



newsline

Four-monthly notes and news
of his ministry from John Blanchard

No. 22

May 2010

Joyce

Wednesday 17 February was a glorious day in the south of England. Dreadful weather had made the winter exceptionally hard and worse was to follow. Two weeks later parts of the UK were deep in snow, closing several of the nation's major airports. Yet on 17 February the south of England was blessed with sixteen hours of unbroken sunshine and temperatures far above the seasonal average.



It was an even more glorious day for my beloved wife Joyce, as in mid-afternoon the Lord graciously called her to her eternal home, which *'has no need of the sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb'* (Revelation 21:23).

Joyce Sylvia McKane was born in Guernsey on 2 December 1933. Like me, she came from a poor family. Her mother was one of sixteen children, including four sets of twins. At one stage, twelve or more shared two double beds, with overcoats for covering. One generation on, Joyce was the oldest of five children. The family attended Vazon Elim Church, and in her early teens Joyce trusted Christ as her Saviour, witnessing to her faith by being baptized in the sea at Vazon Bay, on the island's west coast.

We first met in April 1954 when the Guernsey Civil Service transferred me to the Attorney General's Office, where Joyce already worked. I was immediately struck by her exceptionally good looks and attractive personality — throughout her life she had a smile that could melt an iceberg — but I was shaken by the daily radiance of her Christian faith. I was the Youth Fellowship leader, a choir member and a Sunday School teacher in a local Anglican church, but was soon to realize that I was a religious hypocrite and that my Christianity was an occasional performance, not a dynamic experience.

'As much as I can, as well as I can, for as long as I can'

In October of that year Joyce invited me to an evangelistic campaign led by Paul Cantelon, a visiting American evangelist. Believing that I had all the religion I needed, I refused point blank, but Joyce quietly persisted and finally played her trump card: she would be there every night, and we could go together. My resistance melted in a moment, but my initial reaction to the services was negative. It was much too 'American' for my liking, but after a few nights God showed me that my religion was worthless and that I needed to trust Christ as my Saviour.



One night I sang the closing hymn from the depths of my heart: 'Pass me not, O gentle Saviour, hear my humble cry; while on others you are calling, do not pass me by.' God graciously answered my prayer — and my life was transformed. My relationship with Joyce soon matured into deep personal love, and on 22 August 1957 we were married in Holy Trinity Church, which she had earlier joined.

We poured ourselves into its life and ministry, especially among young people. Soon afterwards, we became founder members of the Guernsey Branch of the National Young Life Campaign, in which her particular gifts were widely used. God blessed the Branch in a remarkable way, including calling over twenty of its members into full-time Christian service in the next seven years. It was also the driving force behind the island-wide 'Guernsey for God Campaign' in 1958, when Joyce helped me to carry out my responsibilities as its General Secretary.

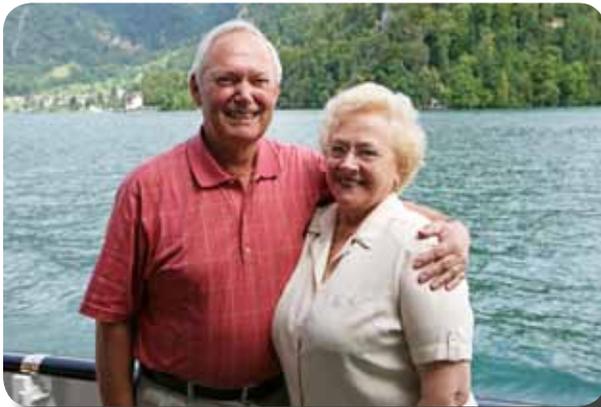
In 1962 we left Guernsey with three young sons to serve with NYLC in the south-west of England, making our home in Weston-super-Mare. We were virtually penniless (only a gift slipped under our front door enabled us to pay the boat fare to England) but Joyce had already proved herself a very efficient manager of slender resources; she also shared my convictions about priorities. The accounts for our first month as a married couple include these two entries: 'Two salaries £73 12s 3d ... tithe £7 6s 0d.' Over the years she was to knit countless sweaters, which were carefully mended and handed down along our growing line of sons.

Whatever our own constraints, Joyce always had a heart of compassion for those in need; time and again she would encourage me to respond to disaster appeals on the media — and if I hesitated she would take matters into her own hands! Nor did she limit her kindness to 'official' charities. While visiting friends once, she tripped coming down the stairs; a week later our hostess received a cheque from Joyce enabling her to replace the stair carpet. A pastor recently told me that when sugar was in short supply, Joyce gave him a large bag, saying, 'Your needs are greater than ours' (and we were bringing up five sons at the time). That was my Joyce. Hoarding possessions held no appeal to her; she was a living expression of obedience to Jesus' command, '*Freely you have received, freely give*'. (Matthew 10:8).

Her support for my ministry was incalculable, not least in caring for the growing family as I travelled beyond the UK to Europe, the United States and elsewhere. They all pay unqualified tribute to her selfless dedication to their well-being. In 1976 I was unexpectedly called to be the Minister of Westminster Chapel, London (and urged by Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones to accept). In the event I declined the call, but though Joyce felt inadequate to be a pastor's wife she was fully prepared to accept God's will in the matter. After the boys had left home, Joyce sometimes joined me on preaching tours in the United States, but she never caught the travel bug and at heart she was a 'home bird', quietly content with housework, gardening, reading — and the *Daily Telegraph* crossword!

In June 2008 she underwent several urgent medical tests. When a doctor told her, 'I wish I didn't have to tell you these results', Joyce replied, 'I am a Christian, simply tell me the truth.' The truth was that she had a malignant colorectal tumour and the cancer had already spread to her liver and lungs. She calmly accepted the diagnosis with the dignity and grace which were to mark the remaining twenty months of her life. When she entered 'the valley of the shadow of death' at the turn of this year, there was no fear, anger or resentment, no 'Why me?' and none of Dylan Thomas's 'rage against the dying of the light'. Our times of Bible reading and prayer together became especially precious; the last words of Scripture she heard were, '*Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever*' (Psalm 23:6).

We had very few complete holidays over the years, but celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary with a delightful train journey through Switzerland. Then six months ago nearly the whole family came to be with us on Christmas Day and we had the most wonderful time together. Joyce was banished from the kitchen and Stephen led the preparation of a superb lunch. The Queen's Speech, table games, family photographs, endless teasing (a family trait) and other fun turned the clock back forty years. We all sensed that this could be our last Christmas together, and so it proved to be: less than eight weeks later Joyce passed away.



*Golden Wedding Day
22 August 2007*

5 March was another bright, sunny day as we laid her body in the grave to await the Lord's return. The graveside service was simple, dignified, and moving, and very challenging to those outside of Christ. The Service of Thanksgiving later in the day was outstanding, with delightful tributes to Joyce and the faithful preaching of the gospel, for which I had planned and which Joyce would have wished. A recording of the service has been posted on my web site — www.johnblanchard.org — and can be accessed via the Home Page.



Christmas 2009 - a final family photograph

The family and I received well over 500 cards, letters and e-mails expressing sympathy and the assurance of prayerful support. We have also been deeply moved by the many donations made in Joyce's memory. These amounted £11,394, which has been divided between *Missionary Aviation Fellowship*, *Barnabas Fund*, *The Samaritans*, *The Royal Marsden Hospital* and *The Princess Alice Hospice*. If for any reason I have not directly acknowledged any *Newsline* reader's gift, please forgive me and accept my warmest thanks for your share in this wonderful tribute.

After fifty-two years of married life together, my loss is indescribable and many things Joyce and I enjoyed together have lost a lot of their taste. I must now press on without my wife, the mother of my five sons, my best friend, my lover, my closest prayer partner, my constant adviser, my best critic — and my strongest defender! Time without number in the course of my travels over the years, I found myself saying, 'I wish Joyce could see this/be here/meet these people/worship in this church.' Now, she has beaten me to the best place of all — and is in much better company!

I am deeply grateful to the countless friends who supported us both in prayer, especially over these past two years, and I covet their continued help as I pick up the threads of the ministry, still firmly resolved to do '*as much as I can, as well as I can, for as long as I can*' in the Lord's service.

EASTER IN ALBANIA

As regular *Newsline* readers will know, Albania has had a very special place in my heart and ministry for the past four years. I still find it baffling that well into my eighth decade an unexpected invitation to preach there for a few days four years ago should have led to so much more, including Project Albania.

The weekend visit last December was so fruitful that I was invited to return and do something similar over the Easter weekend. I flew to Tirana on the Saturday and had the privilege of preaching three times in the city on Easter Day. Two morning services were at Grace Church, whose fine biblical ministry is closely linked to a highly-regarded teaching and training programme in English and computer technology.

At both services I showed the consequences there would have been had the resurrection of Jesus never taken place, before declaring the Bible's triumphant assertion that it had. There was a special joy in doing so in a building now known as the Lincoln Centre, but which during the years of Communist domination was the home and headquarters of the murderous dictator Enver Hoxha. The delicious irony was emphasized when after the second service two fine young people in their late teens were baptized on confession of their faith.

In the evening a large crowd gathered in Tirana International Hotel for an evangelistic rally, at the end of which many copies of the newly published Albanian translation of *Jesus: dead or alive?* were given away.

Before flying home on the Monday I had a long meeting with three key Christian leaders to discuss the progress of Project Albania and to make plans for its future development. Eleven of my titles have now been translated and published, nine of them as part of the project. It was decided to move ahead immediately with two more, including the major work *Whatever happened to hell?*, and to think in terms of another four titles later on — a very positive end to another encouraging visit.



Lincoln Centre 1 – from Communism to Christ

Over the sea to Skye (and elsewhere!)



Skye from Kyle of Lochalsh

Scotland has long been a favourite stamping ground for my Popular Christian Apologetics tours, and April saw me there again with Howard Williams in the driving seat as usual. Our short tour favoured the west side of the country and included Highland venues that pushed our road time to nearly twenty-four hours in five days.

We began in **Dalry**, Ayrshire, where Martin Thomson, the Minister of Trinity Church, hosted us for the fifth time, twice in his previous charge. It was wonderful to focus the entire evening on our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the response may have been the warmest I had ever known in Dalry.

Six hours of tortuous driving now took us through majestic Wester Ross (mostly invisible in the poor weather) to the coastal village of Gairloch. This was my fifth visit, though the meeting this time was held in nearby **Poolewe**, famous for the stunning botanic gardens at nearby Inverewe. Some people drove over 100 miles, including mountainous single-track roads, to be at our meeting, when the subject was 'Evolution: Fact or Fiction?' One highlight was hearing of a lady who had come to faith in Christ reading *Ultimate Questions* when she was ninety years old and 'still very sharp in her thinking'.

We took the scenic route to Skye the next day — the hardest driving we had ever done on tour — then over the new bridge before turning north to **Staffin**. The weather was so wild that I feared only a handful of people would come to the Parish Church, yet it was nearly full, some people having travelled nearly the whole length of the island to be with us for a fine evening contrasting the richness of Christ with the emptiness of atheism.

Another six-hour drive took us to the east side of **Glasgow** for an excellent engagement in Sandyhills Parish Church, where an invitation to return was so warm that it was almost an order! The tour then ended in **Kirkmuirhill**, Lanarkshire. Ian Watson, Minister of the Parish Church, greeted me with, 'Welcome home', a heart-warming reminder of a remarkable mission Peter Anderson and I led there in 1984. The attendance and response, during and after this meeting, was so encouraging that it would be no surprise if Kirkmuirhill remained on our radar!

Dismantling 'New Atheism'

Richard Dawkins may be the world's best-known atheist — though his being considered by some as one of the world's top three intellectuals should be taken with more than a pinch of sodium chloride!

A cheerleader for 'The New Atheism', Dawkins' 2006 book *The God Delusion* sought to destroy religion in general and Christianity in particular. In the preface he wrote, 'If this book works as I intend, religious readers who open it will be atheists when they put it down.' (In a delightful irony, I have heard of atheists and agnostics who were so disillusioned by the book they became Christians after reading it!)

There have been many fine responses to *The God Delusion*, including the superb *Who made God?* by Edgar Andrews (EP Books), but I have long felt the need for a short, easily read presentation that clearly exposes the major flaws in Dawkins' case and points readers to the truth. *Dealing with Dawkins* (96 pp) is the result. EP Books enthusiastically commissioned a large first printing, which has already drawn very encouraging reviews, including the following:

'John Blanchard has produced yet another winner. Perfect for our sceptical times, this book will demonstrate to any open-minded reader that, contrary to Dawkins' atheistic claims, biblical Christianity is reliable and relevant, powerful and persuasive.'

Professor Edgar H. Andrews, BSc, PhD, FinstP, FIMM, CEng, CPhys, Emeritus Professor of Materials at the University of London

'John Blanchard's books should be purchased in bulk and given away freely to all who are enquiring seriously about the existence of God and the claims of Christianity.'

Frank Retief, Presiding Bishop of the Church of England in South Africa

Dealing with Dawkins retails at just £2.50 but, until 31 July only, regular readers of *Newsline* may order it at the following remarkable discounts, **post free**:

- 1-3 copies — £1.50
- 4-9 copies — £1.25
- 10-24 copies — £1.10
- 25-49 copies — 99p
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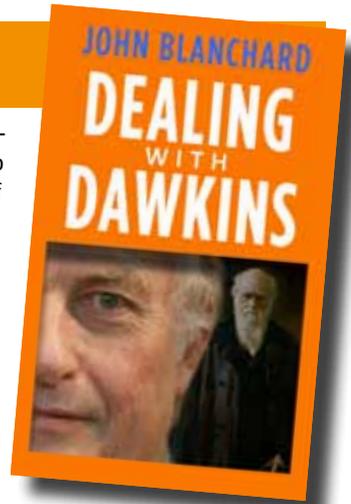
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COMING ENGAGEMENTS 2010

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, visit www.johnblanchard.org. Please pray for God's enabling and blessing at these events — and if possible plan to attend any scheduled to be held near you.

MAY

- 10 CROCKENHILL, Kent: Menzone evening at Crockenhill Baptist Church
[Info: 01322 662527 or bdw5az@aol.com]
16-21 WESTPORT, Co. Mayo, Ireland: Christian Golfers' Conference

JUNE

- 4* GLASGOW: Balshagray Victoria Park Parish Church, 218-230 Broomhill Drive, Glasgow. G11 7QA
[Info: Derek_robertson1@sky.com]
5* LOSSIEMOUTH, Morayshire: Lossiemouth Baptist Church, King Street
[Info: 01343 813103 or 07867 577354 or chrisandannegault@btinternet.com]
6 INVERNESS, Highlands: Inshes Church of Scotland, Sir Walter Scott Drive. IV2 3TW
[Info: 01463 226727 or 01463 772402 or ali.inshes@btinternet.com]
7* DINGWALL, Ross-shire: Dingwall Church of Scotland, Castle Street. IV15 9HU
[Info: enquiries@dingwall-church.co.uk or brucezomba@hotmail.com]
8* MUSSELBURGH, East Lothian: Musselburgh Baptist Church, 68 New Street. EH21 6JQ
[Info: 07971 029222 or jslang@talktalk.net]
9* CARLUKE, Lanarkshire: Kirkstyle Baptist Church, 13 Chapel Street, Carluke. ML8 4AP
[Info: 01555 770666 or ianmartin39@hotmail.com]
10* EDINBURGH: Holyrood Abbey, 831 London Road, Edinburgh. EH7 5YY
[Info: 0131 661 6002 or 0131 652 0640 or minister@holyroodabbey.org]
11* AIRDRIE, Lanarkshire: Airdrie Baptist Church, 97 Graham Street, Airdrie. ML6 6DE
[Info: 01236 748 052 or jleitch@blueyonder.co.uk]
22* BROMSGROVE, Worcs: Welcome Hall, Woodrow Lane, Catshill. B61 1PO
[Info: 01527 872126 or j.andrew.jack@googlemail.com]
23* WARLEY, W. Mids: Spring Meadow Baptist Church, Off Halesowen Rd, Old Hill, Cradley Heath. B64 6LB
[Info: 0121 559 2026 or info@spring-meadow.org]
24* DUDLEY, W. Mids: Dudley Baptist Church, Priory Road, Dudley. DY1 4AD
[Info: 01384 457324 or pastor@dudleybaptist.org.uk]
25* BIRMINGHAM: Monyhull Church, St Francis Drive, Monyhull Grange Estate, Kings Norton. B30 3PS
[Info: 07806 079057 or colin@monyhullchurch.org]
26* BIRMINGHAM: Junction Road Evangelical Church, Handsworth. B21 0EL
[Info: 0121 356 8152 or jeff.d.warner@btinternet.com]
27 WORCESTER: Woodgreen Evangelical Church, Hastings Drive, Worcester. WR4 0SR
[Info: 01905 754548 or administrator@woodgreen.fslife.co.uk]

July and August are reserved for study, preparation and writing.

* *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:
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