



NEWSLINE

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

No.5

September 2004

No apologies for apologetics!



Regular readers of *Newsline* will know that for the last four years I have been increasingly committed to the Popular Christian Apologetics project. This is not an organization or movement, but merely a phrase to indicate the thrust of my present ministry. Instead of the traditional approach to evangelism I am concentrating on two things — directly challenging atheism, agnosticism and scepticism of every stripe and equipping Christians to do the same.

My biblical mandate for this is as clear as crystal. Writing to all Christians of every generation (his letter is indiscriminately addressed to ‘the elect’), the apostle Peter urges us to be constantly ‘prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have’ (1 Peter 3:15). In the original Greek, ‘answer’ is *apologia*, which means a defence of oneself or one’s beliefs. In a Christian context it includes countering the scientific, philosophical and religious objections to ‘the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints’ (Jude 3) and showing that the only true God has revealed himself in the Bible, in creation, in the human conscience and in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is exciting (and exhausting!) work but in the goodness of God this change of approach is one which he has honoured in most encouraging ways. By and large, meetings have been larger, as has the proportion of non-Christians attending them. Best of all, I am hearing of significantly more people who are professing faith in Christ as a result of the written or spoken ministry.

This is reflected in some of the reports that follow and I am so thankful to friends who continue to uphold me in prayer and whose support in this way is such an encouragement to me as I seek to make the most of the many opportunities that continue to come my way.

If this is your first issue of *Newsline* I hope you will enjoy these pages — and if you would like to ‘join the team’ I would be delighted to welcome you on board.

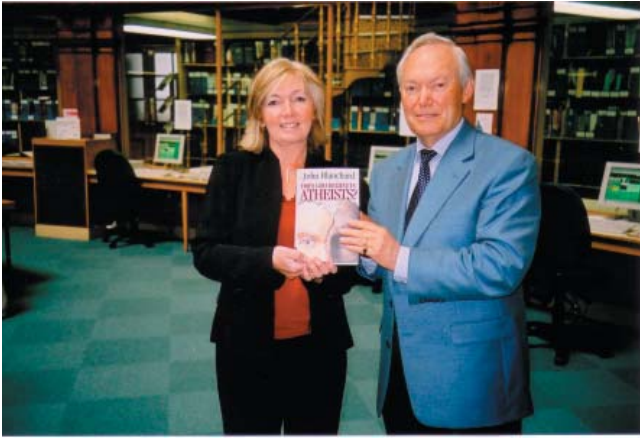
175 NOT OUT!

In 1979 I had the privilege of speaking at the 150th anniversary rally of the Liverpool City Mission, held in the city's famed Philharmonic Hall. Earlier this year the Mission celebrated its 175th anniversary and, to my delighted surprise, they decided to invite the same speaker they had twenty-five years ago!

The story of the Liverpool City Mission (the first City Mission in England) is truly heart-warming and deeply challenging. Originally called 'The Society for Promoting the Religious Improvement of the Poor of Liverpool and the Neighbourhood', it was launched by forty Christian men, mostly merchants, who initially employed three agents (at £40.00 a year) to work in the hovels, garrets and cellars crammed with people who were pouring into the city at the rate of 10,000 a year. Since then, the work of the Mission has embraced countless ways of fulfilling its ministry, including literature distribution, door-to-door work, open-air meetings, dockyard visitation, factory evangelism, mission centres, children's camps, youth work, a telephone ministry, newspaper features, rescue centres, prison visitation and schools work, to say nothing of providing hot meals, clothing and essential furniture to thousands of the city's poor, homeless and neglected inhabitants. A flourishing City Centre Café, run by 'an ex-cop and an ex-con', now adds a significant dimension to its work.



For the 175th celebration it was decided that each of the Mission's seven churches should arrange its programme on different days of the same week. This enabled me to get an overview of the work in the various locations. On the opening Sunday the morning service at the A. C. Mitchell Memorial Church was rather unusual. Instead of a sermon I was put 'in the lions' den' and invited to answer a wide range of questions raised by members of the congregation. I must admit that I had had my doubts as to whether this was a wise move, but it seemed to be very effective. Later in the day I spoke at a special meeting originally intended for church leaders but 'invaded' by others!



Presentation to Liverpool Central Library

One of the most effective outreach events was an evangelistic meal organized by Matheson Memorial Church, Bromborough. The British Legion Hall was an ideal setting, the food was superb and very close attention was given to the gospel message. A Senior Citizens' Lunch at Dingle Mount Church was very well

attended and was followed that day by a 'Songs of Praise' -type package put together for broadcasting later in the week on Radio Merseyside. Earlier in the week there had been another Radio Merseyside opening, this time an extended interview in the course of which I was able to share my own testimony.

Northwood Chapel was packed to capacity for an event that included an audio-visual presentation of the work of the Mission but allowed ample time for a direct presentation of the gospel, while the week came to a climax with the official 175th Birthday Rally held at Wellington Road Church, Wavertree. As at the Northwood service, David Jebson, who was Superintendent of the Mission from 1951-1991, gave a potted history of its work, leaving me to bring a reminder that the essentials of the gospel had never changed and that we all had the same responsibility as that laid on first-century believers.

The Mission has always appreciated the value of the printed page and this was reflected in my being invited to present 25 copies of *'Does God Believe in Atheists?'* to the city's Central Library with a view to their being distributed among its branches. The Library contains an impressive one million books and has 7.5 miles of archives. The copies of the book were very warmly received, not least because the copy already in the library had been frequently borrowed since it was first placed there. Mission supporters are hoping that the additional copies spread around the city will be in even greater demand.

Earlier this year UNESCO honoured Liverpool by naming it as a World Heritage city. Those with an interest in its spiritual welfare will continue to pray that the gospel will be the means of preparing many of its millions for life in that eternal city 'whose architect and builder is God'.

Two weeks in the Word

About two years ago I told some close friends that I had probably preached at my last Bible Convention. They said some kind things about the ongoing need for my Bible-teaching ministry, but I pointed out that while there were many fine preachers who could be greatly used at conventions, I was concerned about a more urgent need — to counter the rising tide of atheism, agnosticism and scepticism and similar ideas that were flooding our contemporary culture. Yet I had hardly delivered myself of this ‘mission statement’ when I had invitations to no fewer than four conventions! Three of them were scheduled recently within a two-week period and I have to say that whatever others may have gained from them, they were a means of great blessing to me, not only in the times of study and preparation but also in the joyful liberty of being able to ‘preach the Word’ without getting involved in the demanding cut and thrust of philosophical or scientific argument.

Beside the seaside

The first event was the Bournemouth & Poole Bible Convention, which has a long history of encouraging and challenging believers in that delightful part of the country. West Cliff Baptist Church gradually filled as the convention went on and there was a marked sense of God’s presence and blessing as we looked at the Bible’s teaching on the providence of God, the deity and humanity of Christ, the transformation that will take place when Christians go to heaven and the believer’s responsibility to get actively and deeply involved in bearing witness to the relevance and power of the gospel. As the convention’s Secretary wrote later, ‘There was such a positive feedback from those who attended and it was apparent that many were encouraged by the Lord’s message that was laid upon your heart.’

As well as the main conference services, there was an excellent meeting for church leaders and a well-attended event for ladies, as well as two fine Sunday services in



Thinking things through: Church Leaders Conference

local churches and a breakfast meeting with convention committee members, when we were all able to share insights into spiritual issues affecting churches in the current culture. Being in Bournemouth also gave an opportunity to take part in an hour-long radio broadcast on Hope FM and so to reach far beyond the convention meetings.

Middle England

From Bournemouth, I drove straight to the Midlands, where the Donington Bible Convention has been running for thirty-six years. For most of that time it was held in a tent in Donington itself, just outside Wolverhampton, but four years ago the terrible foot-and-mouth disease outbreak meant that the field was out of commission. Looking around for an alternative venue, the convention committee hit on a campus of the University of Wolverhampton and providentially this has proved the perfect setting. An adequate lecture theatre, an adjacent refectory and all the necessary facilities make it ideal for the convention's purposes and well-attended meetings added to the sense that it is on a firm footing.

The committee had asked me if I would base all the sessions on the Letter of James and of course I was more than delighted to agree. Four hours working through these five New Testament chapters was like renewing fellowship with an old friend, and Evangelical Press supplying copies of *'Truth for Life'* to back up the spoken ministry gave a welcome added dimension to the weekend. In addition to the convention sessions I enjoyed preaching in West Park Church, Wolverhampton and I was also glad to do a live telephone interview for BBC Radio Jersey, in which *'Why Believe the Bible?'* was the focal point of many of the questions.

Showers and blessing!

The third convention has the longest history of the three. For fifty-seven years Christians in Longhorsley, a village north of Newcastle, has held an annual convention under canvas. It all began when an evangelist from Yorkshire visited the village. His preaching had such a remarkable impact that it spawned an annual gathering for Bible ministry and the



Encouraging numbers at the Donington Convention

convention has continued uninterrupted ever since. This was my third visit to this delightful part of Northumberland (which the locals call 'England's best-kept secret!') and it was a special treat to share the ministry with a long-time friend, Derek Swann.

There are two special memories from this year's convention. The first was the dire weather, with pouring rain several times every day (and always when Derek Swann was preaching!). The second was the encouraging news that a university student professed conversion after the first day's ministry. Two special features of the convention were an evangelistic service on the Sunday night and a very worthwhile morning seminar for pastors and Christian leaders. I left Longhorsley thankful to God for all his goodness during those three delightful days.

No greater joy

Being in full-time Christian ministry has many pressures and problems, but it also brings great joys. None is greater than hearing of cases in which God has graciously used the ministry to bring men and women to faith in Christ. In recent months there have been not a few such cases. A woman drove 2 ½ hours to a meeting in Matlock to tell me that she began reading *'Does God Believe in Atheists?'* as an atheist and had trusted Christ two-thirds of the way through reading it. At the same meeting I heard of a husband and wife who had both come to faith through reading *'Where was God on September 11?'*

In Rutland I met a man who had been converted when I preached in Torquay several years ago. At other meetings several people told me of being converted, or significantly helped in their early days as Christians, through reading *'Right with God'*. News has come through of a pastor who was converted reading the same book. An e-mail from the United States tells of a young woman accepting Christ at a service in Texas. Another from the States comes from a man who says the ministry 'changed my life'. A message from a friend tells of a university student converted while reading *'Training for Triumph'*.

At a meeting in Lancashire I met a Jewish lady who told me that some years ago she went into a Christian church for the first time. I happened to be preaching at that particular service and when I met her she told me that she was converted there and then and has been going on with the Lord ever since. A day or so later I was told of someone converted while reading *'Is God past his Sell-by Date?'*

A message from a full-time Christian worker in Australia runs, 'A young Greek woman came into the bookshop for outreach material in various languages. Seeing the copies of *"Ultimate Questions"* in Greek, she said with great emotion, "That was the booklet that my Orthodox Dad read just a month before he died, and through its message he came to a wonderful saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ." She went on to say that all he wanted to do in that last month was to read the Bible and ask questions that she could hardly answer at times and added, "He died at peace with God".'

Thank you!

To say that one is engaged in 'an independent ministry' is something of a contradiction in terms as I am utterly dependent on God to supply all the means needed to sustain the work. I am grateful that he has unfailingly done so and I am also grateful to those Christians whose kindness enables the ministry to continue.

If support of my work has been included in your gifts to the CM Trust, please accept my sincere thanks for your important share. Friends who give directly are thanked personally at the time.

UPDATE

Press releases Recent news from Evangelical Press tells of great encouragement on the book front. Yet another reprint of *'Ultimate Questions'* has been delivered, this time totalling 456,000 copies in nine languages! This means that forty languages remain in print, with more to come, including Sinhala (for use in Sri Lanka) and Amharic, which is the most widely used of the eighty-six languages spoken in Ethiopia.

Evangelical Press also reports that the first edition of *'Why Believe the Bible?'* was sold out within a month and that the first reprint is rapidly being taken up, while enquiries are also being made about translating it into Dutch. A reprint of *'Has Science got rid of God?'* is also on the point of being ordered, just three months after it was first released.

God at the Games Thanks mainly to a generous gift from a British-based Christian Trust, believers were recently able to use some 4,000 copies of *'Ultimate Questions'*, in Greek and English, at the Olympic Games held in Athens. Please pray that many lives will be affected by reading the gospel presented in these booklets.

On air In recent months there have been several openings on local radio within the UK. Another opportunity came from Radio KCLR in the Republic of Ireland, when a sympathetic interviewer made it possible for me to speak very freely on questions arising from *'Why Believe the Bible?'*. The authority of Scripture is a major issue in these days and it was good to present a biblical perspective to a wide audience.

On disc As well as the many reprints of foreign language translations of *'Ultimate Questions'* and progress towards it being made available in several others, news has recently come of digital recordings of the material having been produced in Cantonese, Mandarin and Hokkien, the last of these being for use in Taiwan. These recordings have been made for the benefit of those unable to read and it is a great encouragement to know of Christians with the vision and enterprise to undertake this work.

JOIN THE TEAM!

If you have not seen *Newsline* before and would like to receive future copies (by post or e-mail) please let me know.

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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. 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.

- September**
- 5 GILLINGHAM, Dorset: Gillingham Baptist Church – Pastor's Anniversary Services [Info: 01747 824009]
 - 8* MOLD, Cheshire: Ebenezer Baptist Church [Info: 01978 760649 or HugDw@aol.com]
 - 9* WIGTOWN, Dumfries & Galloway: Kircowan Church of Scotland [Info: 01988 402242 or martin@thomsonm40.freereserve.co.uk]
 - 10* CAMPBELTOWN, Strathclyde [Info: 01880 740635 or moller-kintyre@lineone.net]
 - 11(aft)* LOCHGILPHEAD, Strathclyde [Info: 01546 602145 or donmorrison@onetel.net.uk]
 - 11(evng)* FORT WILLIAM, Highland [Info: 01397 702054 or linandalan@btopenworld.com]
 - 13* DORNOCH, Sutherland [Info: 01862 811524 or fiomargarvie@yahoo.com]
 - 14* INVERNESS: Culloden Academy [Info: 01463 226889 or 01463 731712 or mnadvisernorth@uk.uumail.com]
 - 15* MUSSELBURGH, East Lothian: Musselburgh Baptist Church [Info: 0131 6654207 or jslang@btinternet.com]
 - 23* CARDIFF BAY: Two evangelistic apologetics meetings (1pm and 7.30pm) in The Coal Exchange, Mount Stuart Square [Info: 029 20 307 107 or janandliz@forreststreet.freereserve.co.uk]
 - 28-30 DINGWALL, Ross-shire: Scottish Northern Convention [Info: 01349 882265 or rob-jones@freeuk.com]
- October**
- 2-3 WALDRINGFIELD, Suffolk: Waldringfield Baptist Church – Church Anniversary services [Info: 01473 723396]
 - 9 IRELAND: Springhill Court Hotel, Kilkenny [Info: 56 7786681]
 - 10 IRELAND: Kilkenny Presbyterian Church: [Info: 56 7786681]
 - 11-12 IRELAND: Kilkenny. The Irish Outreach Conference, held in Kilkenny Presbyterian Church [Info: sgmurphy@eircom.net]
 - 13-15* IRELAND: Bandon, Co. Cork: [Info: 21 477 4251 or ptjeffers@eircom.net]
 - 21-23* ROMANIA: Oradea: Church leaders' conference
 - 25* SWANLEY, Kent: Crockenhill Baptist Church [Info: 01322 662527]
 - 30-31 UNITED STATES: Grace Church, Suwanee, Georgia [Info: dshaw30092@charter.net]
- November**
- 3* UNITED STATES: First Presbyterian Church Jackson, Mississippi [Info: (601) 353 8316]
The remainder of November is reserved for study, preparation and writing.
- December**
- Reserved for study, preparation and writing.

* Indicates a Popular Christian Apologetics meeting