



More than numbers

Whenever a close American friend of mine was teased about the approach of her 80th birthday she always responded by saying, 'It's just a number.' Be that as it may, 2007 has been a year of special numbers for the Blanchards.

The first was in March, which marked the 45th anniversary of my coming into full-time Christian work. The verse God used to catapult me into the ministry was, 'Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say' (Exodus 4:12, AV) and I have constantly leaned on that promise. It came back powerfully to me when I spoke at my 10,000th meeting many years ago and means no less to me now as I strive to do 'as much as I can, as well as I can, for as long as I can'.

The second was in July, when I celebrated my 75th birthday. As a young man I had a wholly irrational notion that I would never make old bones, but God has graciously sustained me to the present day and I am constantly thankful for his goodness and mercy. My mother died when she was just twenty-four and my only sibling when he was fifty-two. It is sobering to reflect that I am now within twelve months of their combined lifetimes.

The third was in August, when Joyce and I celebrated our Golden Wedding anniversary. Greeting cards celebrating special events from births to birthdays and weddings to retirements are often so soaked in sentimentalism they are robbed of all serious meaning (which is what makes choosing them so difficult at times). Greetings without biblical basis or content reflect a distorted picture at best. In our time together over the past fifty years we have known delights and disappointments, sunshine and shadows, laughter and tears, peaceful days and those filled with painful pressure, definite answers to prayer as well as answers that have been delayed or seemingly denied.

Cecil Myers once wrote, 'Successful marriage is always a triangle; a man, a woman and God'. Joyce and I gratefully testify that God has generously played his part and our prayer on 'the day' was that he would graciously draw us ever closer to himself and to each other during the remainder of our time together.



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

Back to Bonnie Scotland

‘Bonnie: Adjective; attractive or beautiful’, runs an entry in *Oxford Dictionary of English* and as Howard Williams and I toured Scotland on a recent series of Popular Christian Apologetics engagements we strongly endorsed the word’s common association with England’s northern neighbour.

We began in **Stranraer**, on the south-west coast, where the Baptist church is located just yards from the point at which ferries leave for Ireland. Pastor Paul Coventry and the church members had worked hard at preparing for the meeting, and a good-sized crowd helped to provide a fine send-off for the tour.

Our next stop was in Chryston on the north-east side of **Glasgow** where Martin Allen, who is also Chairman of the influential Crieff Fellowship, has had a remarkable ministry for the past thirty years, leading Chryston Church’s membership to significant growth and depth. The fine new church hall was packed to capacity for a lively meeting reflecting great interest in the case against atheism. Meeting someone converted when reading *Right with God* added to the sense of a very worthwhile evening.



Crowded at Chryston

A longer journey took us to **Inverness** (a.k.a. ‘Tesco City!’), the fastest growing city in Europe, where we were able to support the hugely encouraging work of Inshes Church. A few years ago, the city’s West Church was dwindling fast as people moved out of the city centre and under Alistair Malcolm’s dynamic leadership it was decided to close it down and build a radically different place of worship in the growing suburb of Inshes. The result is a magnificent modern building, designed and equipped to meet the area’s developing needs. There were only a few empty seats in the main auditorium as I debunked the alleged conflict between science and true Christianity and conversations afterwards gave an opportunity to clinch many of the points that had been made.

For many years Gilcomston South Church, **Aberdeen**, has made a large contribution to the spiritual life of ‘The Granite City’, generally recognised as the oil capital of Europe. Its Yorkshire-born minister Dominic Smart is building on the work of the legendary William Still, who in his fifty-two years there led what became one of Scotland’s most notable evangelical congregations. The premises have been superbly refurbished and are now much more welcoming to visitors. Saturday nights in big cities are not always the best for Christian meetings, but the

crowd at Gilcomston certainly bucked the trend, while Sunday worship attracted an even larger attendance to set the seal on two fruitful days.

From one of Scotland's largest cities we moved to a 'dot on the map', **New Deer** (population 700) in the farming heartland of Aberdeenshire, and which was voted the 2006 Calor Scotland Community of the Year. The well-equipped St Kane's Church Centre, with its suite of modern rooms and the Mustard Seed Café, is a major focus of the church's life seven days a week. A relaxed approach to the evening there attracted some people the minister, Alistair Donald, who shares my passion for apologetics, had never seen at any previous church event.

Until recent EU restrictions were imposed, **Peterhead** was the busiest fishing port in Europe. It has strong religious roots (and still more churches than public houses) and nearly 10% of the population belong to evangelical congregations. The Baptist church sponsored a buffet supper in the Palace Hotel and the ballroom was filled for the event. The whole evening went exceptionally well, not least the Q and A session, when questions ranged from the Genesis 'gap theory' to the chaos theory, which takes us into subatomic physics. I had never been to Peterhead before (my initial contact was a man who came to faith reading one of my evangelistic books twenty years ago) but this visit has whetted my appetite to return.



Holyrood Abbey Church

At last we headed south, and to **Edinburgh**, the nation's capital. Holyrood Abbey Church dates from 1900 and has a well-earned reputation for evangelical life and witness. Its current minister, Philip Hair, leads a forward-looking congregation that was to celebrate the official opening of its magnificent new church halls, costing well over £1 million, ten days after our visit. The ground floor of the

fine church building was comfortably filled for a meeting with a particularly strong evangelistic application.

Back to the west coast next and a meeting in James Watt College, **Greenock**, sponsored by Orangefield Baptist Church, at whose 200th anniversary I had spoken last year. Meetings in such settings sometimes work well, sometimes not; on this occasion the IBM lecture theatre had only a few empty seats and made for easy communication with those who came.

Our last stop was a return visit to Trinity Church, **Dalry**, in the heart of Ayrshire. The church's minister, Martin Thomson, has become a good friend (this was his fourth Popular Christian Apologetics event in two different parishes) and his hard work was rewarded with a large crowd and a delightfully warm spirit in the meeting. We could not have wished for a more enjoyable ending to this latest venture north of the border — and it certainly helped to get us thinking about a possible return to Bonnie Scotland!

Highlights from the Netherlands

At its nearest point the Kingdom of the Netherlands is only about 100 miles from England, yet until I preached there recently I had never set foot in it other than on a day trip taken by a houseparty I was leading in Belgium many years ago.

One-quarter of the size of England and with about one-third of its population the Netherlands — nearly 50% of which is below sea level — is one of our nearest neighbours, yet to scratch beneath the surface is to discover many surprises and contrasts. Two of its major claims illustrate this. On the one hand it has a glorious Christian history, marked by its fight for religious freedom and its remarkable commitment to missionary work. On the other hand it has notoriously turned its back on these past glories, so that there are now few restrictions on drugs, deviant lifestyles, prostitution, homosexuality and abortion, and it was the first country to legalize euthanasia.

In terms of religion, over 30% of the population is Roman Catholic, while over 150 Protestant denominations are arranged in such a way as to baffle at least this British visitor: to find that to be Reformed is not necessarily to be evangelical soon had me scratching my head! In 2004, after forty years of negotiation, three major denominations merged to form The Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PKN) which has some 2,000 congregations and a membership of nearly 2,000,000, about 12% of the nation's population. Being at least partly a former state church, PKN has both conservative and liberal streams and its inclusiveness led well over 100 congregations to separate from it and organize themselves as the Restored Reformed Church, holding more firmly to Reformed and Lutheran confessions. Outside of these are many other churches, many

loosely labelled 'evangelical' [I did tell you the picture was confusing!].

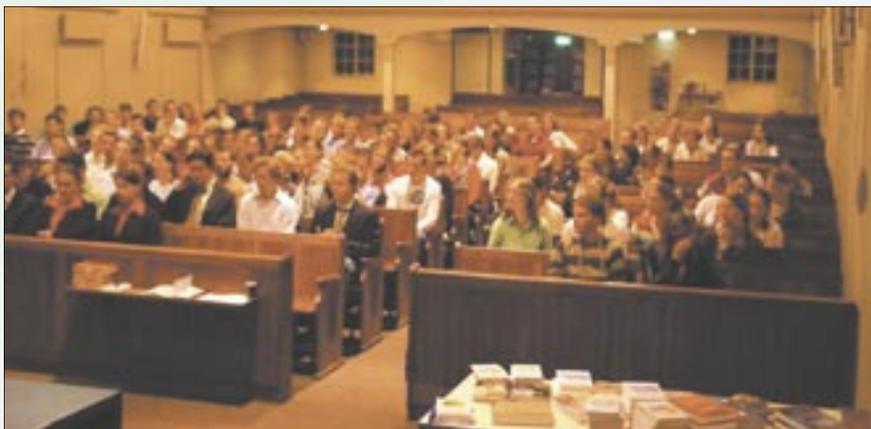
My visit was arranged by de Banier, a publishing house founded in 1928, disbanded in World War 2 when the Germans took over the printing presses and revived in 1948. It produces some seventy titles a year, publishes a fortnightly family magazine and has issued Dutch versions of five of my own titles, *The Beatitudes for Today*, *Read Mark Learn*, *Luke Comes Alive*, *Why believe the Bible?* and *Where was God on September 11?*,



With Karl Otte, Managing Director of de Banier

the first three of which are attractive hardback presentations. De Banier's books circulate widely in Holland and Belgium and in Dutch-speaking parts of Canada. While at de Banier it was remarkable to hear that a national Christian newspaper has a daily circulation of 50,000!

My first engagement was in **Utrecht**, where I spoke at a combined meeting of Depositum Custodi and Civitas Studiosorum in Fundamento Reformato, two student organizations committed to Reformed principles. I was very encouraged by the size of the crowd and I cannot remember the last time I spoke to such a large body of students who seemed so seriously attentive to the ministry. It was a privilege to be there.



Serious students in Utrecht

From Utrecht I went on to **Putten**, scene of the worst Nazi crime in the Netherlands, in which most of the male population was deported and less than fifty returned. Putten is in the country's well-defined 'Bible Belt' and of a population of 23,000 some 10,000 attend church every Sunday. However, this astonishing statistic needs to be tempered by realizing that formalism is rampant. There was an excellent crowd in the meeting, at which my interpreter was Oscar Lohuis who was until recently pastor of a thriving church but has now been released for an itinerant ministry, something very rare in the Netherlands.

Saturday was crammed! The first three sessions were in **Groenekan**, a village of some 900 people and where a church hall was packed to capacity, some people having travelled over 100 miles to be there. There was a lively response to a long morning session on morals and ethics, an afternoon dealing mainly with the providence of God and an extended Q and A session that seemed especially helpful. From Groenekan I was driven to **Hardinxveld-Giessendam**, a 1957 merger of two small towns, where a 90-minute session was scheduled for me to speak on the person and work of Christ. A superb church centre was virtually full for a meeting that (like almost all the others on the trip) went on well past 10pm.

My host that night lived in **Dortrecht**, scene of the historic Synod of Dort which in 154 sessions spread over six months in 1618-1619 refuted Arminianism and affirmed what are now known as the Five Points of Calvinism (though the great French reformer had died over fifty years earlier) and decided to have the Bible translated into Dutch from the original Hebrew and Greek. Being there was a unique opportunity to discuss these events as well as to prepare for my last engagement, which was in **Rotterdam**. The International Christian Fellowship has over forty nationalities in its congregation and a vibrant outreach programme, so it was a special privilege to preach the gospel to such a large, mixed congregation and a great encouragement to be 'signed off' from the Netherlands with a warm invitation to return.

ALBANIAN UPDATE

Project Albania continues to make good progress on all fronts. The Project was launched only twelve months ago and I have asked Will Niven, my missionary contact in Albania, to bring you up to date. Here is his report:

Dear friends,

We want to thank you for your support for this important project. The lack of evangelistic resources in Albania is a great hindrance to our work both in personal evangelism and in open airs and special meetings that the churches organize. Thus far we are pleased to report that three booklets have been translated and are now being edited for printing, God willing, in September. Evolution: Fact or Fiction? Where is God when things go wrong? and Why believe the Bible? have been translated by Bela Pano, who has previously worked on books by Ravi Zacharias and Jerry Bridges. She is now working on Right with God and we hope that the final transcript for Does God believe in atheists?, being translated by Florenc Mene, will be delivered for editing at the end of July.

Our aim is to launch the first titles in September and then to publish Does God believe in atheists? in time for the new university year in October. Our conviction is that these materials will give us far more flexibility in what literature we present to people. The emphasis on apologetics in evangelism is an important one and we hope that these publications will be a great help to Albanian churches not only in this country but beyond. We are thankful that the Albanian Evangelical Mission is kindly allowing us to come under the umbrella of its publishing wing and that we can work together to further the cause of the gospel amongst the Albanian peoples. Be assured of our heartfelt thanks for your part in this exciting venture.



*Ultimate Questions
in Albanian*

Thank you !

My warmest thanks once again to friends who have recently sent gifts through the CM Trust for the support of my ministry. Your fellowship is greatly appreciated. Gifts sent directly to my home address are always acknowledged personally at the time.

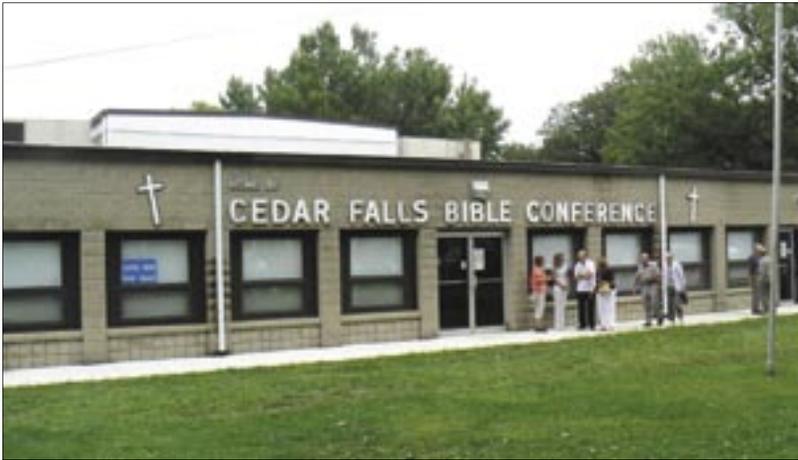
How was your weekend?

This question is asked millions of times every week in the workplace and elsewhere. If you had asked me the question early in August the answer would have gone something like this:

FRIDAY: Time for an hour of deskwork before getting a cab to Heathrow Airport for flights to Chicago then Cedar Rapids, Iowa, followed by an hour's drive to Cedar Falls.

SATURDAY: Two preaching sessions at the 86th Cedar Falls Bible Conference, which has a remarkable history. In 1921 a committee drawn from nearby churches and the local Chamber of Commerce agreed on the need for 'spiritual enrichment' in the area and a Bible conference was held the following year with G. Campbell Morgan as the featured speaker. He also spoke for the following four years, while more recent speakers have included J. Sidlow Baxter, John MacArthur, Stuart Briscoe and Jerry Bridges.

The conference facility covers twenty-six acres, with eighty-five cabins and three meeting places, yet in 1985 its Methodist owners, unable to make it a going concern, sold it to the Conference for just \$1.00! Since then the conference has made steady progress, with consistently good support from Iowa and neighbouring states.



SUNDAY: A good Sunday morning attendance began a day which climaxed with well over 1,000 at the evening service. One of many encouragements was to meet a missionary to Russia who claimed to have given out at least 10,000 copies of the Russian edition of *Ultimate Questions* in the course of personal evangelism in St Petersburg and elsewhere.

MONDAY: Two flights today, to Chicago then Boston, gave good time for reading (Gary Gilley's superb *This little church stayed home*) and put me in a good position for the following day.

TUESDAY: A 5.00am start today to catch the 8.20 flight to London, enabling me to be at home in Banstead by 9.00pm local time, without jet lag and ready to pick up the usual threads the next morning.

The many friends who pledged their specific prayer support for this special weekend can be assured that their prayers were answered. As ever, I am deeply grateful for their important share in my ministry.

COMING ENGAGEMENTS 2007

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.

- September**
- 5-9 SHETLAND: Shetland Bible Week [Info: eric@thepetersons.co.uk]
 - 15-16am IRELAND: Kilkenny Presbyterian Church, Co. Kilkenny [Info: 56 7786681 or dmoore@esatclear.ie]
 - 16pm* IRELAND: Drogheda, Co. Louth [Info: 41 980 2860 or johnwoodside1@eircom.net]
 - 17* ENNISKILLEN, Co. Fermanagh: [Info: 028 6862 1135 or 077 9866 0050 or Brendan.jones@lineone.net]
 - 18* BALLYMONEY, Co. Antrim:[Info: 028 27666452 or Ballymoneybaptist.fsmaill.net]
 - 19* PORTSTEWART, Co. Londonderry: Portstewart Baptist Church [Info: 020 703 52582 or g@downie1936.freereserve.co.uk]
 - 20* MAGHERAFELT, Co. Londonderry: [Info: 02879 418747 or patterson.kenneth@talk21.com]
 - 26* PURLEY, Surrey: Purley Baptist Church [Info: 0208668 0422 or kevinahronson@purleybaptist.org]
 - 29 LONDON: London Inreach Project Annual Meeting [Info: 020 7831 5666 or Derek@cgec.org.uk]
 - 30 EPSOM: Dorking Road Baptist Church – Harvest services [Info: 01372 728826 or brian.moody1@ntlworld.com]
- October**
- 7-9 UNITED STATES: Christ Community Fellowship, ALBUQUERQUE, New Mexico [Info: (505) 222 7380 or Pastorbrown66@msn.com]
 - 10 UNITED STATES: First Presbyterian Church, JACKSON, Mississippi [Info: (601) 353 8316 or mrb@fpcjackson.org]
 - 14 (am) UNITED STATES: Grace Church of Gwinnett, SUGAR HILL, Georgia [Info: (770) 241 1395 or david@gracechurchgwinnett.com]
 - 14 (pm) UNITED STATES: Reserve Worship, LAKE KEOWEE, S. Carolina [Info: (404) 642 9722]
 - 24 UNITED STATES: Durham Memorial Baptist Church, Charlotte, N. Carolina [Info:(704) 392 5346 or info@dmbconline.org]
- November**
- 1-3 UKRAINE: Evangelical Press pastors and church leaders' conference in Kiev.
 - 14* PURLEY, Surrey: Purley Baptist Church [Info: 0208668 0422 or kevinahronson@purleybaptist.org]
 - 22* BIRMINGHAM: University of Birmingham [Info: buecu_secretary@hotmail.co.uk]

The rest of November is reserved for research, study and writing.

December *The whole of December is reserved for research, study 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 'Sarnia', 81 Lambert Road, Banstead, Surrey, SM7 2QU. Telephone 01737 357501 E-mail: jbsarnia@gmail.com