



NEWSLINE

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

No.9

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Canyon Comments

After five services in New Mexico, and before heading for Georgia, Joyce and I took a side trip to fulfil a lifelong ambition to visit the Grand Canyon, in Arizona. Nothing prepared us for the staggering sight of this true wonder of the world, 277 miles long, 18 miles wide and reaching 5,000 feet down to the Colorado River. As we stood there in jaw-dropping amazement, three thoughts came readily to mind.

Firstly, creation's testimony to God's awesome power. For all its size, the Grand Canyon is merely a scratch on the surface of a planet orbiting around a star a million times its size, within a galaxy that has a hundred thousand million stars and is one of a hundred thousand million galaxies in the known universe. That God should have spoken all of this into being defies understanding and is a towering testimony to his wisdom, power and imagination.



Secondly, the cosmic catastrophe generated by human sin. In spite of the media mantra about the canyon having been formed over millions of years, its stunning strata (a guide told us that their glorious colours were only 'skin deep') can just as readily be interpreted in terms of the catastrophic global flood recorded in Genesis as God's judgement on human sin.

Thirdly (a bit of lateral thinking here) my mind turned to that other great canyon, the 'great gulf' fixed in eternity between heaven and hell and the ever-urgent responsibility I share with all other Christians to take the gospel to the dying generation in which we live, telling them of the Saviour who alone can rescue them from the power and presence of sin.

Enjoy *Newsline*! And please pray for me as I seek to do as much as I can, as well as I can, for as long as I can!

Scotland – plus!

A recent tour of Scotland began in Northern Ireland and ended in England! The original plan was to begin in Scotland's central belt, but an unusual opening across the Irish Sea meant that the sixteen-day excursion began in **Magherafelt**. Two morning services in the Curran and Castledawson Presbyterian churches were followed by a full-to-the-rafters combined service in the evening — and then by the kind of young people's meeting, with over 100 present, that had such a 'grip' on it that it is difficult to describe. A wonderfully satisfying day!

After taking part (without distinction!) in a Christian Golfers Conference event, Howard Williams and I flew to Liverpool, then made a high-speed dash to **East Kilbride** for the first of the meetings in Scotland. One young man afterwards called it 'outrageously good' and for me the highlight was the testimony of a young American woman to the relevance of the gospel when Hurricane Katrina hit her home town of New Orleans.

Next came a six-hour drive through misty but magnificent Wester Ross for an evening meeting in **Gairloch**, where the church was comfortably full and the Highland welcome all that I expected. A late and slow start the next day would have been welcome, but we needed to be in **Thurso**, the northernmost town on the British mainland, for a lunchtime meeting with church leaders in Olrig House, charmingly managed by Oliver and Valerie Vellacott. I took an informal and interactive line, and testimonies afterward struck a very positive note. The evening engagement was at the magnificently refurbished Pulteneytown Parish Church, complete with modern coffee bar, featured in BBC Television's *Songs of Praise* the following week.

After the obligatory photo-op at John O'Groats we headed south to delightful **Dornoch**, where Principal John Garvie was our host at the Dornoch Academy, almost a year to the day since we were last there. After a warm meeting there and a memorable evening in **New Deer** (see page 6) we settled in for a very full weekend at Deeside Christian Fellowship Church, **Aberdeen**. Now under Jeremy McQuoid's leadership, this remarkable church planted another fellowship (already thriving) a few miles away in Banchory yet is still bursting at the seams. A packed church on Sunday morning, 250 or so on Sunday night and a similar attendance on Monday added up to a very full weekend, blessed not least by the kindness of a church member and his wife who volunteered to drive 600 miles to Darlington and back to replenish Howard's seriously depleted stocks of books, videos and tapes.



From Aberdeen we made our way to the Town Mission in **Arbroath**. For a one-off Tuesday night meeting (unlike my last visit for a week's convention in 2003) I expected a small attendance and a more relaxed evening, but by the starting time the hall was packed to capacity. Dr Bob Clapham, now 89 years young, and who has been the Missioner for 55 years, led the meeting with his usual wholehearted enthusiasm and it was a benediction to be there.

Still heading south, our next stop was **Musselburgh**, where the Baptist church (we were there last year) had moved into the superbly redesigned Fisherrow Hall, one-time home of the British Sailors' Society. Another fine meeting, good contacts, and a sense that this had been a worthwhile event. A meeting the

following evening at Buccleuch and Greyfriars Free Church of Scotland in nearby **Edinburgh** meant the unusual luxury of two nights in the same bed. The attendance was smaller than expected, but contacts made afterwards more than made up for this.

Our last stop in Scotland was in **Dalry**, Ayrshire, where our good friend Martin Thomson is Minister of Trinity Church. Yet again I proved a poor prophet as the crowd was five times larger than I anticipated. It was one of those lovely occasions when the buzz of hundreds of Christians enjoying informal fellowship after the meeting was sufficient to make the whole trip worthwhile. We will remember Dalry for a long time!

The next day we crossed into England for a Saturday night meeting in St James's Church, **Carlisle**. Diary clashes affected the attendance, but the presentation was adapted to handle this. Many people spoke afterwards of being helped and a late-night dash to **Ashton-in-Makerfield** in Greater Manchester had me in position for Sunday's preaching at Cave Browne Evangelical Church before heading for Manchester airport.

Three flights and a total of some 1,500 miles of travel held the sixteen-day package together. It all added up to a fruitful and rewarding experience, not least because 300 enquirers asked for a free copy of *'Right with God'*. Please pray that God will graciously use these books to his glory in the coming days.

Another

'FREE' day!

'I saw from your diary that you were free, so I thought I would call you.' I smiled wryly as I talked for a while and then mused on how much I needed prayerful support for those 'free' days as well as for diary entries showing that I had a preaching engagement. To show what I mean, here are notes of some of the tasks I tackled on the day I wrote this piece.

- The morning mail is usually a key factor and today's was no exception. There was an invitation to speak at an evangelistic weekend in the north of Scotland; a letter from a long-time friend asking if I could advise him on books giving a detailed exposition of a particular part of Scripture; another from someone who appreciated *'Whatever happened to Hell?'* but wanted to discuss the section in 1 Peter 3:18-20, where Peter speaks of Christ preaching to 'the spirits in prison'. As the passage is notoriously controversial, a fair amount of time was spent in seeking to unravel it in the light of my correspondent's letter. A manuscript by an author who had heard me preach in Thailand came with a letter from a publisher asking whether I would write a back cover commendation: agreeing to it will mean reading nearly 200 pages. A letter from South Africa keeps me up to date with some traumatic changes in a church at which I preached earlier in the year. Another from a minister in Scotland tells of showing a video of *'Does God Believe in Atheists?'* in his manse and asks for help in tackling the interesting issue of how to interpret Genesis 1: a search on the internet produces several articles I hope he will find helpful.
- 'Business visitors' to an itinerant's house are few and far between, but the telephone is another matter and all today's work is punctuated by answering and making calls on a wide range of subjects including detailed arrangements for an upcoming Popular Christian Apologetics tour, a conference in the United States, another in Scotland and booking flights far enough in advance to fit into necessary schedules. A call from the BBC asks if I would appear on the *Jeremy Vine Show* again, this time to discuss Christian faith in Britain: we are able to arrange a time when I am on tour but within reach of a local BBC radio station.

- Then we come to the internet! I have been amazed at the way this seems to have ‘taken me over’ as a means of communication — but how much more efficient it is than ‘snail mail’! My Inbox ‘pings’ relentlessly all day, turning my attention to a fascinating variety of subjects. *An opportunity to share with a friend in sending hundreds of copies of ‘*Ultimate Questions*’ to a church in Spain. *Questions on the content and format of a forthcoming conference in the United States. *A note asking for prayer for a very dear friend who has had a massive heart attack. *Another asking whether I could have some input into helping a friend who went through a traumatic experience some years ago and is now suffering from Alzheimer’s disease. *A question from the United States asking for information about a scientist quoted in ‘*Has Science got rid of God?*’: a search on the internet enables me to track him down and confirm that he is someone with whom she had a previous contact. *Messages to and from Doug Crutchley, who continues to exercise such a remarkable literature ministry on the streets of Cape Town. *Tricky travel plans to be made for a coming engagement. *An invitation to join a dauntingly high-powered panel in discussing the relationship between Islam and other faiths: tricky, this one! *Messages to and from two separate people who may be able to supply some graphics for a coming publication. *A request to reproduce ‘*Ultimate Questions*’ on a church website. *A request for help in tracing publications that might be helpful in addressing the issue of using artificial intelligence in judicial procedures. *An invitation to speak at an evangelistic supper in East Anglia.

A ‘free day’ is more than a misnomer, but what a privilege it is to be involved in the Master’s service! Please pray that I might constantly know all necessary wisdom, energy and grace.

Thank you!

*My warmest thanks to friends who have sent gifts via the
CM Trust for the support of my ministry.*

*Friends who give directly are thanked personally at the time.
As promised, God has graciously continued to meet all my needs.*

‘No journey too far ...

... no crowd too small.’ This was my motto when I first came into full-time Christian work and I have never abandoned it. Miles and numbers have never been my criteria for accepting an invitation and the most unlikely places have sometimes proved surprisingly fruitful.

Hands up if you know where New Deer is! I had to look up the index of my road map to find it (population 700), tucked away ‘miles from anywhere’ in the north-east of Aberdeenshire. The Minister of St Kane’s Church is Dr Alistair Donald, Convenor of the Church of Scotland’s Apologetics Committee, who told me that ‘*Right with God*’ was instrumental in his conversion. He also said he had no idea how many would attend our meeting, but that he had put out forty chairs in the brilliant Church Centre. In the event, he was over 100 short of requirements and latecomers had to stand at the back! The meeting went extraordinarily well and Dr Donald has since sent this encouraging note:



‘I would like to thank you so very much for coming here to our small village on your recent tour. I was delighted at the high turnout and “buzz” in response to your talk on “*Does God believe in atheists?*” I trust that subsequent ones have also been encouraging. I am so glad that you are working in this crucial area of apologetics: there is so little available at a popular level, and you have such a gift for this work. We have now stocked up on your booklets for use in the café and in my own door-to-door work in the parish, and I trust and pray that they will be really helpful in clearing away the various barriers to belief that folk today seem to have. You mentioned the possibility of a Scottish tour next year. If this gets firmed up, may I warmly invite you to come again? I was listening in the car today to the ‘Sell by date’ talk, and think it would fit perfectly for a second visit. I can already envisage dozens of sceptics in the area whom I would personally invite.’

FE FWRODD HI!



Try this for size! — Britain's longest place name

As many people living west of the River Severn will know, the headline is colloquial Welsh for 'It rained!' — *and it did*, day after day, during my recent tour of the Principality. The soggy notes read as follows:

Monday: a terrific start at Heath Evangelical Church, **Cardiff**, with 500-600 in attendance. Where else in the UK could one gather that kind of crowd on a Monday night?

Tuesday: a first-ever visit to **Llanelli**, where the pastor, Philip Swann, had already decided that his church could not accommodate the crowd and switched the meeting to Capel Als. In spite of the rain, 250 crammed into the building (some having made a 100-mile journey) and we had an exceptionally fine meeting.

Wednesday: began with a live interview on BBC Radio 2's *Jeremy Vine Show*, which has a massive audience. I shared the interview with Terry Waite, one-time special envoy of the Archbishop of Canterbury and felt greatly enabled as we discussed the gospel and the need to proclaim it boldly. The evening meeting was in the local university, with many students in a good-sized crowd.

Thursday called for a long haul to **Bangor** in the far north (it took me less time to fly the Atlantic from Boston to London two weeks earlier) but with the university's Main Arts Theatre crammed to capacity (latecomers having to sit in the aisles) it was worth every mile and minute.

Friday found us in **Aberystwyth** and the third university in a row. A good crowd nearly filled the Grove Theatre and with 90% of them students, the Q and A session got so lively that the caretaker eventually had to call 'time' and shoot us out of the building!

Saturday meant crossing the country to **Newport**, where school half-term made something of a dent in the crowd at Malpas Road Evangelical Church, but did not prevent a fine meeting there, or warm-hearted worship the following day.

I crossed the Severn grateful for very encouraging attendances, many close gospel conversations, delightful fellowship with friends all over the country and reflecting the potential in nearly 200 seekers asking for a free copy of *'Right with God'*. May God graciously bless all that was done in this lovely land!

COMING ENGAGEMENTS

At the time of going to press these are my engagements for the next four months. For up-to-date news of any additional meetings, log on to www.johnblanchard.org. Please pray for God's enabling at these events — and if possible plan to attend any that are being held near you.

2006

- January** *January is reserved for research, study and writing.*
- February** 25 OCKLEY, Surrey: Men's Breakfast in Ockley Village Hall
[Info: barry.thomson@btinternet.com]
The remainder of February is reserved for research, study and writing.
- March** 4-5 LINCOLN: Lincoln Evangelical Church — Anniversary services
[Info: r.dale2@ntlworld.com]
12 KINGSTON-UPON-THAMES, Surrey: Cornerstone
[Info: 020 8397 1487 or pete_woodcock@hotmail.com]
19* BELFAST: The Crescent Church [Info: 028 9042 2170
or ndhall@utvinternet.com]
21* BELFAST: The Crescent Church [Info: 028 9042 2170
or ndhall@utvinternet.com]
28 BELFAST: The Crescent Church [Info: 028 9042 2170
or ndhall@utvinternet.com]
31 ALBANIA: Details to be announced [Info: wdniven@aep.org.al]
- April** 1-4 ALBANIA: Details to be announced [Info: wdniven@aep.org.al]
24* LEICESTER: Knighton Evangelical Free Church: [Info: 0116 270 4101
or office@knighton.org.uk]
25* PETERBOROUGH, Cambs: Whittlesey Baptist Church, Whittlesey
[Info: 01733 204139 or jonathanwood1@onetel.com]
26* LOUGHBOROUGH, Leics: Loughborough Baptist Church
[Info: 01509 215548 or 01509 263153 or davidgranger.lbc@fish.co.uk]
27 (1pm) WOODFORD, Essex: Pastors' Conference at Grove Hill Evangelical
Church, South Woodford [Info: simon@spercy.freeserve.co.uk]
27* WOODFORD, Essex: Grove Hill Evangelical Church, South Woodford
[Info 020 8504 9346 or mcmrlhull@hotmail.com]
28* LONG CRENDON, Bucks: Long Crendon Baptist Church
[Info: 01844 201335 or admin@lcbc.org.uk]
29* CHIPPING SODBURY, South Glos: Tyndale Baptist Church, Yate
[Info: 01454 323009 or LBWeenink@blueyonder.co.uk]

* Indicates a Popular Christian Apologetics meeting.

JOIN THE TEAM!

Thank you for reading *Newsline*. If you have not seen it before and would like to receive future copies (by post or e-mail) please let me know at 'Sarnia', 81 Lambert Road, Banstead, Surrey, SM7 2QU
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