



Reachout Subject Guide

The Brethren – True And False

There is a lot of confusion about the Brethren movement. Many of us have met individual Brethren over the years, who mostly seemed to be good Christians, who knew and believed the Bible, and clearly loved the Lord. But others we met who called themselves Brethren may have dressed a little strangely and kept us and others at arms length. Are they really the same?

This confusion has been deliberately orchestrated by a breakaway group or cult, set on convincing people that they alone are the continuation of the movement. To be clear about this deception it is first necessary to discover what the original Brethren movement was like, its beliefs, values, attitudes and what kind of people. Then it will become clear who the real Brethren are today and who they are not.

My qualification for this task is that I was born into the Brethren movement in 1951, then was taken by my parents into the new cult that started in 1960. It took me 16 years to extract myself , after 4 attempts, returning to true Brethren and normal Christianity. So I write from personal experience as well as from exhaustive reading on the history and spirituality of Brethren, and from the many Brethren of different kinds who I have known well.

Brethren Origins

In the 1820s and 30s, many of the more evangelical-minded Christians were very concerned and dissatisfied with the state of the established churches. There was a general concern about worldliness, that things were at a low ebb, and a more specific concern about 'sectarianism'. There was no ecumenical coming together, membership of and loyalty to a denomination had become all-important, with at best only a vague sense of the wider church. People (such as visitors) were received to communion based on their denominational membership, or refused if they belonged to a different part of the church. For this reason alone, devout Christians could be refused.

There was concern too about many of the clergy, who seemed to have doubts about some fundamental biblical truths, and tended to sow such doubts in their hearers – yet they could not be challenged, because they were ordained. Those who were concerned by such things turned to the scriptures and longed for a return to the simplicity and sincerity of the early church as described in the Acts of the Apostles and the epistles. Some stayed in the church, others left.

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Towards the end of 1828, five of these concerned Christians in Dublin began to meet together. Their names were John Nelson Darby, Francis Hutchinson, Edward Cronin, John Bellatt and Anthony Groves. By January 1829 they were 'breaking bread' together at Hutchinson's house in Dublin. Recalling this later in an 1850 letter, John Darby wrote:

'Four persons who were pretty much in the same state of soul as myself, came together in my lodging; we spoke together about these things, and I proposed to them to break bread together the following Sunday, which we did. Others then joined us. I left Dublin soon after. But the work also began at Limerick, a town in Ireland, then at other places in Ireland and England.'

Almost simultaneously, similar gatherings sprung up elsewhere. In many cases these little Christian assemblies were initially unknown to each other, and their existence and mutual discovery was seen as evidence that this was a work of God. Throughout the 1830s the work spread, first in Ireland and England, then in continental Europe, then in America and Canada, then in Australasia. These Christians took no name, but were happy to become known as Brethren.

Brethren Characteristics

The Brethren were evangelical, Christ-centred, deeply devotional and strictly biblical. From the scriptures, they knew that as Christians they were joined to and united with Christ in Heaven. *'Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?... He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.'* (1st Corinth. 6v15-17).

They saw from scripture that the church of Christ is made up of all who are similarly united to Christ, all true Christians.. *'We, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.'* (Romans 12v5). And *'Grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ – from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by what every joint supplies...'* (Ephes 4v15-16). They saw that the church was not an earthly institution, but a heavenly body, consisting of all true believers on Christ. That the church is in fact Christ's body on earth of which He is the Head in Heaven, and must function by *body ministry* (Romans 12, 1st Corinth. 12 & 14).

From their awareness of the Church of Christ as heavenly and containing all true Christians, they recognised only:

One Head – the Lord Jesus Christ

One Leader – the Holy Spirit, to lead services as well as the rest of life.

One Rulebook – the Bible, as the Word of God

One Centre - Heaven, not Canterbury or Rome or anywhere else.

Disagreement with the Established Churches

As protestants, Brethren believed strongly that the 16th century Reformation had been a work of God, necessary because of the very bad state of the pre-Reformation church. But they felt that, whilst the Reformation had revived the gospel truth of 'justification by faith', it had not revived the biblical teaching on the nature of the true church. Rather, it had resulted in the formation of innumerable national churches and dissident groups, including Lutherans, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians and others. They concluded that, outwardly at least, the church on earth was 'in a state of breakdown'.

From their view of the church, there were two common church practices to which they were opposed. The first of these was the '**sectarianism**'. Denominational names separated churches from the rest of the church, and denominational communion excluded other equally true Christians, acting as though they were the whole church. John Darby, wrote:

'If I join one set of Christians, then I do not belong to another. The church, God's church, is all broken up. and its members are scattered among various self-formed bodies'.

So to start a new sect would be no solution. The Brethren did not have or recognise any church membership other than membership of the Body of Christ. They met simply as Christians, and adopted no denominational name that set them apart from other Christians, Their meetings were public, and all true Christians were free to join in and 'break bread' (take communion) etc.

The second church practice to which the Brethren were opposed was what they called '**One-Man Ministry**'. Brethren were concerned that the national churches and the 'free' denominations had replaced the headship of Christ and the leadership of the Holy Spirit with an unscriptural hierarchy of bishops and clergy, or the like, that church members had been divided into clergy and laity. John Darby wrote before he left the Anglican church:

*'I said to myself, if the apostle Paul came here, he could not preach, for he has no letters or orders, but if the bitterest opponent of his truth came, who **had** holy orders, then he would, according to the system be entitled. It is not just a wicked man slipping in (that could happen anywhere) – it is the system itself that is wrong, It substitutes man and an institution in the place of God.'*

So Brethren had no clergy–laity divide, no pre-planned services led by clergy, no orders of service or Prayer books. The services (called 'meetings', where people met with the Lord) were to be led by the Holy Spirit. All brothers present were free to announce a hymn, pray, read the Bible and say a few words etc., as led by the Holy Spirit. Over time, individual understanding of the scriptures increased, and meetings flowed harmoniously as different themes were developed by the choice of hymns, scriptures and prayers.

Having outlined these Brethren criticisms against the churches, it has to be said that the Brethren never saw themselves as anything more than one expression of the church of Christ. They recognised that when any group of Christians gathered together for communion, worship or reading the Bible, whether with a denominational label or otherwise, a little portion of the heavenly church was manifested on earth. When Brethren broke bread, they thought of all who were doing the same.

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Another doctrine and prospect that characterised Brethren was a longing for the Lord's Return. As united to Christ, they looked forward to His return. In the first stage of this ('the Rapture'), Brethren expected all true Christians to be taken up to Heaven. *'The Lord Himself will descend from Heaven with a shout ... Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together ... to meet the Lord in the air.'* (1st Thessalonians 4v16-18).

Brethren believed that, although there are many events foretold in prophecy, there is nothing more to happen *before* this coming of Jesus for His own. Therefore He could come today or at any time. Christians would then be 'raptured' into the joys of Heaven, whereupon in the absence of the Holy Spirit a short time of 'great tribulation' would come on the earth. In the second stage of His return ('the Appearing'), Christ would descend to Earth with His saints to judge then rule over the whole Earth, bringing peace and justice, as is commonly believed.

As well as these matters of belief and emphasis, it must also be stated that the Brethren were students and meditators on God's word the Bible. But they did not teach and discuss it in academic or clinical terms. Whatever they read, they focussed on the Person of Christ, and spoke of Him with love and emotion, in a way that is sadly missing in much of the church today.

The Brethren regard the mid 19th century and the years following as 'the Recovery of the Truth'. It was simply the rediscovery of the truths that were taught and practised by the New Testament churches of the first century AD.

Brethren Writings

The best remembered of the early Brethren were godly, devout people, many of them itinerant preachers, ministers and hymn writers. Names such as James George Deck, John G. Bellat, J. Pellat and Christopher Wolston are just a few of those who could be mentioned. There were no recordings or transcripts of vocal ministry in those days, but many of the 'ministering brothers' produced books of printed ministry (or this was done for them). John Bellat wrote 'The Moral Glory of the Lord Jesus'. J.G. Deck and J. Pellat and others wrote many books of rich spiritual ministry, glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ.

The most prolific writer was John Darby. First, his explanation and defence of the Brethren movement was contained in a series of tracts (much as was done in the 'High Church' or 'Tractarian' movement a few years later), These were widely circulated and read, including, to give them their 'short titles':

'The Notion of a Clergyman' was his most strongly-worded tract, and suggested that control by clergy was the collective sin against the Holy Spirit of the present era, by which the Spirit was grieved and quenched or limited within the church. He did not condemn individual clergy, but recognised that for most, this had been a sin of ignorance, as It had been in his own case.

'God's Principle of Unity', in which he argued that true Christian unity required moral separation from evil, including ecclesiastical (church) evil.

'Grace, the Power of Unity' was intended as a 'balance' to the above tract. In this he argued that not judgement but Grace, appreciated and expressed, was the power of gathering and unity. There could be no substitute for grace.

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Darby went on to produce over the years a 'Synopsis' of all the books of the Bible, and 'Notes and Comments' on many parts of the Bible. Many volumes of his ministry were produced, and classified as Doctrinal, Ecclesiastical, Prophetic and Apologetic, as well as Evangelistic, with a book of gospel sermons. But to many, best of all is his book of 'Hymns and Spiritual Songs' containing many profoundly uplifting poems, shortened versions of which had come to be sung as hymns. Darby was a wonderful hymn-writer.

Later, using his great skill in languages which had began at university, he did his own very literal translation of the Bible from the original Greek and Hebrew, into English, French and German. It must be explained that this was never intended to replace the King James or Authorised standard version, but to sit alongside it as a useful reference for Bible students. And that was how it was used amongst Brethren in his own time and for many years after.

But in the assemblies, there was no overall leader, there was mutuality. The ministering brothers and those who co-led local Bible teaching were devout and godly men, with a gracious spirit and a love of the poor and the simple. They in turn were loved and valued, and are still spoken of in this way today.

If there was one criticism levelled against Brethren that had any substance, it was that 'they were *'too heavenly minded to be of any earthly use'*! They certainly were heavenly minded, their greatest longing was to see and meet the Lord whom they loved and served. But whilst waiting for this upward call, they ministered Jesus Christ to others, in their speaking, their writing, and by their hymns. Many were blessed by them in their own time, and have continued to be since. They were of very great heavenly use on earth.

Many Christians on reading all this will feel some sympathy for what Brethren stood for, but several questions may occur. The Brethren were clearly concerned not to be a cult or closed fellowship, but how could they avoid being just another denomination? Their values and principles may have been laudable, but sound idealistic, so how could they be maintained? How could the movement hold together without a top leadership or governing body?

I leave these as open questions, for you to reach your own conclusions.

Brethren Divisions

The biggest division among Brethren took place less than twenty years after the beginning of the movement, following the arising of serious heresy in the Plymouth assembly under self-appointed leader Benjamin Wills Newton. The seriousness of this heresy, which directly undermined the gospel, was quickly recognised by Brethren almost everywhere, as well as by other Christians. But then a division broke out over how to deal with error, and how to regard people belonging to a church where error is routinely taught. This division began at Bristol, and by 1850 it was complete and the movement was split in two. The two halves took no names, in true Brethren style, but became known as the 'Open Brethren' (OB) and the 'Exclusive Brethren' (EB).

In most respects, Brethren assemblies looked and felt much the same after the division as they had done before. Generally, if you had attended the most important gathering of the week, the Communion or Breaking of Bread, you could not have told whether it was an OB or EB meeting.

Yet from this time on, there was a difference of outlook on the local church and on fellowship (reception and discipline). The Open Brethren saw each of the local assemblies as independent, free to regulate themselves and to decide on their practical fellowship with others, whilst the Exclusive Brethren emphasised the need for unity and agreement between the local assemblies.

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There was also an increasing difference of emphasis in ministry. The Open Brethren emphasised Gospel and Mission, and moved towards greater evangelisation including the sending out of missionaries, and fellowship in the gospel with other Christians. Meanwhile the Exclusive Brethren emphasised Gospel and Church truth, and moved towards seeking light from God to better understand the meaning of the scriptures. Now to understand the scriptures is of-course desirable, though there can be a danger in the idea of 'new light', and more so of 'New truth'. But that was for many years into the future.

Over the next few decades there were several very small divisions, especially among the Exclusive Brethren. Then there was one larger division in 1908 amongst the EB, over a local problem at Alnwick in Northumberland. Like 70 years earlier, there was sharp disagreement between the local brethren and the London assembly in how to deal with this. Again there was a wider split, and the two halves became known as the 'Glanton' and 'London' Brethren.

So there were now **three** main groupings of Brethren – the Open Brethren, the Exclusive (Glanton) and Exclusive (London) Brethren. But the main point to see is that all three remained Christian mainstream, broadly evangelical, and similar in most respects. There was still no cult.

My Experience

I was born in 1951 within the Exclusive (London) section of Brethren, though we never called it that. I was privileged to be born into a Christian family, with loving godly grandparents, and partly due to them, each extended family member was a believer, and all were Brethren. Most of our family lived in the south, and a few in Lancashire, but my parents and I lived in Stockport, 8 miles south of Manchester. My first 9 years were happy and normal.

Our church was a little red brick building simply called 'The Meeting Room'. There were three services (or 'meetings') on a Sunday ('Lord's Day'), and as a young child I was taken to the first and third of these.

In the morning was the main Communion service ('The Breaking of Bread' or 'the Lord's Supper'). For this we sat in a rectangular pattern around the table on which were 'the loaf and the cup'. The service was devotional and worshipful, consisting of hymns and thanksgiving prayers and the occasional short scripture. In the afternoon was the 'Bible Reading', which was a conversational consideration of scripture, reading through a Bible book, one chapter each week. My dad usually went to this on his own.

For the evening Gospel meeting, the chairs were rearranged into rows facing a small platform and desk at the front (the conventional church format), and the meeting was led by a visiting preacher, usually from a different Brethren church – hymn, prayer, hymn, reading, sermon, hymn, prayer. The gospel was faithfully preached, often with verbal illustrations, and with a note of appeal for personal faith in Christ. I still remember some of those messages.

This was usually followed by hymn singing at home around the piano or organ, using the Evangelical hymn books of the day – Alexanders, Sankeys, Judes, 'Golden Bells' etc. These, more than the services, spoke to me powerfully of the love of Jesus, and elicited my responsive love to Him.

During the week (for the adults) there was a Prayer meeting and another Bible Reading, and once a month, an open ministry meeting. Readers will recognise that this weekly programme resembles that of other evangelical churches, except that midweek meetings are now usually in house groups.

Printed Ministry

The Brethren individually were avid devotional readers, both of the Bible and of helpful books and magazines about the Bible. There were four monthly publications circulating in the 1950s:

'The Word Proclaimed' - Gospel sermons preached in various places.

'Gospel Stories for the Young' – a children's version of the same, with simple messages, questions, quizzes, prizes etc.

'Ministry of the Word' – teaching and prophetic ministry on Bible themes from various places, for the adults. This was compiled and edited by John Mason, a godly Belfast brother.

'New York Readings' – Bibles readings and addresses given and recorded in New York, led by Jim Taylor Jr. who aspired to be the leader of the Brethren. There was no spiritual justification for this publication.

In 1960, I became aware that something big and strange was happening. I heard my parents talking about 'meetings by Mr. Taylor', 'fresh light from God', 'separation' and controversy. We were told that this and that family had left or been 'put out' and that we wouldn't see them again, and that if we did, we mustn't speak to to them. Within a short time, this came to include most of our own dear family. As a young child, I didn't question, I just wondered.

Then in 1961, each night as I said my prayers before bed, Mum would sit and tell me that I needed to admit that I was a sinner and to ask Jesus to be my Lord and Saviour. This continued night by night, and eventually I prayed 'the sinners prayer', though it was a few nights later that I prayed it to Mum's satisfaction! You may feel that is exactly what a good Christian mother would do. I don't doubt that she wanted me to be a Christian, but unbeknown to me, she had another very different motive for suddenly piling on this pressure.

So what had been going on? Each year, a big London conference was held (in Central Hall Westminster) which was attended by all the ministering brothers and local leaders from many countries. The purpose was to ensure that they were united and 'singing from the same hymn sheet'. The London brethren invited various different men to lead this over the 1950s. In 1959 they invited Gerald Cowell, a godly man from Hornchurch, to lead the ministry at the conference. Jim Taylor Jr. of New York was also there on the front row.

It was widely known from 'New York Readings' that Taylor had begun new teaching that Brethren should not be in, or should leave, 'associations'. Gerald Cowell preferred to simply preach and teach Christ, but forced to address the issue, he took a more balanced line and suggested caution. At this point, Taylor angrily confronted him and shouted him down. As a humble man, Cowell accepted the rebuke, and Taylor took over the conference.

Within a few weeks, via his agent in Hornchurch, he had arranged for Cowell to be excommunicated ('withdrawn from'). From this point, some three quarters of the Brethren accepted that Taylor was now the leader. He was able to continue his divisive teaching, with a network of his loyal local leaders to enforce it – and was invited to lead the conference himself in 1960.

But Gerald Cowell was not on his own for long, Like David in the Cave of Adulam, many came to him who were distressed or embittered or who had been deemed non-compliant with the new teaching and thrown out. Through them, God preserved a remnant who had 'refused to bow the knee to Baal'.

The Rise of the Cult

Taylor introduced his new 'Separation' teaching in three main stages:

Phase 1 – 1959 - No Associations with *non-Brethren*

There must be no association with *non-Brethren*. This was first applied to business associations, i.e. Partnerships and Directorships. It soon extended to all memberships – Pension Schemes, trade associations and unions, Libraries, Motoring organisations – even when you never met other members!

Phase 2 – 1960 - No Eating with *non-Brethren*

First, all household members 'not in fellowship' were made to eat meals on their own, in their rooms. This included children aged 12+, which is why Mum had come on to me so heavily, knowing that I was 10 and would be in this position in 2 years time! It didn't stop there. Outside the home, 'Separate tables' soon became 'separate rooms'. So followed a total ban on eating in restaurants, cafes, hotels, pubs, work and school canteens. No more school dinners, children must all return home for lunch. Brethren were held to be 'pure' and to compromise this by eating with worldly people would render them impure, and subject to church discipline.

Phase 3 – 1961 – No Living with *non-Brethren*

All household members 'not in fellowship' must now leave home, including sons and daughters aged 18+, and even aged grandparents were thrown out onto the street. Members must **separate from then divorce their partners** who are 'not in fellowship'. There was then to be no further social contact. Many sad family breakdowns followed, and often physical or mental breakdowns or even suicides.

['Non-Brethren' meant anyone not in fellowship with Jim Taylor Jr., including all other Christians, and all other Brethren – 'Open', 'Glanton', and those who had left over this new teaching. Indeed the greatest vitriol was reserved for those who had left, they were seen as 'the most evil, the most dangerous'.]

Before continuing this sorry story - Jim Taylor may have seemed to achieve his ugly ambition, but he did not carry all the Brethren with him. For many hundreds left him in 1959 and especially 1960, and many of these joined with mature ministering brothers Gerald Cowell and E.J. Hemmings, and met for fellowship as they had always done; continuing in or returning to the true devotional Christianity of past years, to true Christ-centred Brethrenism.

A false logic was thus pursued ruthlessly to its devastating consequences. Readers may wonder what biblical justification if any may have been used for these clearly anti-Christian teachings and rules. There was very little, except that 2nd Timothy 2 v19-22 and 1st Corinthians 5 v11 were repeatedly quoted. A proper study of these verses within the context of the chapter and book in which they occur, shows clearly that they were being taken out of context. If an unusual application of any verse leads to conduct which contradicts the spirit and even the letter of the New Testament, then that application must be wrong. This should have been obvious to the Christians involved in this.

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The 'Man of God'

But there was now another new element in their thinking which did the real damage, and this was quite subtle. Brethren had always looked solely to the Bible for truth and guidance. Now it was emphasised that what made the Bible special was that the Holy Spirit inspired and wrote it. But – it was said - the same Holy Spirit who had written the Bible, was now speaking through 'Mr. Taylor' and the 'approved' leaders who supported him. The Bible was what the Holy Spirit was saying back **then**, 'Mr. Taylor's ministry' was what the Holy Spirit was saying **now!** Thus he had effectively replaced the Bible, and any new meaning he gave to any Bible verse was the voice of God for today!

Having established a new principle, it was then written backwards into the history of Brethren. It was now taught that there was just one man in any period through whom God spoke, he was 'the Man of God' and the apostle of the day. It was now taught that this 'apostolic succession' was one of the truths recovered in the Brethren movement.

So, out of the large number of ministering brothers who had led in the exposition of scripture, they picked one for each period, and decided that the apostles had been John Nelson Darby, Frederick Edward Raven, and James Taylor sr (Jim's father). Now let it be clearly said, that each of these had been a godly servant of God, who would never have accepted the claims now being made for them. But thus a new 'position' had been created, and had then been occupied by JT Jr.

But for those who continued with Taylor, many more edicts, rules and bans followed over the 1960s. Pets, holidays, beards, 'buns', wristwatches and many more things were banned in this lunacy. There were strict rules on dress and hairstyles, and eventually a six o'clock start every Sunday, then a day of no less than six meetings, and a meeting every night. 'Separation' continued and intensified, culminating at last in the 1969 statement: **'We are the Church. All else is Apostasy'**. They had finally said it – the claim and hallmark of every cult.

But there was one thing that was not banned, and that was whisky. JT Jr had a great fondness for it from the late 1950s, and in 1963 he was hospitalised for alcohol poisoning, with damage to his liver and his brain, though this was, of course, hushed up, except that he was ill for months and unable to take meetings. His son-in-law Bruce Hales of Sydney, and his brother John Hales, who also had big leadership aspirations, took advantage of the situation to take more meetings around the world and enhance their profile. They were not spiritual but hard-nosed businessmen, and preached commerce, advocating hard work, enterprise and making money.

In 1965, Taylor made a surprise recovery, and began to listen to reports from unhappy brethren. He then 'took the wheel' again, took issue with the Hales brothers for usurping his place and for 'bringing commerce into the assembly', and had them both withdrawn from. Local leaders all over the world who had supported the Hales's over the past two years had to 'take humble ground'. Some older brethren in the south of England hoped for a return to a 'ministry of Christ'. But there can be no restoration of an errant organisation until it goes back to its point of departure, and that definitely did not happen.

The improvement was short-lived. The following year the Hales's were 'restored to fellowship', apparently reconciled with Taylor, and 'ministry' was now given against 'unforgiveness' and 'vindictiveness'. So those with the most sober judgement of the last few years were now the new villains!

The Big Exposure

And before long, whisky began again to take a firm hold. By the late 1960s, Taylor had a glass of it at his side when he took '3 day meetings' in different places, his hosts had to keep him well supplied, and all brethren were expected to supply whisky to their visitors in breaks between meetings. The content of these meetings was greatly affected, becoming frivolous and lewd, so it was becoming a drunken church. I witnessed this at Liverpool in 1969.

Then in July 1970 it all came to a head, with two disgusting 3-days meetings by Taylor, in Preston, and then the following week in Aberdeen. The content was lewd, abusive against individuals, sometimes blasphemous, and otherwise just drunken nonsense. Many brethren came back home from Preston distressed, concerned and 'unclear' about what they had witnessed, and were promptly 'shut up' (half excommunicated) by the local leader until they confessed that they were wrong to 'entertain such doubts' about JT Jr.

But the Aberdeen meetings were even worse, and included repeated bedroom incidents involving Taylor and a visiting sister from Harrow. Taylor's hosts were so concerned that they telephoned his son 'JT3' to come and take him home, saying that he was 'very sick', so he consequently left a day early, on the Saturday night. The many visitors returned to their homes on the Sunday.

The Great Escape

The Aberdeen assembly were very concerned about all that had happened. On Tuesday evening, they met for their usual ministry meeting, and did three important things. First, they exonerated Taylor's hosts on the unusual steps they had taken to protect their house and Taylor himself. Secondly they 'repudiated' the meetings that had taken place as unholy. Thirdly, following proper procedures, they passed no personal judgement on Taylor, but sent the tapes of the meetings and a witness statement of the conduct in the house to A Bufton-Parker, a senior brother in New York, for that assembly to consider and take what pastoral and disciplinary steps they thought fit.

Jim Taylor then arbitrarily withdrew by telephone(!) from his recent hosts, from the witnesses to the bedroom scene, from the whole Aberdeen assembly, then from AB. Parker for having received communications 'from persons under discipline', i.e. from Aberdeen! The brethren everywhere were meant to respect these withdrawals just as if they been done in full assembly in the usual way. And so it was that for quite some weeks, New York never got to hear the Aberdeen tapes or read the witness statement. Anyone who received either was immediately withdrawn from! But 'the truth will out' and eventually a couple of local brothers confronted Taylor in full assembly, the majority of which then agreed, and Taylor and his supporters walked out of the assembly. The remainder at New York now aligned themselves with 'the Aberdeen judgement', as did scores of other places across the world.

So God in His grace provided a unique opportunity for several thousand brethren to get free of the Taylor system, together. And in most places, some did – sometimes the majority, sometimes just a handful. Aberdeen and the assemblies with them, including most of Scotland and many in Britain and America, quickly judged the conduct of recent years. Then, at different speeds and to different degrees, they judged the iniquity of the whole of Taylor's teaching and leadership, repented of their own part in it, apologised to those they had withdrawn from during the sixties, and returned to normal Christianity. People who had loudly supported Taylor just a few years earlier, now 'out', became transformed characters and wholesome Christians. Some went on to be active evangelists and mission workers.

The Refusal to Escape

Less than 3 months after Aberdeen, on 14th October 1970, Jim Taylor died. Publicly there was shock and sadness, but it must have been a secret relief to many local leaders who, whilst insisting that their assemblies supported him, found it increasingly difficult to cover or justify his sayings and conduct. An 'ambush' explanation was put around, that Taylor's unusual sayings and doings at Aberdeen were, under God, a means of catching out those who had been secretly opposed to him for years, who would then rise up and charge him with corruption and leave him. So God's plan had been successful! The ambush theory speaks volumes that this was the kind of God that they now believed in.

To the Taylor Brethren, the crucial question now was who would succeed him. Many saw three possible contenders. In early 1971, two of these got rid of the third, then one of them stepped back, leaving the field free for the other.

And so, **James Harvey Symington** (JHS) became the next leader and 'Man of God'. This new 'Big Jim' then set about ridding the fellowship of the 'party atmosphere' that had set in after Aberdeen, returning to a new seriousness, demanding ruthless 'self-judgement' and humility, called 'doing death to the flesh', quoting Romans 7. He insisted that brethren confess their wicked thoughts and deeds publicly in brethren meetings. But JHS himself displayed neither 'ruthless self-judgement' nor humility, rather he was ruthless with others, getting rid of and replacing local leaders all over the world whom he disliked or distrusted. An insecure leader sees enemies all around, so can be neurotic and dangerous. And still, heavy whisky drinking continued.

Symington died in 1987, and was replaced, surprisingly, by **John Hales** of Sydney. This was the same John Hales who, with his brother Bruce, had unofficially led the Brethren during Jim Taylor's illness between 1963 and 65, then been briefly 'withdrawn from'. He had ministered under JHS in the 70s, but then, like many others, had been briefly 'withdrawn from' by him, in 1978 and again in 1980. It was unheard of for anyone who had ever been withdrawn from to be elevated to local leadership, let alone worldwide (or 'universal') leadership. We can only assume that there were no other serious contenders for this tough but financially rewarding position at that time. His son Bruce David Hales had strongly campaigned for him.

So if Hales had held a long-term ambition to be overall leader, he achieved it after a 22 year wait. His elder brother Bruce, who had also been withdrawn from by JHS, was then restored after twelve years out. But he was too aged, sick and alcoholic to be interested in co-leadership. John reigned supreme.

Hales had some outward air of spirituality and taught on 'the spirit of the family'. He became concerned about the brethren children mixing with the world at schools and encouraged parents to home-school their children. In 1994 the first Brethren school, the Meadowbank School, was opened in his home city of Sydney, and many others followed all over the Brethren world. Hales also took the first steps to re-emphasise commerce in church meetings.

John Hales died in 2002 and the inevitable happened, he was replaced by his son **Bruce David Hales** – a second Bruce Hales! This was no surprise. Bruce said that, due to his father's frailty, Bruce had actually taken over from him seven years earlier, in 1995! Bruce continued the work his father had started of rehabilitating 'the commercial regime' of 1963-65. To do this, he called for and led a 'Review' – not of 1960 or 1970, but of 1965. The pre-determined conclusion was that there had been nothing wrong and no cause for his father and uncle to have been withdrawn from. It was said that those who had complained to JT Jr. were lying or exaggerating, that they misled him, when all the Hales's were doing was helping people and their businesses!

The Brethren – True and False

So those assembly judgements of 40 years earlier were reversed. The way was now open for commercialism to be boldly re-introduced, and it was. Hales and his sons set up a 'Universal Business Team' to investigate, advise, co-manage, and where so wished, to take over Brethren businesses. Short of this, new partnership agreements were introduced with 'Brethren clauses', so that if a business owner, director or partner was withdrawn from, they forfeited all their powers and rights in the business. Thus any Brethren business anywhere could be taken over by the Hales's, and from this and from money gifts, Bruce began to amass a fortune.

Meanwhile, Bruce had an immediate problem to deal with. The Brethren had lost their valued 'charity' status, as the Charity Commission had come to realise that they didn't undertake charitable activities, and that their services, unlike those of other churches, were private, so there was no public benefit. The financial loss arising from this was so great that Hales felt this had to be immediately addressed.

The Brethren set up a charity arm, and from their vast resources, instigated a range of much-trumpeted activities, ranging from holding 'pie days' in meeting room car parks to donating public seats in random local authorities to forming a 'Rapid Response Team' to take aid to the scenes of disasters and emergencies. Anything but open services and meetings to the general public. Coupled to this was a massive programme of political lobbying, with the engagement of expensive top legal teams, which was ultimately successful, and charity status was regained.

'Plymouth Brethren Christian Church'

As part of this campaign for public trust and respectability, for the first time, the cult did something that no Brethren had ever done – they took on a name and registered themselves as the 'Plymouth Brethren Christian Church.com'. The purpose seems to have been twofold – to sound like a Christian mainstream church, and to present themselves as the natural continuation of the Brethren movement. Let us consider this fourfold falsehood.

'Brethren' – No. These people effectively **left** the Christian Brethren movement over 60 years ago, in 1960, to follow Jim Taylor Jr, of New York, with his new false **'Separation'** teaching, which deliberately broke up marriages and families. They bear no resemblance to the true Brethren.

'Christian' – No. Christians respect and follow the Bible as the Word of God, which governs their beliefs and practices. But for these people, their highest authority is **not** the Bible, but the words of their 'universal leader', currently Bruce Hales of Sydney. They only accept the Bible as selectively taught and interpreted by him at any time. So for them, the rest of the Bible is practically irrelevant and doesn't necessarily guide their belief or conduct.

'Church' – No. These people claim that they are the **one true church** and that all others are false, including the Church of England and even Christian Brethren. This is clearly the mark of a cult, and reinforces their affected superiority, total separation from non-members, and total hostility against ex-members. The claim shows that they are not part of the church at all.

'Plymouth' – No. Plymouth (the place) has no significance in the history of the cult. Way back in the 1840s, Plymouth had a large assembly of Brethren, but this came to be led by Benjamin Wills Newton. He was judged to have become a heretic because he taught false doctrine which directly undermined the Gospel (i.e. that Christ had to die because He was born a sinner, and that He experienced the hot displeasure of God, for this reason alone. If we believe this, we have lost the deity and saving grace of the Saviour). Therefore, Newton and his followers were rightly shunned by Brethren and other Christians. So by calling themselves 'Plymouth', it could be implied that the PBCC are now saying that they are followers of Newton!

The Brethren – True and False

Let it be clearly stated then that the PBCC (so-called) are not part of the Christian Brethren movement. The Christian Brethren by contrast have always lovingly preached the Gospel and faithfully taught the Bible, with a devotional spirituality. So the shameful teaching, conduct and claims of the cult have long been a huge embarrassment to the true Brethren.

Linked to this and equally false is the claim that the PBCC was founded by John Nelson Darby. First of all, there was over 70 years between Darby's death in 1888 and the founding of the cult. Secondly, there is no spiritual or moral compatibility between John Darby and the falsely-named PBCC today.

Books about the Brethren

Several books were written over the 20th century describing the history and beliefs of the Christian Brethren, but they are all now probably out of print. One that I found particularly helpful was 'The History of the Brethren' by Napoleon Noel. The Taylor cult had their own distorted version of this story called 'The Recovery and Maintenance of the Truth' by Alfred Gardiner, which portrays the history of Brethren as a progressive revelation of truth and of opposition to every revelation, leading into 1960 and the cult which followed.

However, for something much more up-to-date, my friend and colleague Lance Christie of South Yorkshire has written a series of books which describe the course of the cult between 1970 and 2017, including his own traumatic experience as a member who left in that year. He now reviews all from a Christian viewpoint. These books are brand new and have not yet been printed, but pre-publication e-copies can be purchased as follows:

'Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea' – £4.99.

Spells out the impossible choices that the PBCC imposes on its members, and visited on the author personally.

'Go for their Underbelly' (a Bruce Hales quote) – £9.99.

A most comprehensive and detailed exposé of the PBCC efforts to influence government elections, use their connections to achieve charitable status and gain billions of pounds' worth of PPE contracts.

'Cease and Desist' – £1.99

An accounts of the desperate cult efforts to silence critics, including Lance.

'Narcissism' series – revealing conversations between Lance and another former PBCC member – the contents will shock you. Contains three books:

'Indoctrinated and Manipulated' - £5.49. Narcissistic Behaviour in a Church – how under their 'Separation' doctrine, the PBCC have destroyed part of what was once a Christian church and turned it into a false cult.

'Duped and Ousted' – £5.49. Narcissistic Behaviour in a Business – how the PBCC leadership have infiltrated then stolen their members businesses that they had built over for many years to pass on to their families.

'Separated and Shattered' - £5.49.

Narcissistic Behaviour in a Family – how the PBCC leadership have destroyed marriages and families, and turned sons and daughters against their own parents

Witness Statements - £1.99.

Analysis of 21 PBCC Witness Statements against Lance for Leeds Court.

The Brethren – True and False

Aquittal - £1.99.

Lances Aquittal of all PBCC harassment charges in Leeds Court, January 23

'Peep Behind the Scenes' – £2.99

A collection of fascinating podcast statements by PBCC leavers.

As Christians, we need to be aware of the counterfeits to our faith, so that we can warn those in danger, pray for those already entrapped, and give help to troubled, ejected and suffering individuals as we may have opportunity.

This is a unique opportunity to obtain pre-production e-copies of these books before they are published in both paper and electronic form, You can order these by e-mailing Lance via Rod.Hawgood@gmail.com

All payments must be sent electronically to **Lance J Christie** at HSBC, **sort code 40-27-15** , **account no. 05204585** with your name as the payment reference. As a **Special Offer to Reachout Trust** members and supporters, we can send all the above for **just £30!**

Alternatively, if this article has raised questions, or you would like to discuss or know more about any of the matters raised, please feel free to contact this author, via the Reachout Trust or by the e-mail address above.



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