has been a decided upturn in recent years and the hall was virtually full for



Bob Clapham and John Blanchard

the nine days during which I was responsible for the ministry. [By the way, how many missions do you know that every year run a Bible Convention for fifteen days?] There was an enthusiastic response to the straightforward exposition of Scripture night by night and we had the biggest crowd of all when I took an apologetics theme.

Founded in 1849 the mission has had an extraordinary history, growing from a dilapidated building tucked away in a narrow cobbled street to fine, purpose-built facilities in a prime location. Activities now include Sunday services, Sunday schools, a youth club, Girls' Brigade, Bible studies and prayer meetings, a Wednesday afternoon Fellowship meeting and a Saturday night youth rally, while social facilities are provided for indoor bowls, aerobic classes, meals on wheels, a café and a well-patronized daily lunch club. Bob Clapham has been the driving force behind all of this and a few years ago was awarded the British Empire Medal for his services to the town.

My nine days in Arbroath were enriched by hearing of several people's conversion, two in particular. A doctor in Glasgow, a committed atheist, was soundly converted after reading '*Does God Believe in Atheists?*' and is now enthusiastically sharing the gospel with his peers. A prisoner at the end of his tether read a copy of '*Ultimate Questions*' he found under the bed in his cell. Soon afterwards somebody gave him a Bible and it fell open at a text he had just read in the booklet. God spoke to him through it and he trusted Christ. *Nothing* can compare to the joy of seeing God at work in this way!

## ORKNEY: *Low flying; high tension*

Orkney enthral me. Glorious scenery, wonderful wildlife, rich historical culture and the warmest of welcomes help to explain why, but a recent return visit confirmed what

I already knew, that the people living in these God-blessed islands have the same spiritual needs as those living elsewhere, and the gospel is the only means of meeting them.



Ready to board!

Last year my ministry there was confined to mainland Orkney, and Rev. Trevor Hunt had arranged a good return visit to his fine church in Finstown. However, this time I also visited Westray (population 600), the 'Queen o' the Isles'. My friend Stephen Hagan, Convenor of the Orkney Islands Council, had arranged a meeting in the local Baptist Kirk, where Steve Langford is the pastor. I was warned to expect no more than a dozen people, but about thirty came. The meeting got off to a warmer-than-expected start when the electronic organ caught fire! — but there was even greater warmth in the congregation and the feedback since the meeting has been very encouraging.

I had travelled to Westray by ferry, but Stephen Hagan arranged for me to fly back to Kirkwall (all of 20 miles) via the tiny island of Papa Westray. This enabled me to sample the world's shortest scheduled commercial flight, just two minutes from take-off to touchdown — and I have a certificate to prove it!

Back in Kirkwall I spoke at the 17<sup>th</sup> annual Orkney International Science Festival, a secular event that attracts scientists from far and wide. Asked to speak on 'Has Science got rid of God?' I rather expected it to be a 'Daniel in the lions' den' encounter, and so it proved. The hall was packed and several interruptions during my presentation were the prelude to a Question and Answer session during which some of the scientists who were atheists or agnostics went for me like a pack of rottweilers! The organizer later said that the exchanges were 'lively', but this was like calling a hurricane a gentle breeze! However, he had agreed that a free copy of *'Is God past his Sell-by Date?'* could be offered to those who wanted one, and about 75 people responded. I am so thankful for such an opportunity and trust that there will yet be evidence of people's hearts and minds being changed by the power of the gospel.

## Across the pond

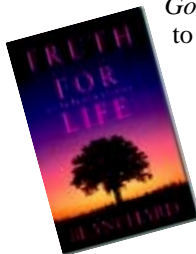


Lisa Turner, Sally Norton, Janet Sartelle (and Joyce) – the top table in Tennessee!

October saw me back in the United States for another busy schedule. All three churches were ones I had visited before and it was very encouraging to see large crowds willing to deal with major subjects. Emmanuel Baptist, Enid, Oklahoma is becoming a favourite stop and my good friend Pastor Wade Burleson, now President of the Southern Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, had played his part in preparing his people for a very fruitful time. At MacArthur Boulevard Baptist Church, Texas (one of whose previous pastors was my long-time friend Ron Dunn) Dr David Allen enthusiastically led three well-attended sessions on various aspects of Christian apologetics. This would be an unusual subject in that particular culture, but the sessions went very well, with excellent feedback. In Tennessee, Independent Presbyterian Church, Memphis, a large, thriving church led by John Sartelle and a superb staff, has been a home from home for me over the years, and it was a privilege to lead their annual Reformation Conference. Other pressures mean I expect to cut down my work in the States from now on, but visits like these are more than worth the effort involved.

## Ministry to Muslims

In mid-December I had a remarkable opportunity to speak in Kingston University at a meeting organized by the Ahmadiyya Muslims. My assigned subject was 'The Christian view of the Afterlife' and I was given adequate speaking time before an extended Q and A session on a wide range of subjects. I know of hundreds of people who were in prayer for this particular event and I sensed that God answered their prayers in a very marked way. After the meeting eighty of those present accepted a free copy of *'Is God past his Sell-by Date?'* Please pray that God will graciously use this to their eternal blessing.



## Coming soon!

Evangelical Press has been working on the production of a superb new presentation of 'Truth for Life', my Commentary on the Epistle of James. Full details will be given in the next issue of *Newsline*.

# UPDATE

**Success at Smiths** There is good news for those who have been asking whether W. H. Smith has reordered '*Is God past his Sell-by Date?*' The answer is that the company has placed three further orders so far. Its appearance on Smith's shelves obviously has great potential for reaching the unconverted and the more copies that are bought from its shops the greater this potential will become. If you have not already done so, please consider buying one or more in this way. To help your local shop to identify it, the book's ISBN number is 0-85234-500-3.

**Airtime Down Under** Genesis FM, a radio station in New Zealand, recently took a great interest in an article of mine entitled 'Where was God on September 11?' that had appeared in the Christian newspaper *Challenge Weekly*. As a result, a spoken version of the article was aired *no fewer than 360 times* over a three-month period. It is difficult to imagine that amount of airtime in Britain! During the same period another New Zealand radio station interviewed me by telephone on the same subject.

**Reaching South Africa** Doug Crutchley, a good friend who is passionately committed to literature evangelism, reports having personally distributed 7,000 copies of '*Ultimate Questions*' (in various languages) on the streets of Cape Town and elsewhere in recent months. As Doug always seeks to get involved in personal conversation with the people he contacts, this involves an immense amount of hard work on his part. He tells of having distributed 40,000 copies of the booklet in this personal way over the past seven years — a stupendous effort — and of having followed up nearly 600 people with discipleship literature. Please pray for Doug in this significant ministry.

**Witness in Wales** Many readers will know of the excellent Christian witness arranged at the Llangollen Eisteddfod. News of the latest event tells of the widespread use of '*Ultimate Questions*' there in many languages and in particular of good conversations with visitors from the Ukraine, Russia, Romania, Finland and the Czech Republic. The booklet became so widely used that an extra '*Ultimate Questions*' stand was set up near the Town Hall and many helpful conversations were held there.

**South coast initiative** Brighton and Hove City Mission is involved in a number of creative initiatives to reach people with the gospel. In one of these, and to coincide with the anniversary of the terrorist attack in the United States, literature was distributed to 23,000 homes. This included an invitation to send for a free copy of '*Where was God on September 11?*' and over 500 were requested. Many of these people were followed up and there are reports of whole families attending local churches as a result and of others joining 'Christianity Explained' courses.

**Questions galore** Evangelical Press continues to report an extraordinary demand for '*Ultimate Questions*'. Last spring the total reprint was about 300,000 in many different languages and another multi-language reprint of more than 200,000 copies is already on the way. When I first wrote it in 1987 I had not even thought of it being translated into *any* foreign languages, let alone the forty or so in which it is now available. I am grateful that God's plans go far beyond my faith!



# Encouraging others

From time to time I am given the opportunity to encourage others in Christian ministry by publicly commending their work, and since the last issue of *Newsline* I have had the privilege of reading three new titles and adding my endorsement.

The largest of these is *A Glorious High Throne*, by Professor Edgar Andrews. This 432-page work, published by Evangelical Press as part of the Welwyn Commentary Series, is a warm and practical exposition of Hebrews. I predict that it will be of enormous help to the busy preacher, the enquiring student and the ‘ordinary’ Christian who wants to learn more about this wonderfully rich (but not always straightforward!) New Testament letter.

The second is *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Documented, Defended*, written by Curtis Thomas and others and released by P & R Publishing. The original version was written forty years ago, when it had a formative influence on my own thinking and ministry. Now, in its updated and enlarged form, it is even better, and a ‘must’ for anyone seeking to understand, teach and enjoy the doctrines of grace.

The third is *One Day I’ll See You*, the beautifully presented life story of my dear friend Peter Jackson. Published in Worthing by Bible Matters, it tells how a sixteen-month-old boy, blinded by measles, became a greatly loved gospel pianist, a passionate evangelist and a warm-hearted pastor. Here is PJ at his best — honest, compassionate, understanding and Christ-centred. As I say on the back cover, ‘If you don’t enjoy reading it, do seek help — soon!’

## KEEP IN TOUCH!

If this is your first copy of *Newsline* and you would like to receive future copies (by post or e-mail) please let me know.

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E-mail: [jb@johnblanchard.co.uk](mailto:jb@johnblanchard.co.uk)

## COMING ENGAGEMENTS

At the time of going to print, these are my engagements for the next four months. For up-to-date news log on to [www.johnblanchard.org](http://www.johnblanchard.org). Please pray for God's enabling as I speak at these events — and if possible plan to attend any that are being held in your area.

**January** 13 MILTON KEYNES: Loughton Baptist Church, Bradwell Road, Loughton [Info: 01908 562259 or [JKShawMK@aol.com](mailto:JKShawMK@aol.com)]

*The remainder of January is being reserved for research and writing and I have set myself a very demanding schedule. Please pray that I might have all the needed stamina and insight and that I will use these days to the full.*

**February** 28 GRIMSBY, N. E. Lincs: The Ice House Christian Centre [Info: 01472 349917 or [eric@icehouse-christiancentre.co.uk](mailto:eric@icehouse-christiancentre.co.uk)]

*The remainder of February is being reserved for research and writing. Please pray!*

**March** 9 GILLINGHAM, Kent: Wigmore Evangelical Free Church [Info: 01634 244685 or [JackLast@aol.com](mailto:JackLast@aol.com)]  
10\* NORTHAMPTON: Details t.b.a. [Info: 01604 499523 or [jeff@thetaylors5.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:jeff@thetaylors5.freeserve.co.uk)]  
17\* GORRAN HAVEN, Cornwall: Mount Zion Church [Info: 01726 842873 or [geoff.fox@mtzion.org.uk](mailto:geoff.fox@mtzion.org.uk)]  
18 EAST LOOE, Cornwall: Grace Community Church [Info: 01503 240930]  
19\* PLYMOUTH: Details t.b.a. [Info: [Scepreint@aol.com](mailto:Scepreint@aol.com)]  
20\* CREDITON, Devon: The Boniface Centre [Info: 01363 774747 or [nigelcleave@creditn.fsworld.co.uk](mailto:nigelcleave@creditn.fsworld.co.uk)]  
21 BURNHAM ON SEA, Somerset: Burnham Baptist Church [Info: 01278 783920]  
23 NEWPORT, Gwent: Bethesda Baptist Church, Rogerstone [Info: 01633 895586]  
24 ROSS ON WYE, Herefordshire: Gorsley Chapel [Info: 01989 720312]  
25 WORCESTER: Woodgreen Evangelical Church [Info: 01905 754548 or 01905 358235]

**April** 15\* DONCASTER, S. Yorks: Bessacarr Evangelical Church [Info: 01302 533570 or [kna.mca@2a.org.uk](mailto:kna.mca@2a.org.uk)]  
17\* MATLOCK, Derbyshire: Council Chamber, County Hall [Info: 01629 733744]  
18 ASHTON-IN-MAKERFIELD, Lancs. Cave Browne Church [Info: 01942 711755]  
19\* ASHTON-IN-MAKERFIELD, Lancs. Bryn Baptist Church [Info: 01942 719705] [Info: 01629 733744 or [Brooks37G@aol.com](mailto:Brooks37G@aol.com)]  
20\* MARKET OVERTON, Rutland: Market Overton Free Church [Info: 01572 767383 or [therushes@whsmithnet.co.uk](mailto:therushes@whsmithnet.co.uk)]  
21\* RUGBY, Warwickshire: Rugby Evangelical Church [Info: 01926 424584 or [pfe@lineone.net](mailto:pfe@lineone.net)]

*\*Indicates a Popular Christian Apologetics meeting when I will be speaking on 'Does God Believe in Atheists?'*