



No. 27

January 2012

Harvest is coming!

In early October I spoke at a Harvest Supper in Welwyn Evangelical Church, Hertfordshire, a thriving fellowship led by Mostyn Roberts. I have spoken at many such events over the years, but none better organized or presented than this one. The harvest display, the table decorations and the food — three choices for each of three courses! — were splendid preparation for the ministry. With some two-thirds of those present being guests it was an unusually good opportunity to preach the gospel and, as ever, a great privilege to do so. The pastor e-mailed me soon afterwards to say, 'We have had very good informal feedback already from a number of individuals who came.'

Harvest has always seemed to me to be a perfect time of year in which to speak of the urgency of the Christian message, framing it in the biblical principle that 'whatever one sows, that he will also reap' (Galatians 6:7). J. I. Packer says, 'No man is entirely without inklings of judgement', but most people seem perfectly relaxed about pushing the idea aside and living for the present. All their energies are poured into the here and now, with scarcely a serious or prolonged thought about the eternal future.

Just as the natural harvest depends inevitably and precisely on the seed sown, so does life's spiritual harvest. 'The one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption' and only 'the one who sows to the Spirit will ... reap eternal life' (Galatians 4:8). This simple truth should speak powerfully to the unconverted, but for the most part they are not listening. It also presents a constant challenge to Christians, underlining their inescapable responsibility to 'proclaim the gospel to the whole creation' (Mark 16:15). The Scottish minister James S. Stewart once wrote, 'No church is anything more than a pathetic, pietistic backwater unless it is first and fundamentally and all the time a world missionary church.' How does your church measure up? And where do you stand?



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

ITALIA

– Uno

I had never been in Italy until I received an invitation to be in Mantova (Mantua) in September. The town is steeped in history that made it an important cultural, artistic and musical hub. In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo spent his exile there, and Verdi's opera *Rigoletto* is also set in the town.

My invitation was from Sola Grazia Church, in adjacent Porto Mantovano. The church was planted by Andrea Artioli, who also co-founded *Coram Deo* ('before the face of God'), committed to church planting and the production of sound Christian literature. Three titles are already published, another fifteen have been translated, and *Does God believe in Atheists?* is virtually ready for printing, but finance is a major barrier.

Under the leadership of Alan Johnston, a team from N. Ireland had worked there for a week before I arrived, taking advantage of the renowned annual literature festival in Mantova to witness and distribute material in the town's delightful cobbled piazzas.

At my first meeting I focused on existential evidence for God. Scheduled to begin at 10.30am, a closing Q and A session made it seem as if it would never end and in excessive heat I eventually called 'time' at 1.30pm. The next meeting was in the *Sala Civica*, the local Council Chamber. Ten years after the event I was asked to speak on 'Where was God on September

11?' and again faced a blizzard of questions, this time covering a host of issues including the integrity of the Bible, the Fall, original sin, election to salvation and man's part in conversion.

On Sunday morning it was a privilege to preach on what was incidentally the church's third anniversary and this message from the pastor gives a sense of how the ministry was received:

'I want to express my joy and thankfulness to the Lord and to you for the marvellous weekend the Lord gave us together. It has been a time for joy and growth in the Lord and the fellowship has been amazing to us all as a church.'

The church and *Coram Deo* have a vision to rent a vacant shop in Mantova and if possible to develop it into a coffee shop, a Christian bookshop and a church. The potential is tremendous, but as with the publishing arm, finance is the big problem. I would dearly love to initiate ways of solving it and left Italy with this very much on my heart.



MORE IN THE MIDLANDS

For our third PCA tour in the Midlands in two years, Howard Williams and I were again generously hosted for the entire week by Andrew and Jan Jack in their superbly suitable home in Bromsgrove.

We began in **Rugby**, where most of the large crowd in Rugby Evangelical Church were visitors. There was an excellent spirit in the meeting and a good Q and A session, adding up to a fine start to the tour. Woodgreen Evangelical Church, **Worcester**, is always a welcome — and welcoming — venue and another good crowd set the scene in which to present biblical truth related to the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attack. The Q and A session was particularly searching and included the utterly answerable question as to why God allowed the origin of sin.

Pelsall Evangelical Church, **Walsall**, was our next stop and nearly every seat in the church hall was taken. Questions ranged from countering Richard Dawkins to counselling those hurting in one way or another, and as usual they all gave scope for additional ministry. After the meeting Howard's entire supplies of the pocket edition of *Ultimate Questions* were scooped up. On the following day thieves reached the Evangelical Church in **Kidderminster** a few hours before us and stripped a lot of lead from the church roof. Our visit was more welcome! Questions covered subjects such as God's purpose in allowing suffering, free will, election and the Old Testament destruction of pagan nations. Pastor Philip Hearn kindly e-mailed me later to say, 'Many were helped in their thinking by your clear presentation of the truth.'

In forty years Cornerstone Church, **Nottingham**, has grown from a small back-street fellowship to a diverse congregation of some 600 people representing thirty nationalities. Bursting out of its available accommodation in a local school it is well advanced on a £6 million project to build premises suitable 'for generations to come'. Our Saturday night 'sitting at tables' event attracted a very good crowd, questions included several I had never been asked before, and the final encouragement came when someone told me they had come to faith while reading *Why the Cross?*

A Sunday morning service at Welcome Hall Evangelical Church, **Bromsgrove**, our hosts' home church, was the perfect way to end the tour.



ITALIA

– Due

Having thoroughly enjoyed preaching in Italy for the first time in September it was a delightful privilege to be invited back to the country just four weeks later. My first engagements had been in the northern town of Mantova and my second invitation was to serve churches in the historic city of Bologna, just over fifty miles to the south.

Bologna, the capital city of Emilia-Romagna, is in northern Italy's Po Valley and has a million inhabitants. The University of Bologna, founded in 1088, is the world's oldest. Bologna's first settlements date back to at least a millennium before Christ. At its peak, in the final years BC, Bologna was Italy's second city and now boasts Europe's second largest historic centre, with an immense wealth of Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque artistic monuments. San Petronia Basilica is one of the world's largest churches and the city is also famous for having no fewer than forty-five miles of arcades. It has also attracted a number of interesting nicknames — '*la dotta*' (the learned one) because of its famous university, '*la rossa*' (the red one), because of either the colour of many of the historic centre's roofs or its long stretch of left-wing politics, and '*la grassa*' (the fat one) because the Bolognesi enjoy their food!

My invitation came from the EMF missionary Stefano Mariotti, a pastoral elder of the Independent Evangelical Church of San Lazzaro, who was born in Bologna and completed his formal theological education at the Wales Evangelical School of Theology. In the course



With Tom Buchta and Stefano Mariotti

of his BA and MA programme there he met and married Jenny, who hails from Hinckley. As I had a Popular Christian Apologetics meeting there last year, in her home fellowship, Mount Road Baptist Church, we already had an interesting link.

The church in San Lazzaro was founded in 1971 by a group of believers from Bologna. Originally with Brethren roots, it became independent in 2002, enabling it to express its Reformed convictions. With just forty members, the church is involved in pastoring another fellowship in the nearby village of Sasso Marconi. The leaders have a passion to

reach the 30,000 people of San Lazzaro and the 15,000 people of Sasso Marconi with the gospel as well as an even greater vision — to establish a strong working fellowship with other evangelical churches in the area to reach the 500,000 people living, working and studying in Bologna.

My visit shared with the one to Mantova the interesting experience of being the climax to a week of ministry by a team. This time it came from the USA and was led by Tom Buchta, a retired New York policeman who was on duty at the 9/11 Twin Towers terrorist outrage. They had had an almost unique opportunity to speak in public schools, where they reached over 1,600 Middle and High School and University students. In a delicious irony, Italy's pluralistic policy had at one stage virtually closed the door to evangelistic, non-Catholic input, but various court decisions changed things and paved the way for the American team.

On the Saturday, Tom Buchta showed a DVD on 9/11 and testified to God's grace in his life during the event, then I spoke on 'Where was God on September 11?' The meeting was held in a room at the public library of San Lazzaro and it was a case of 'standing room only'.



Many people on their way to and from the library stopped and listened in doorways, and at the end of the meeting many of those who came took Bibles or evangelistic literature.

On the Sunday, eight local churches closed their services and three para-church organizations joined them in a service held in a Bologna cinema. This kind of co-operation was unheard-of and there was a great sense of unity, with leaders expressing the desire to repeat the experience at some time in the future. Tom Buchta again related his experience at 9/11 before I preached, emphasizing the utter emptiness of all life's experiences if God was ruled out of the picture, before pressing home the demands of the gospel. After the service fifty Bibles and seventy copies of one or another of my evangelistic booklets were taken.

On his web site, Stefano Mariotti says, 'It is with a true sense of wonder that we think back at what God has done this week. We are also looking forward with expectation to see the fruits the Lord will bring out of the seeds that have been planted. So please do pray for all the young people and adults that during the week have been presented with the reality of Jesus' power to save the lost.'

'IT'S BEST IN THE WEST'

This was a constant catchphrase of the late Frank Farley, under whose ministry I came into full-time Christian service and who mentored me in those early days, when we both lived in Weston-super-Mare. Although my family and I lived there for only ten years, the West Country has a very special attraction to me and I was delighted to return there in October for another Popular Christian Apologetics tour with Howard Williams.

We began in **Taunton**, Somerset, where Cyril Aston had organized a united event at Octagon Chapel that was as well supported as on a previous visit. We got to the chapel an hour early and it was delightful to meet one West Country contact after another from the past, to catch up with news and to encourage each other in the Lord. The entire evening went very well, but these times of fellowship remain my warmest memory of our time in Taunton.

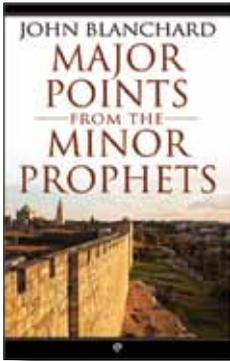
Our next stop was in Devon, where we had a fine meeting in Emmanuel Baptist Church, **Sidmouth**. As in Taunton, the keen attention to the ministry there was augmented by other contacts. One man reminded me that he had once shown me a Bible that was on board *HMS Beagle* when Charles Darwin made his famous voyage from 1831-1836. Another man told me that a coming cruise was to include Beijing and it was a joy to pray with him that he would be given wisdom in handing out supplies of *Ultimate Questions* in Chinese.

We then headed into Cornwall, where our first meeting was in **Truro**. In the Fal Theatre of the superb modern Truro College I spoke on 'Meet the Real Jesus' and the first question, loud and clear, was 'How can I find him?!' After the meeting I spent a long time with an atheist (the security officer eventually had to turn us out!). Before then, it was good to talk to someone whose husband had come to Christ when I last preached in the area. Our second Cornish stop was **Falmouth**, where the Q and A session in Falmouth Baptist Church was the liveliest of the entire tour. It was about to end when a Jewish lady spoke movingly of her difficulty in reconciling the sovereign love of God with the Holocaust. Responding to this was an important challenge!

Truro College



The tour ended with Sunday preaching at Grace Community Church, **Morval**. This followed a superbly organized men's supper the church sponsored in The Old School House, **Menheniot**. Under the leadership of John Gillespie for twenty-five years, GCC has grown from a handful of people to hundreds and has planted three churches in nearby villages. It is always a delight to serve such a cause and Howard and I left Cornwall thankful for all of God's goodness to us during our final tour of 2011.



NOT YET OFF THE PRESS!

My late wife Joyce often urged me to write a book on the Minor Prophets, but urgent evangelistic booklets kept the project on the back burner. Finally, most of my 'writing time' in 2011 was taken up with meeting her wishes and the result is *Major Points from the Minor Prophets*, a 288-page exploration of what a friend of mine used to call the Bible's 'clean pages'. I have found the project fascinating, absorbing and challenging, and my prayer is that many readers will do the same. Publication is scheduled for February, but several key Christians have read the manuscript and kindly made the following comments:

'John Blanchard has an uncanny instinct for the need of the Church to be an effective witness. I heartily recommend this book to anyone who takes Bible reading and Bible teaching seriously.'

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

'John Blanchard has become legendary as an apologist, evangelist and author. He has now given another asset to believers in their desire to know the Word of God and to make known the God of the Word.'

Dr Harry L. Reeder, III, Senior Pastor, Briarwood Presbyterian Church, Birmingham, Alabama, USA

'Any book that encourages us to study the Minor Prophets has to be welcomed. Any book written by John Blanchard has to be welcomed. So this book promises to be a great treat.'

Phillip Jensen, Dean of St Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney, Australia

'This is no ordinary meal; it is a twelve-course feast. There is no excess fat, just lean, tasty meat, delectable and digestible. It is a delight. Enjoy! And encourage others to do the same.'

Rev. George Curry, Elswick Church, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England

Major Points from the Minor Prophets retails at £8.99, but EP Books is making an exclusive offer to Newsline readers, who until **30 June 2012** can order single copies at £7.50 + £1.95 postage; 3 copies at £7.00 each, POST FREE; and 5 copies at £6.00 each, POST FREE. Order direct from EP Books, Faverdale North, Darlington DL3 0PH — 01325 380232 — sales@epbooks.org. Orders to be placed by phone or e-mail (not web site); quoting Offer Code **NL/012012**. USA readers should contact usasales@epbooks.org or call toll free 1-866-588-6778 after 1 April.



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

COMING ENGAGEMENTS 2012

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 plan to attend any scheduled to be held near you.

JANUARY

- 1 BANSTEAD, Surrey: Banstead Community Church, Banstead Junior School, The Horseshoe, Banstead, SM7 2BQ [Info: 01737 300903 or dan@bansteadcommunity.org.uk]
- 8 WOKING, Surrey: Emmanuel Chapel, 18 Portugal Road, Woking, GU21 5JE [Info: 01483 835 240 or rj.barwick@yahoo.co.uk].
- 13-15 ITALY: Christian Evangelical Church, Viale Bacchioliere 26, Punto Lode [Info: fioresam@libero.it]
- 24 DARLINGTON, Co. Durham: Review and planning meeting at EP Books.
- 29 PORTUGAL: International Evangelical Church of the Algarve, Varzea da Mao, Vale Judeu, 8100-333 Loulé [Info: 289328635 or iecav@sapo.pt]

FEBRUARY

- 26 BANSTEAD, Surrey: Banstead Community Church, Banstead Junior School, The Horseshoe, Banstead, SM7 2BQ [Info: 01737 300903 or dan@bansteadcommunity.org.uk]

The rest of February is reserved for study, preparation and writing.

MARCH

- 4 BANSTEAD, Surrey: Banstead Community Church, Banstead Junior School, The Horseshoe, Banstead, SM7 2BQ [Info: 01737 300903 or dan@bansteadcommunity.org.uk]
[Marking the end of my 50th year in full-time Christian ministry]
- 7-11 ALBANIA: Meetings and services in several cities and towns, and filming with Christian Television Association [Info: wdniven@hotmail.co.uk]
- 20* ANDOVER, Hants: Andover Baptist Church, Charlton Road, Andover, Hants, SP10 3JH [Info: 01264 352728 or 07798 648803 or elder@koinonia-andover.org]
- 21* CHEAM, Surrey: Cheam Baptist Church, Cheam Village, Sutton, SM3 8QB [Info: 020 8642 5070 or tim.saunders@cheambaptist.net]
- 22* HAYWARDS HEATH, W. Sussex: Christ Church, New England Road, Haywards Heath, RH16 3LE [Info: 01444 459980 or markjventham:googlemail.com or ask@cchh.org.uk]
- 23* BANSTEAD, Surrey: Banstead Community Hall, Park Road, Banstead, SM7 3AJ [Info: 01737 300903 or dan@bansteadcommunity.org.uk]

APRIL

- 2-23 UNITED STATES: A preaching tour is currently being arranged. For details go to: www.johnblanchard.org

** 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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